

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Shoftim



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Shoftim

Accepting Yesurim with Joy

It states (Tehillim 23:4) שבטך ומשענתך המה ינחמוני, "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." The rod (שבטך) represents afflictions and punishment (Midrash Shocher Tov). Even afflictions are a source of comfort for us. The Chida (Nachal Kedumim) explains that this is because we believe that everything is for our benefit and good. Therefore, Chazal (Brachos 61:) tell us that we should praise Hashem for the bad, because that which appears bad is also for our benefit.

Yismach Yisrael writes that this is alluded to in the first pasuk of this week's parashah, אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך לשבטך. He explains that לשבטך represents the yesurim, and נתן לך means that the yesurim are like a gift that Hashem gives to a person. The yesurim are a gift given to the person because they are for his ultimate good.

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l (Shem Olam, Shemiras Shabbos, ch.3 in the footnote) brings another pasuk from this week's parashah that tells us that yesurim are for our good. It states (18:13) תמים (18:13) עם ה' אלקיך, "Be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d." Rashi writes, "Conduct yourself with Him with temimus and rely on Him. Do not inquire of the future; rather accept whatever happens to you with temimus, and then you will be with Him and to His portion." Rashi is telling us to accept everything that Hashem gives us, and this is because whatever Hashem gives us is certainly for our benefit.

Chofetz Chaim writes, "A person should have temimus with Hashem and believe that everything is for the good... And then, in the end, he will certainly see that those matters, themselves [which he thought were bad], were a great chesed and kindness."

It states (Devarim 13:5) אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו ואותו תיראו, "You shall follow Hashem, your G-d, and fear Him..." What type of fear is the pasuk referring to? Ibn Ezra writes, ואותו תיראו, "You should be afraid of Hashem to ask, 'Why is it this way?'" One should be afraid to ask, "Why is Hashem doing this to me?" We should be afraid to ask this because we believe that it is all for the good. The Chofetz Chaim explains that a person's mind is weak and limited, so he shouldn't question Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

There is a mashal of a father who brings his son to the dentist. If the son is afraid of the pain, the father isn't upset at his son about it because it is natural to be scared of the dentist and the pain. But if the son says to the father, "Why are you doing this to me? Why don't you love me? Why do you want to harm me?" the father will be upset at his son for speaking and thinking this way. His son should know that he loves him, and if he brings him to the dentist, it is because he needs the dentist, and it is the best thing for him. We should be certain that Hashem loves us, and therefore, we should never complain about Hashem.¹ We must believe that everything that occurs is solely for our good.²

1. A blind person was brought to the hospital, and a doctor gave him an injection. The patient, unable to see that it was the doctor who gave him a shot, is upset that he is being hurt for what he thinks is no reason. There is another person in the hospital, and he is also receiving a shot. This patient can see and knows it was the doctor giving the shot. Therefore, he is happy with it. He knows it is for his good.

2. Reb Shlomo Kluger on Shulchan Aruch (חכמת שלמה, Orach Chaim, 46) writes, "When a person says the brachah ששעה לי כל צרכי, thanking Hashem for providing him with all his needs, he fulfills Chazal's dictum of (Brachos 54.) "A person must praise Hashem for the bad as he praises Hashem for the good." This is because he proclaims daily that he has all his needs. But behold there are days that are chas v'shalom bad for the

One of the mitzvos of this week's parashah is to accept the Sanhedrin's rules and not disobey their final decision. It states (17:11) לֹא תִסּוּר מִן הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּדוּ לְךָ יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל "You shall not divert from the word they tell you, either right or left." Rashi writes, "Even if they tell you that right is left and left is right. How much more so when they tell you that right is right, and left is left."

Why did Rashi specifically give the example of right and left? Why not day and night, dark and light, and so on?

I heard from a talmid chacham that the example of right and left can explain why one thinks and sees things differently. When two people sit across from one another and face each other, one person's right is the other person's left. When a Rav and talmid sit opposite one another, and the Rav talks about his right side, the student might reply,

"Rebbe, that is the left side," because from the student's perspective, it is the left side. The student has to accept the view of his Rav, and then he too will see, like the Rav, that right is right and left is left.

This is what occurs when a Rav and talmid discuss *halachah* or *hashkafah*. The Rav says something correct from the Rav's perspective, and the talmid says he is wrong because he sees things differently. But if the student accepts his Rav's view, he will begin seeing things as the Rav saw them.

The same can be said about Hashem's *hashgachah*, meaning the way Hashem leads us. From our place, it seems that things should be different. But Hashem sits in heaven and sees things from His perspective (see Tehillim 33:11-12). And from Hashem's place, Hashem knows what is truly best for us.³

person. How can he praise Hashem and say the brachah לִי כָל צָרְכִי, *she'esei li kol tzuray*, claiming that he has everything he needs when he is lacking things and things aren't going right for him? The answer is that he believes that the bad is also for his benefit, and he blesses Hashem for the hardships, too. And how the bad is actually good is explained by Chazal (Brachos 5.). They teach that yesurim help a person earn Olam HaBa. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 65:9) says that Yitzchak chose yesurim [because this enables us to attain Olam HaBa and forgiveness for our aveiros]. With this in mind, we can always say לִי כָל צָרְכִי, *she'esei li kol tzuray*, everything is precisely as it should be.

The Zlotchover Magid zt'l was very poor early on in his life and suffered from a lot of yesurim, and yet he was always happy. When he was poor, his students asked him how he said the brachah לִי כָל צָרְכִי, *she'esei li kol tzuray* to thank Hashem for everything he has when he lacks so much. He replied, "Apparently, one of my needs is to be poor. Why else would Hashem make me poor? So, with this brachah, I thank Hashem for my poverty, too, because that is one of my needs" (Tורת המגיד מוֹלֶאטְשׁוֹב p.286).

Sifsei Tzaddik (Mikeitz 15) writes that a baal yesurim told Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa that he feels he cannot say the brachah לִי כָל צָרְכִי, *she'esei li kol tzuray*, "Who gave me all my needs," because he doesn't have all his needs. He said that if he said the brachah, it would be a brachah l'vatalah (a brachah said in vain) because the brachah doesn't apply to him.

Rebbe Bunim replied, "Hashem is certainly giving you all your needs. One of your needs is to perfect your soul. This occurs when you accept everything Hashem gives you lovingly. So, Hashem is giving you all your needs because Hashem is arranging opportunities and tests so that you can reach perfection by accepting Hashem's leadership and plan with emunah.

3. It is said in the name of the Apter Rav zt'l, "Whoever accepts Hashem as He is, Hashem will accept him as he is." This means that when a person doesn't question Hashem and His ways, Hashem won't be so critical about his behavior, and Hashem will bestow many brachos on him.

I heard the following story from a fine Yid from America. Several years ago, he fell while building a succah and was rushed to the hospital. Next to him in the hospital was a ninety-year-old Yid called Reb Zev Deutsch. Reb Zev told him, "Listen, my son, remember this rule at all times: Don't mourn or cry over what

The Gemara (Taanis 8.) states, 'Reb Yehoshua ben Levi says, 'Whoever is happy with his yesurim, he brings yeshuos (salvations) to the world, as it states (Yeshayah 64:4) בָּהֶם עוֹלָם וְנוֹשָׁע.' The pasuk is discussing yesurim, and it

states עוֹלָם וְנוֹשָׁע, the world [which means many people] will receive their salvation in his merit, and this is because he accepts the yesurim with joy.⁴

happens to you because everything is for the good. Nothing bad happens to a person; only sometimes the good is concealed. The following story happened to me. When I was a bachur, I escaped from the resha'im ym's. I ran from Veitzin to Pest. I escaped together with five friends. At that time, our lives were in constant danger because we didn't have any documents or passports to prove we weren't fugitives. One of the bachurim remembered that he had a relative in the city we were passing through. He immediately went to the relative's home. The baalas habayis heard where we were hiding, and she brought us bread and water. A few days later, this relative returned with five forged Swiss passports. When she came with the passports, my neshamah almost left me, because we were a group of six, and she only brought five passports. She had made a mistake, thinking we were five. I was left without a passport. The forger refused to create another passport.

The five bachurim left me and went on their way. As soon as they left, I sat on the floor and cried over my bitter fate. I thought, "All my friends are on their way to freedom, while I remain here in darkness. Who knows what will be with me?"

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "Why do you cry, my son? Don't cry. I will prepare your salvation." This is what occurred. A general stopped my friends at a checkpoint to check their passports. Something about the passports aroused his suspicion. He called over his friend, an expert in detecting forged passports. This officer confirmed that the passports were fake. The five were thrown into the Danube River, where they breathed their last, hy'd. But, as you see, I survived. And now I am in the nineties. So why should you cry over Hashem's ways."

Reb Zev Deutsch, in this story, felt very alone when his friends left him with their passports, and he had to remain behind, but it was for his benefit. Many people feel alone. Some people have trouble finding their shidduch; others don't have children, parnassah, or nachas, r'l, and they feel alone. They feel like they are the only person in the world who is suffering so much. But they need not worry. A great salvation is being prepared for them, and everything is certainly for the best.

A poor person in Eretz Yisrael couldn't pay the electricity bill, and the electric company turned off his power. The family sat in the dark, bemoaning their poverty, which had reached such a low level that they couldn't even pay their electric bill. As they sat there with long faces, their wealthy neighbor knocked at their door. The rich neighbor asked, "Do you know why half of my home doesn't have electricity?" They soon discovered that half of the wealthy man's home was once part of the poor man's apartment. Therefore, when the electricity of the poor family was cut off, the electricity of half of the wealthy man's home was turned off together with it. The wealthy man also understood that the poor man was paying half of the electric bill for him. He immediately gave the poor man \$20,000.

The poor family discovered that their problem was good for them. They were upset that they had to sit in the darkness and couldn't afford to pay the electric company, but this problem turned into a \$20,000 gift!

4. Menoras HaMaor (נר ה' כלל ג' ח"א פ"ב) writes, ואם יקבלם בשמחה ויצדיק בהן דין בוראו, מן השמים ירחמו, עליו ויוציאוהו מצרותיו, ויושיעו לו ולבני דורו בזכותו "Yesurim cleanse a person from his aveiros. And if he accepts them with joy and understands that Hashem is correct in His judgment [to afflict him], heaven will have compassion and save him from his tzaros. And the entire generation will be saved in his merit." In brief, Menoras HaMaor is saying that if he accepts the yesurim with joy, the yesurim will leave him, and he will bring salvation to the entire world.

Magid Meisharim (beginning of parashas Vayeishev) tells that the magid (the malach that spoke to the Beis Yosef) told the Beis Yosef that his wife (it was the Beis Yosef's third wife) will have male children. The malach added that according to nature, his wife couldn't bear children. (Because in a previous gilgul, his wife was a man, a talmid

The Ben Ish Chai (Ben Yehoyada) writes, "With Hashem's help, I think the explanation is as follows: How can a person be happy with yesurim? However, when one thinks that the tzaar is for a short time... and this will save him from many years of distress... he will be happy with the yesurim... He thinks that the י of the yesurim is only for a שעה, a short time.⁵ A person has a mitzvah to be צפית לישועה, to await Hashem's salvation because, at any moment, Hashem will remove the yesurim from him. In the merit of these thoughts and of his joy, he merits to bring salvation to the world, because י with שעה spell 'ישועה'."

Re Yankele of Pshevorsk zt'l was once collecting money for the poor, and at one person's door, he fell and hurt himself. At this time, Rebbe Yankele told the following story:

A man committed a crime, and the judge ordered to give him fifty lashes. This wealthy person went clandestinely to the one who gives the lashes, paid him money, and asked that he not hit him hard. He should pretend that he is hitting him, but he shouldn't.

He agreed to the plan. As he was giving the lashes, he snapped the whip near the man's back as though he was hitting him,

but the whip didn't touch his back. By the fiftieth lash, however, he hit him with the whip with all his strength.

The wealthy person complained, "Why did you hit me the fiftieth time? I paid you that you shouldn't hit me."

He replied, "I wanted you to know what you were saved from the other forty-nine times.

Reb Yankele explained that tzedakah protects from punishment. The fact that he goes door to door to collect money for the poor will save him from a lot of tzaros and pain. Heaven wanted to show him an example of what he was being saved from, which is why he fell.

Although we Embrace Yesurim, We Pray that they Leave Us

Being happy with yesurim isn't a contradiction to davening that the yesurim leave us. To apply the mashal we mentioned above, a person is happy when he goes to the dentist. He is fixing up his teeth! But he would be happier if he didn't need the dentist. The same is true with yesurim. We are happy with the yesurim, but that doesn't mean that the situations are easy and we should daven to be freed from the yesurim.

chacham, and therefore, she wasn't able to bear children.) But she had special merits, and because of them, the Magid told her that she would bear children. One merit was that the Beis Yosef went into exile to study Torah, and it was hard for her. When the Beis Yosef returned home, he fell ill, and she took care of him during his illness, which was also very difficult for her. She accepted the difficulties with a joyous heart and thus merited to have children.

We quote, "She merited this [to bear children] because of her good deeds, and because she had tzaar when you went away from her to galus, and also because of the tzaar she had when she took care of you when you were ill. A person gains so much from accepting yesurim with a happy countenance, just like someone who merited to perform a mitzvah... and therefore, she will give birth to male sons for you, as I promised you."

5. י is an expression of agony, as people shout, "Woe" or "Oy." And thinking that it is only for a שעה, short time, this helps him be happy with the yesurim.

6. Meor Einayim (Lech Lecha) writes, "Someone who has intelligence and thinks about what happens to him will find the good that follows [the yesurim]. And if he doesn't find the good, then the dinim were certainly to redeem him from his aveiros and bring him to Olam HaBa. As Chazal (Yoma 86.) states, 'Yesurim cleanses away the sins of man.' And there is certainly no greater kindness than that..."

The Yismach Yisrael teaches that it states *בכל צרתם לו צר*, whenever Yidden are in a tzarah, Hashem is in distress together with them. Therefore, it is obvious that Hashem doesn't want to bring the tzarah. He suffers together with us when we have a tzarah! But because of His love to us and His knowledge that this is what we need, Hashem brings yesurim to us. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Hashem, and the person, would prefer if there can be no yesurim, at all.

We repeat the Rashi we mentioned above (18:13) *תהלך עמו בתמימות ותצפה לו*, "Conduct yourself with Him with temimus and look up to Him [for His salvation].... Accept whatever happens to you with temimus." In the same Rashi that defines *תמימות*, Rashi discusses accepting whatever happens, and to look up to Hashem, and to request a salvation. It isn't a contradiction. We can pray for a better situation, one that we don't even need the yesurim. We wait for the time when the *dinim* will turn into *rachamim*, and we will see the revealed good. But until that occurs, we know that whatever Hashem brings us is for the best, and we are happy with it.

It states in this week's parashah (20:1) *כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך וראית סוס ורכב עם רב ממך לא תירא מהם*, "When you go out to war against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them." The Torah tells us not to be afraid in a frightening situation when

there is a war and the enemy is stronger. Rabbeinu Yonah adds that this isn't only discussing war. It is discussing any trouble that a person knows is approaching. He should trust in Hashem. Rabbeinu Yonah writes, "Hashem's salvation shall be in his heart. He should trust in Hashem. As it states (Tehillim 85:10) *אך קרוב ליראיו ישעו*, "Truly, His salvation is near those who fear Him."

Similarly, the Chareidim (ch.21:31) writes, "This pasuk obligates us never to lose hope in Hashem's compassion, even when a person sees that a tzarah is approaching, and to completely trust in Hashem's salvation."

This is an important lesson. We have to develop bitachon. We face problems and fears, and we must feel that Hashem will undoubtedly help us. At the same time, we see it is ok for a person to want matters to improve. A person doesn't say, "This is for the good, so why should I want it to change?" This isn't the approach we take because although it is for the good, it is bitter, it is painful, and it could even be heart-wrenching, r'l. Although a person knows that it is for his good, nevertheless, he can definitely look forward to a better future. As Rashi writes, *ותצפה לו*, and as the Rabbeinu Yonah writes, "The salvation of Hashem should be in your heart." You should look forward to the salvation that will come.⁷

7. Reb Nosson Meir Wachtfogel zt'l, mashgiach of Lakewood, said in the name of the Chofetz Chaim zt'l that when the heavenly court asks *ציפית לישועה*, it doesn't only refer to the salvation of Klal Yisrael as a whole, rather also to the salvation of each individual. Every person will be asked whether he hoped for Hashem's salvation during difficult times. Did he trust that Hashem will save him?

The Kobriner (Toras Avos, Drachim b'Avodas Hashem 209) would say, "A Yid must believe that the darkness has an end; the darkness will disappear, and in its place will be light."

The Kobriner (Toras Avos, Emunah u'Bitachon 42) explained the pasuk (Tehillim 116:10) *האמנתי כי אדבר אני עניתי מאד*. The poor person says, *האמנתי*, I believe that the day will yet come, *כי אדבר*, when I will be able to say *אני עניתי מאד*, 'that I was poor.' I believe that one day, I will be able to look at my life of poverty as something of the past, and I will praise Hashem for saving me from it." The day will come when he will be wealthy, and he will talk about his poverty in the past tense. He will tell how Hashem saved him and gave him the wealth he has now.

Teshuvah in Elul

The Beis Yisrael zt'l (ד"ה שופטים 5717) brings a Rashi (17:5) that says, לתרע בית דינך טועה, "The gate of beis din is making an error."⁸ The Beis Yisrael says that alluded in these words are a lesson in teshuvah. Rashi is saying that those who do teshuvah at the gate of the beis din, which means they begin doing teshuvah in Tishrei when we stand in judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, טועה, these people are making a mistake, because it is very late to begin doing teshuvah then. Rashi writes that the correct way is שער שעבד בו, "the gate where he committed the aveirah." This means our

teshuvah should begin immediately after we commit the aveirah.

And if we didn't do teshuvah then, at least we should do teshuvah in Elul and not wait for the last minute.

If a person had a court case, would he begin preparing for it a moment before he goes to court, or would he prepare days in advance? This is why we have Elul, to prepare ourselves with teshuvah to merit good judgment.

The Midrash (Hoshea 14) says, שובה ישראל עד, ה' אלקיך, that one should do teshuvah when it is still days of compassion,⁹ and the Chasam

8. To understand Rashi's literal intention, we begin with the pasuk (17:5) והוצאת את האיש ההוא או את האשה ההיא... אל שערך... וסקלתם stones..."

It discusses the punishment for those who worship avodah zarah and states that they are punished at the gate. But the pasuk doesn't state which gate. Is it the gate of the beis din where they were judged or the gate of the city where they committed the aveirah? Onkelos says לתרע בית דינך, the gate of beis din. Rashi disagrees. He says שער שעבד בו that they are punished at the gate of the city where they committed the aveirah. Rashi adds, המתרגם אל שערך לתרע בית דינך טועה, Those who translate that they are brought to the gate of the beis din are making a mistake." It isn't the gate of the beis din instead it is the gate of the city.

9. Kol Yaakov (written by Reb Yaakov Rokach zt'l, from the gaonim of Tripoli, about two hundred years ago) writes several hints for the word אלול. One is (Tehillim 106:46) ויתן אתם לרחמים לפני, the roshei teivos are אלול. This hints that they will receive rachmanus. The following words are כל שוביהם, for all those who do teshuvah.

(2) (Tehillim 27:8) אלול is roshei teivos וענני לך אמר לבי That Hashem will answer us in chodesh Elul.

(3) (Tehillim 68:21) אלול is roshei teivos ולנו א"ל למושעות ולאלקים, and it tells us that there will be yeshuos in this month.

(4) (Tehillim 35:23) אלול is roshei teivos והעירה והקיצה למשפטי אלקי ואדני לריבי, and hints that one should awaken from his slumber in this month.

(5) (Tehillim 73:26) אלול is roshei teivos לבבי וחלקי אלקים לעולם.

It states (Devarim 21:13) ובכתה את אביה ואת אמה ירח ימים, "She shall weep for her father and her mother for a full month." The Zohar (Chadash 72.) says, ירח ימים דא הוא ירחא דאלול, the month referenced is the month of Elul. This hints to the need to do teshuvah in Elul, and to cry over our misdeeds. Mishnas Chasidim (parashas חושב מחשבות) explains that the pasuk doesn't state חדש ימים, rather ירח ימים, because ירח is roshei teivos יום ראש חודש. To hint that from rosh chodesh Elul onwards, a person should begin his teshuvah. He shouldn't wait until the middle of the month.

Or Pnei Moshe (Va'eschanan ד"ה בדברי) explains the Midrash (Devarim Rabba 7:10) that when Moshe said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu (Devarim 3:25) אעברה נא ואראה את הארץ הטובה, "Let me now cross and see the good land." Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, "If it is אעברה נא that you request, then it will be mevatel (annul) the סלח נא (Bamidbar 14:19), and if you ask for סלח נא, then it will be mevatel the אעברה נא." We can explain that נא alludes to the 51 days from rosh chodesh Elul until Simchas Torah. The reshaim say אעברה נא, let the 51 days pass. They don't have patience for these days. (The end of the pasuk explains why they don't like these days. As it states ואראה

Sofer (Drashos, Drush for parashas Netzavim, 5595) says that this means he should do teshuvah in Elul, which are days of rachamim before the days of din and judgment arrive.

Three people came to the Divrei Chaim of Sanz, zt'l. The first one cried, "Rebbe, it is Elul, and I want to do teshuvah." The Rebbe said, "If you want to do teshuvah, do so! Why did you come to me?" He didn't want to speak to him.

The second person also told the Divrei Chaim that he wanted to do teshuvah, and the Divrei Chaim gave the same answer.

The third person came to the Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l and cried and said, "Rebbe! Elul has arrived, and I still don't even want to do teshuvah." The Divrei Chaim accepted him and taught him the path of teshuvah. This is the avodah of these days, to reveal the desire to do teshuvah.

The Divrei Chaim concludes one of his teshuvos (Shu"t Divrei Chaim Yorah Deiah vol.1, 33), "To just be *mifalpel* in learning (to write in-depth, clever ideas in Torah), this isn't a good time for

that, because we have to check the depths of the heart during these awesome days. Signed, Elul, 5617..."

The Sfas Emes said to one of his wealthy chasidim, "All year round, I speak to you about your business (because the Sfas Emes would advise him regarding his business). But during this month, the best investment is to invest in teshuvah." When one invests in teshuvah in this month, he earns great benefits, b'ruchniyus and b'gashmiyus, for the entire upcoming year.

The Sfas Emes writes in a letter (year 5625, Likutim), "My dear friend, *rosh chodesh Elul* isn't the right time to sleep in the dormant of this world. It is certain that these days, heaven arouses people to do teshuvah, but a person has to do his part, too.

The Ohev Yisrael (the Apte Rav zt'l, Re'eh, עשר, י"ה) writes, "It is known from the holy sefarim that Elul is the time for a person to check the deeds he does throughout the year and to correct them with *charatah* (regret), *viduy* (verbally admitting the *aveiros*), and with *teshuvah sheleimah*... and with *kabbalah l'asid*, to accept on himself

את הארץ הטובה, they want to enjoy the pleasures of this world.) But if it is so, and they don't take advantage of these days of teshuvah, then they will lose the *סליח*, the atonement of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. However, if a person wants *סליח*, to be forgiven for his aveiros on these days, then he should make sure not to *אעברה* *נ"א*, that these 51 days shouldn't pass without utilizing them for teshuvah and tefillah.

About parashas *ראה*, which is read either on rosh chodesh Elul or on Shabbos Mevarchim Elul, the Beis Aharon zt'l said that *ראה* is *roshei teivos* of *הולך*, "See that Elul is going." One can ask, why didn't the Beis Aharon say that *ראה* is *roshei teivos* for *הגיע*, "See that Elul arrived." Why did he choose the word *הולך*, that it is going?

We can answer this question with a lesson from the Baal Shem Tov: Friday night before Shemonah Esrei, we say *וביום השביעי שבת וינפש*, and Chazal (Beitzah 16.) say that these words mean *וביום השביעי שבת*, when the seventh day ends, *וי-נפש*, woe, the nefesh has left (*וי אבדה נפש*). Because after Shabbos leaves, people moan that they lost their neshamah yeseirah. The Baal Shem Tov zt'l asks why we say these words at the beginning of Shabbos. A more appropriate place would be at the end of Shabbos because that is when people moan that the neshamah yeseirah has left them.

The Baal Shem Tov answers that when Shabbos arrives, we are reminded that Shabbos will soon leave, and then we will regret that we didn't make better use of the Shabbos. Soon you will say *וי אבדה נפש*, "Woe, the nefesh yeseirah has left me." Remember this at the beginning of Shabbos, and you will utilize your time wisely.

We can say that this is also why the Beis Aharon linked the word *ראה* *אלול הולך* to *ראה*, remember that Elul is leaving. In just thirty days, Elul will be over. Remember that at the beginning of the month, and you will use the month wisely.

that from now on he will attach himself to fear Hashem all day long. We can explain the reasons why specifically Elul was chosen for this introspection. One reason is so every Yid will come to the day of judgment, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, clean from aveiros. Another reason is that אלוּל spells אלוּל. A לול is a window (see Zevachim 55:). אלוּל hints to us that in this month, a window is opened to accept those who do teshuvah with truth." It is easier to do teshuvah in Elul. A window opens in heaven to accept our teshuvah. And this is particularly needed for us this time of year so that we can come to the holy days of judgment clean from aveiros.

The Arvei Nachal (Shabbos Shuvah 4) writes, "Throughout the year, when a person does an aveirah and he doesn't do teshuvah, he has only one aveirah, the aveirah that he performed. The fact that he didn't do teshuvah isn't considered an aveirah. This applies all year round. However, starting from *rosh chodesh Elul*, which are days of *ratzon* [a time when our teshuvah is accepted with love], if these days pass and he doesn't correct himself [with teshuvah], he now has to do teshuvah on two matters, because now he has two aveiros. One aveirah is the aveirah he performed, and the second aveirah is that he didn't do teshuvah. This is the meaning of the pasuk that states (Bereishis 43:4) *כי לולא התמהמנו כי עתה שבנו זה פעמיים* [לוּלֹא has the letters of אלוּל, and התמהמנו means to wait.] *כי לולא התמהמנו*, if he waits and he doesn't do teshuvah during Elul, *כי עתה שבנו זה פעמיים*, now he has to do teshuvah on two aveiros."

Or Pnei Moshe writes, "It is known that in Elul, with teshuvah, one fixes the aveiros he performed throughout the year. Perhaps this is the meaning of the pasuk (Devarim 32:5) *שחת לו לא בניו מומם*, "Corruption is not His - the blemish is His children's." The words לו לא spell אלוּל backwards. [The combination of לו לא and אלוּל] means that they don't do teshuvah, not even in Elul. Then בניו, the madreigah that they could have been called "Hashem's children," מומם, is lacking from them." It is a beautiful level to be called

"Hashem's child." We get that title when we utilize these special Elul days. Because these days are mesugal for teshuvah, to become close to Hashem with love, אני לדודי ודודי לי, like a son coming near to his father. But if one doesn't take advantage of this time, this closeness will be missing, and he won't be called "son," as implied in the words בניו מומם.

Or Pnei Moshe continues that, therefore, we say on Rosh Hashanah, אם כבנים רחמנו כרחם, that if we did teshuvah in Elul and are considered Hashem's children, then Hashem should have compassion on us like a father has compassion on his children.

A Path in the Sea

The Arizal (Shaar Ruach Hakodesh, yichud 16) writes that in Elul, one should think the pasuk (Yeshayah 43:16) *הנותן בים דרך ומים עזים נתיבה*, "He Who made a path through the Sea and a road amid the mighty waters." because in this month, Hashem gives us a path of teshuvah, a road to return to Hashem. Why is the path for teshuvah compared to a path or a road in the sea?

(1) One explanation is that after a path is taken at sea, there is no sign of the path anymore. This indicates that after one does teshuvah, there will be no sign of the past aveiros.

(2) When a person drives a car on the highway and realizes he is driving in the wrong direction, he can't turn around immediately. If he does, he can cause an accident. He must continue driving in the wrong direction until he reaches a place where he can safely turn around. But when one is in the sea and realizes he is going the wrong way, he can turn around immediately. Teshuvah is compared to הנותן בים דרך, like a path in the sea, and when he recognizes that he is going the wrong way, he can immediately turn around and take the right path.

(3) There is a wise saying (quoted in Igros Sofrim of Reb Akiva Eiger, letter 9), "Thousands of ships passed through the great sea, and not one of

them set a path." There is no set route in the sea. The sea is broad, deep, and vast, and each person finds their own route. This is a *mashal* for teshuvah. There isn't a set route. Each person must utilize his talents and abilities to honor Hashem in his own way, and to return in teshuvah before Hashem.

A baal teshuvah shouldn't say, "Show me the exact path of teshuvah that I should go on," because each person and situation is different. There are basic guidelines, but after that, there is room for individuality, for each person to find his path of teshuvah and his own path in avodas Hashem. Therefore, we say, הנותן בים דרך, teshuvah is like the sea, which doesn't have a clear, known path. One has to jump into the ocean and find his way to his destination.

(4) The Rokeach says that the sea represents teshuvah because just as anyone can go to the sea, so, too, anyone can do teshuvah. The option is available for all.

Teshuvah without Losing Hope

This week's parashah discusses עדים זוממין, which is when *eidim* testify falsely against others in beis din to harm them. If beis din accepts their testimony, beis din will deliver punishment. However, if the witnesses are proven to have spoken falsely, they are punished with the punishment they wanted to cause their fellow man. For example, if, with their testimony, they wanted to obligate someone to pay a thousand dollars, and they were proven to have testified falsely, now they (the false witnesses) must pay one thousand dollars. If they wanted beis din to give someone lashes and they were proven false witnesses, the witnesses would be punished with lashes. This lesson is written in this week's parashah with the words (19:19) ועשיתם לו כאשר זמם לעשות לאחיו, "You shall do to him as he conspired to do to his fellow man."

The Beis Yisrael zt'l says: If for trying to harm another, you are punished, certainly when one harms *himself* with his own negative, reprimanding thoughts, he will be punished for doing so. The negative thoughts

knock him down and make him feel there is no hope.

This is a particularly important lesson to remember in Elul, the days of teshuvah. We check our deeds these days; we take stock and look at what we did right and wrong throughout the year. We deeply regret the bad and we strive to improve. But it would be a mistake if these thoughts of teshuvah result in one feeling that he is a *rasha*, and that there is no hope for him to return. About this, Chazal (Avos 2:13) say, אל תהי רשע בפני עצמך, "Don't consider yourself a *rasha*." The Ra'v Bartanura quotes from the Rambam, "Don't consider yourself a *rasha* because this can cause you to go entirely off the path."

Teshuvah is a fine line. Deep remorse for the aveiros is an intrinsic part of the teshuvah process, but never feel that you have no hope. Believe in yourself and in your potential. This is essential.

The holy sefarim say that when one does teshuvah, he should excuse himself before Hashem. He should express that he isn't entirely guilty for his bad deeds. For example, when he says *viduy*, he can say how hard it was for him to overcome the yetzer hara, and that the tests were overwhelming, and although he wanted to do the right thing, he failed.

The Noam Elimelech (Vayishlach) writes, "When a person sinned, he shouldn't make himself a *rasha* in front of the prosecuting [malachim], rather he should say that he is a little bit of a *rasha*, and he is a little bit of a *tzaddik*, too... He should turn himself into a *בינוני* (in between *tzaddik* and *rasha*)." One of the reasons this is important is because if he views himself as a *rasha*, he will lose hope, and he won't do teshuvah.

We learn this lesson from עדים זוממין. They are punished for trying to harm others, and the Beis Yisrael says that one will certainly be punished if he tries to harm himself with negative thoughts. We also understand from this that if one does the opposite, and he thinks positive thoughts about himself and

encourages himself, he will be rewarded immensely.

There is a mashal about a clever thief who borrowed one hundred dollars from his friend. A few days later, he told his friend, "I already owe you one hundred dollars. Give me another hundred, and I will owe you two hundred dollars." He did this a few more times until he owed his friend three hundred dollars... four hundred dollars, and so on. Each time, he began with his refrain, "I already owe you this amount of money; give me another hundred, and I will owe you such and such."

And he did the same to all the people in the city.

But then the thief approached a clever person. He thought he would play the same trick. He said, "I already owe you a hundred dollars. Lend me another hundred, and I will owe you two hundred dollars." The clever person immediately understood where this was headed and said, "You don't owe me a hundred dollars. You don't owe me anything."

The yetzer hara plays the same stunt with people. First, the yetzer hara entices and brings a person to perform an aveirah. The next day, the yetzer hara tells him, "You already committed an aveirah yesterday. You aren't the great tzaddik you thought you were. You can do another aveirah today." This goes on and on until he falls to low levels, r'l. But when the yetzer hara comes to a wise person and tries to make him feel like a baal aveirah, he replies, "I didn't sin yesterday. I don't know what you are talking about. I am a tzaddik..." and in this manner, he frees himself from the yetzer hara and from performing aveiros.

Chazal (Avodah Zarah 3.) say, מִי שֶׁטָרַח בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת, יֵאָכֵל בַּשַּׁבָּת, "Someone who toiled on erev Shabbos will eat on Shabbos." Chazal use this phrase about the reward in Olam HaBa (because Shabbos is an analogy to Olam HaBa). If you toil in Torah and mitzvos in this world, you will be granted Olam HaBa. Notice, however,

that Chazal didn't say מִי שֶׁהָכִין בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת, that someone who *prepared* on erev Shabbos will eat on Shabbos, rather whoever was *טָרַח*, toiled. This indicates that Hashem only requests that we try and do our best. That is sufficient to merit Olam HaBa. This is another thought that one can say in his viduy. "I failed. I sinned. But I tried. I didn't want to sin. I worked very hard, toiled, and tried to do good. And since I toiled, I am not all that bad. I acquired that for which we merit Olam HaBa."

Avodas Yisrael writes, "Parashas Shoftim is always read in Elul, the time designated for a person to return to His creator and to attain forgiveness for his aveiros that he performed throughout the year. [His aveiros will be forgiven] because he regrets his aveiros, has thoughts of repentance, and has tears and mourning over his sins... The Torah commands שׁוּפְטִים וְשׁוֹמְרִים, a person should judge himself, to check and judge all of his deeds. The Torah says, לֹא תִטֶּה מִשְׁפַּט, that he shouldn't judge himself falsely, to say about a bad deed that it was good, because when he judges himself correctly, this will help him receive a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah. This is the meaning of the words וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת הָעָם מִשְׁפַּט צֶדֶק, [you will be judged with kindness on Rosh Hashanah, and this is because you judged yourself correctly and honestly]. And this is the meaning of the verse, צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוּף. [The double צֶדֶק means that] if you will have an honest judgment below, you will have a good judgment from Above."

We can't lie. We can't whitewash an aveirah. We must be honest, admit to our shortcomings, and truly regret them. But at the same time, we can't allow our repentance to make us feel like we are resha'im and that Hashem doesn't want us and doesn't love us. Along with our regret should be the belief in ourselves, our potential, and our eternal connection with Hashem.

Fear in Elul

The sefarim discuss the great fear that Yidden experience in Elul.

The Beis Aharon (p.130:) writes, "The main thing is that everyone should draw fear onto himself during these days..."

One year, in Elul, the Beis Aharon was in Anipoli and davened shacharis in the inn where he was staying. Before he put on the Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, he said to his gabbai, "Quickly prepare the horses [to tie them to the wagon for traveling]. My hair is on fire from fear of Rosh Hashanah." (Birkas Aharon p.119). (He wanted to get home as quickly as possible to prepare himself for Rosh Hashanah.)

The Imrei Emes once traveled a long way during Elul. He said, "For my father [the Sfas Emes], the walls of the home would tremble during Elul. But for me, on Elul, I go on one train and then I get onto another train..." The Pnei Menachem said that his father, the Imrei Emes, said this due to his humility, but actually, the Imrei Emes had a lot of fear during Elul, and the fear was felt in his home.

Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaar HaYirah 101) writes, "From when Elul arrives until after Yom Kippur, a person should be afraid of the judgment."

The Baal HaTurim (Netzavim על לבבך) gives some hints to אלו-ל. One is from the pasuk (Devarim 30:6) את לבבך ואת לבב, that we should circumcise our hearts, and the hearts of our children to love Hashem. The roshei teivos

of spell Elul. Also, he brings the pasuk (Tehillim 27:13) לולא האמנתי לראות בטוב ה' אלוּל spells לולא. He concludes with the following awesome words: "From Elul on I am afraid before Hashem."

The Shlah Hakadosh explains the pasuk (Amos 3:8) אריה שאג מי לא יירא, "a lion has roared, who will not fear." He writes that אריה is roshei teivos for ראש השנה, יום כיפור, הושענא רבא.

Seven Gates

In Elul, when you judge yourself and review your deeds, special attention should be given to the "seven gates of the soul," which are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth. We must check that they are used only for Hashem's honor. The parashah begins with ופטים ושומרים תתן לך בכל שערך, "judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates..." The Shlah Hakadosh writes, "There is a lesson of mussar alluded to in these words, based on the Sefer Yetzirah (4:42) which states, "There are seven שערִים, gates to the soul: Two eyes, two ears, the mouth, and two nostrils. A person must guard these gates. They are the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, speech, and anger that comes from the nostrils.... Over these gates, one must place שופטים ושומרים, which means that one should constantly be judging himself. This is the meaning of תתן לך. He should watch that there shouldn't be an aveirah."

One should judge himself constantly whether he is using his eyes¹⁰, ears, and

10. The Tschakaver Rebbe zt'l from America (who was niftar about two years ago) owned a burial plot in Har HaZeisim, near the grave of his father and other relatives. Surprisingly, when the Tschakaver Rebbe fell ill, he requested to be buried in America. He explained that although there is a great benefit to being buried in Eretz Yisrael and a particular benefit to being buried together with family, he is *mevater* on all of that and requested to be buried in America. He explained that if he were buried in Eretz Yisrael, his children would travel to him for the yahrtzeit, and they would have to pass through the airport, which isn't the easiest place for guarding the eyes. He preferred that his children shouldn't have this test. For this reason, he opted to be buried in America.

אלוּל is roshei teivos עינינו ולי"ה ולי"ה, "We are to Hashem, and to Hashem, our eyes are turned" (see Succah 51:). The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l (beginning of Re'eh) adds that this hints to us the importance of guarding

mouth properly¹¹ and whether he is cautious about anger. If improvement is necessary,

he should consider what he can take on that will help him improve.

the eyes during Elul, that it should be לִי"ה עֵינֵינוּ, our eyes turned solely to Hashem.

11. It states (Tehillim 15:3) לֹא רָגַל עַל לְשׁוֹנוֹ, the final letters spell אֱלֹהִים. This is a hint at the importance of guarding the mouth in Elul. On the holy days, we will use our mouths to plead to Hashem for a good year. For our tefillos to be answered, we must see that our mouths are pure and clean, without lashon hara, falsehoods, speaking during the tefillah, and so on.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner zt'l (יום א' דסליחות תקע"ב) said, "A shofar coated with gold is pasul. The sound of the shofar passes through the gold, the material used for making the egel, and [אין קטיגר נעשה סניגר, something that reminds Heaven of our sins – the sin of the egel – can't be used as our advocate]. According to the Zohar, only the erev rav made the egel, and it occurred thousands of years ago, and nevertheless, gold is pasul in the shofar because gold was once used for avodah zarah. We see how cautious we have to be that אין קטיגר נעשה סניגר, something with a mere hint of sin and prosecution against us, shouldn't be used as our advocate. So how can a person blow shofar or daven to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when his mouth is disgusting and tamei from speaking lashon hara? Therefore, it is imperative to do teshuvah."

The Chida (Chadrei Beten, Ki Seitzei) writes, "The beginning of teshuvah is to guard the mouth. As Dovid HaMelech (Tehillim 34:13-15) says, סוֹר מִרָע... נִצּוֹר לְשׁוֹן מִרָע – guarding the tongue comes before everything, it is a precursor to סוֹר מִרָע.