

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Chukas



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Chukas

Protected under Hashem's Wings

During World War Two, when the Nazis came to France, there was a yeshiva in Leon, France. One week, a student of the Novardok yeshiva gave a drashah before *kabbalas Shabbos*. He spoke about the minhag of turning from Mizrach to face Maariv while saying the last stanza of *lecha dodi* and then bowing to the right and the left. He explained that this custom is to remind us that one doesn't know where his salvation will come from. It might come from the east, it might come from the west, it could come from the right, it could come from the left.

No one knew at the time, but as he spoke in the yeshiva, there was a rasha outside, holding a grenade in his hand. He entered the *beis medresh* to throw it, just as the people of the yeshiva turned around for the last phrase of *Lecha Dodi*. The rasha thought that they had turned around to look at him. He thought he would catch them by surprise but then realized that maybe they were prepared for his attack and knew his plan. He became paralyzed from fear. The grenade exploded in his hands, killing him.

We tell this story to remind us that keeping Torah and mitzvos is our protection. We protect ourselves with our connection to Hashem.

Reb Dovid Povarsky zt'l told the following story:

The Novardok yeshiva operated in Soviet Russia. Obviously, in that era, they had to conceal the existence of the yeshiva from the government. If they were caught, the government would declare them to be anti-

revolutionary, the yeshiva would be closed, and the students imprisoned, r'l.

Once, officials of the Russian government were planning a meeting in a building across the street from the yeshiva. The leaders of the yeshiva wondered whether they should close the yeshiva for that day, as it states (Tehillim 119:126) *עַתָּה לְעִשׂוֹת לַה' הִפְרוּ תוֹרָתְךָ*, sometimes one should stop learning (*הִפְרוּ תוֹרָתְךָ*), so the yeshiva can go on afterwards. They sent their question to the Alter of Novardok zt'l and he responded that they shouldn't close the yeshiva – not even for a day. On the contrary, they should learn more, and with greater *hasmadah*. The Alter assured them that this merit will protect them.

On the day of the government meeting, two soldiers arrived early to set up the meeting place. As they came near the yeshiva, they heard a loud *kol Torah* and tried to see what was going on. Two bachurim of the yeshiva looked out the window and saw the soldiers approaching. Frightened, they ran upstairs to the dormitory and hid under blankets.

The soldiers entered the yeshiva and saw everyone learning with *hislahavus*. They had never seen anything like this before. Some students were shouting towards their chavrusos, others were making unusual hand and body motions, as is the way of those immersed in Torah study. The soldiers were convinced they had entered a mental asylum. According to the law, they couldn't do anything to such an institution, so they left.¹

Once again, we learn that the greatest protection is to be attached to Torah.

1. After leaving the yeshiva, the soldiers said to one another, "Although they are insane downstairs, we don't know what is going on upstairs." They returned to the yeshiva and went upstairs. Just then, the two bachurim came out of their hiding place. The soldiers killed them on the spot, hy'd.

During the First World War, many bombs landed in Dvinsk. The residents of Dvinsk asked Reb Meir Simchah (the Or Someiach) whether they should escape to towns that weren't under attack as much. Reb Meir Simchah told them to remain in Dvinsk. He explained, "Every bomb has its address. It won't help to escape to another city."

Sometime afterwards, the danger in Dvinsk increased, and most residents of Dvinsk had already left. Reb Meir Simchah remained. He said that as long as there are nine other Yidden in Dvinsk, he will be there.

He helped the Yidden who remained in Dvinsk. He distributed tzedakah to them (from donations that he received from others), and he wrote letters of encouragement to the women, whose husbands were soldiers in the war.

The Steipler (Kobetz Igros 4) discusses Reb Meir Simchah's *bitachon*, at that time. He writes, "It is known that Reb Meir Simchah advised that during the war, people shouldn't run away; rather, they should remain where they are. He explained that each arrow arrives at the address designated and planned in heaven..."

The Steipler tells: Once, during the war, Reb Meir Simchah was in Vienna, and he met the mayor of Dvinsk. This mayor had a lot of respect for Reb Meir Simchah, and he invited Reb Meir Simchah to return to Dvinsk with him, in his expensive car. Reb Meir Simchah said that he preferred to travel with his brothers of Bnei Yisrael, in simple wagons.

It seemed that he traveled in a dangerous manner, because wagons were unprotected, whereas a car has a metal covering on all sides. But during this trip back to Dvinsk, a bomb fell on the mayor's car. Everyone in the car died. Reb Meir Simchah said about

this episode that we can clearly see that every arrow has its address.

Practically, each person should ask his Rav what he should do to protect himself. Nevertheless, whatever is decided, it is important to remain calm, because everything that happens is from above, and nothing bad will happen when one trusts in Hashem.

Pninei Yechezkel (Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l) tells the following: "More than fifty years ago... there was a lot of bombing in London... Reb Yechezkel Abramsky always said, 'When I put on a *talis* in the morning and I say the pasuk (Tehillim 36:8) **מִהַ יָּקָר חֶסֶדְךָ אֱלֹהִים וּבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ יִחְסִיּוּ**, "How precious is Your kindness, Hashem, and the sons of man will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings." I intend that I am saying to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that when I wear the *talis*, I am going under Hashem's wing... and this protects me from all harm... Nothing bad will happen to me throughout the day. Even if bombs fall, I am under Hashem's wings and protected."

Even bachurim who don't wear a *talis*, wear a *talis katan*. That is their protection. They are under Hashem's wings. Furthermore, the primary point is the intention, to go under Hashem's protection, and to trust in Him. Our *bitachon* and our devotion to Hashem are our protection.

Emunah Peshutah

Rashi (19:2) writes, "The Satan and the nations of the world ask the Yidden, 'What is this mitzvah (of *parah adumah*)? What are the reasons for it? The Torah writes **חֹקֶה**, it is a law. It is My decree, and you don't have permission to think about it.' We don't understand the mitzvah, but we keep it without understanding. This is the meaning of *emunah peshutah*: to believe in Hashem and His mitzvos, even when we don't understand.²

2. In the *ketores*, we say **אֵילֹהִים הָיָה נוֹתֵן בָּהּ קֶרֶטֶב שֶׁל דֶּבֶשׁ אֵין אָדָם יָכֹל לַעֲמוֹד בִּפְנֵי רִיחָהּ**, "If a drop of honey would be added into the *ketores*, no person could have withstood its scent. ?ולמה אין מערבין בה דבש? So why don't we add honey?

Reb Menachem Weiss Shlita from Elad tells that his four-year-old son suffered from Psoriasis³ for a long time. Reb Menachem brought his son to doctors, but they couldn't find a cure. Their only advice was to go to the Dead Sea, where his pain would be alleviated a little.

Before Shavuos (this year), his son came home from cheder and told his father that he would be healed from his Psoriasis very soon. His father asked him how he knew

this, and the boy replied that his rebbe in cheder spoke to them that day about the yom tov Shavuos, which was approaching. Their rebbe told them that when Hashem gave the Torah, all the ill were cured. The boy told his father, "Our Rebbe said that it will be Shavuos and matan Torah again in a few days. At *matan Torah*, everyone is healed. This is how I know that I will be cured."

His father remained silent. He didn't say anything. Wondrously, during the yom tov

Wouldn't it be wise to add 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 ממנו אשי לד', "Because the Torah says, 'Do not sacrifice leaven and honey to Hashem.'"

These words exemplify that we do not follow what our common sense dictates. Our 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 had a strong liking for strong 96% vodka. His friends rebuked him. "Why do you drink? You are ruining your health and *shalom bayis*. All your friends are leaving you. Why don't you stop?"

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

When keeping the Torah, there may be ninety-five reasons and explanations to do things differently. Our common sense may advise in a specific direction, but we accept what Hashem commands 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 with what we think or want.

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, so 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 the 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 desire. 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, desires, and priorities. But when we embrace the Torah as it was taught, we don't change it to fit our personal needs.

3. Psoriasis is a painful skin condition that causes a rash and itchiness.

day meal on Shavuot, the boy rolled up his sleeve and showed everyone that he was healed. The Psoriasis had disappeared. (Generally, Psoriasis becomes worse in the hot summer months. But for this boy, instead of becoming worse, it was totally healed.) We learn from this the power of *emunah peshutah*, the power of *temimus*. The boy believed that he would be healed on Shavuot, and this is what occurred.

We were all young, once upon a time. We should cast away all the "*chochmos*" that we acquired over time, and return to believing in Hashem with *temimus*, like a young child.

Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller zt'l said that Shlomo HaMelech was חכם מכל אדם, the wisest man in the world (see Malachim 1, 5:11), yet Shlomo said (Koheles 2:9) אִנִּי הִקְדַּמְתִּי עֲמֻדָה לִי, "also my wisdom remained with me" א"ף is *roshei teivos* for אמונה פשוטה. This means that although he was extremely wise, his power and specialty were his simple, pure *emunah*. He pushed aside all his wisdom and believed in Hashem with simplicity, like a young child – and that is the greatest wisdom!

We can also say that א"ף is *roshei teivos* for אן פשעטלאך, "without explanations and *pilpulim*". He didn't tell himself, "This case is different... It wasn't referring to this situation..." and so on. Rather, he believed in Hashem with *emunah peshutah*.

Every year, on Parshas Parah, Rebbe Henech of Alexander zy" a told a story that the Chozeh of Lublin zy" a related:

During the era of the Rishonim, it was common for the Catholic priests to summon Yidden to a religious debate in front of a tribunal. Their motive was to prove their religion and legally force the Yidden to accept it.

A priest once came into a Jewish village and, with permission from the local government, announced that someone should come forward to debate with him. This time, the loser of the debate would be thrown into a river and face their death. The court said, "There will be no second chances

and no appeals. Whoever loses the debate will be drowned immediately."

The Yidden were very afraid and davened to Hashem for salvation.

The date of the debate was quickly approaching. No one wanted to be chosen to challenge the priest because everyone was scared that the Yid would lose the debate and be thrown into the river.

A simple tailor volunteered to take on the contest. This tailor was unlearned, which made his chance of success against the scholarly priest slim, but since no one wanted to take on the challenge, the community had no choice other than to accept his offer and pray for his success.

When the priest saw the tailor standing before him, he was confident that he would easily win this debate, and so he said to the tailor, "You can ask the first question." The tailor fearlessly said, "What does איני יודע mean?"

The priest replied, "I don't know."

The jury promptly lifted the priest and drowned him in the nearby river. They didn't listen to the priest's shouts and excuses because the instructions were that there be no appeals. The loser was to be drowned immediately. He admitted that he doesn't know, so he lost the debate.

The Yidden rejoiced. Their *tefillos* were answered. They asked the simple tailor how he thought of this clever question. The tailor replied, "I studied a Yiddish translation of *Rashi*. *Rashi* writes איני יודע, and the translator writes 'ich veis nisht' (I don't know). So I figured that if the learned author of this *sefer* didn't know the meaning of איני יודע, then this goy won't know the answer, either."

The Chozeh told this story to show how a simple, unlearned tailor can win a debate against a learned priest because for *emunah*, one doesn't need wisdom. Simplicity is the key factor for *emunah*.

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 nefesh* to know Torah, as it states in this week's parashah (19:14) ואת 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. 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 ואת 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 cleanses 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.⁴

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

4. It states (19:2) פרה אדמה תמימה, "A perfectly red cow." Rashi explains that *תמימה* in this context means "It shall be perfect in its 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 the *temimus* of the *parah adumah*, it can have one black hair, and it is still called *tamim*, entirely red. But as for *temimus* in our devotion to Hashem, one must be one hundred percent wholehearted with Hashem. Not even one hair of his essence should be left out.

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

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.⁵

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 the 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 the fast on the date of the month that this occurred because in a dream (shaalas chalom) it was revealed to them that the tragedy was associated with the parashah (parashas Chukas), as it states ואת חקת התורה, and Unkelus writes, דא גזירת אורייתא, 'This is the decree on the Torah.' Also, in the year ת"ח, 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.⁶

Mikvah

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said he achieved his levels through immersing himself 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, "Aveiros cause tumah. The Midrash on (Tehillim 51:4) הרב כבסני מעוני, '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 had eaten the food 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

5. 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 pot over the fire to draw out its impurities.

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.

6. Rebbe Shlomo Karliner *zy"a* said that Gemara comes from the word *gumri*, coals, since the Gemara is like burning coals that burn away all tumah and ignites our hearts to Hashem.

Rebbe Shmuel Kaminka *zy"a* once spoke to his students about the importance of studying a *blatt* Gemara. He said, "With a *blatt* Gemara, one comes out of the *blotta* (the mud, meaning the *yetzer hara*)."

One of his students was inspired by this counsel and quickly went into the adjacent room to find a Gemara to study. He didn't find a Gemara, but he found a Mishnayos. He learned a chapter and then returned to hear more Torah from Reb Shmuel Kaminka. Rebbe Shmuel said, "He thinks he can cleanse himself with a chapter of Mishnayos like with a *daf* Gemara."

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."⁷

Everything is from Hashem

It states (Eichah 3:37) *מִי זֶה אָמַר וַתְּהִי ה' לֹא צָוָה*, "Who has spoken, and it came to pass, unless Hashem commanded it?" Rashi writes, "If I will say that the bad that came to me wasn't from Hashem, rather from chance, it isn't so. Both the bad and the good wouldn't have occurred if Hashem didn't command it."⁸

It states (21:12) *וַיִּחַנו בְּנַחַל זֶרֶד*, "they encamped along the river of Zered." *זֶרֶד* is similar to *זֶרֶת*, which is a measurement – a half-amah. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 19:24) states that this river was called *נַחַל זֶרֶד* because it was only a half-amah deep. And yet they couldn't cross it for thirty-eight years! As it states (Devarim 2:13-14) *עָתָה קָמוּ וַעֲבְרוּ לָכֵם אֶת נַחַל זֶרֶד וַנַּעֲבֹר אֶת נַחַל זֶרֶד וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר הָלַכְנוּ מִקְדָּשׁ בְּרַנֵּעַ עַד אֲשֶׁר עָבְרָנוּ אֶת נַחַל זֶרֶד שְׁלֹשִׁים וּשְׁמֹנֶה שָׁנָה*, "Now get up and cross the brook of Zered. So we crossed the brook of Zered. The days when we went from Kadesh

Barnea, until we crossed the brook of Zered, numbered thirty-eight years..."

This tells us that it is all up to Hashem. As the Lechovitzer zt'l said, "With Hashem's help, we can cross the sea. Without Hashem's help, we can't cross a doorway."

It states (21:8) *עָשָׂה לְךָ שָׂרָף וְשִׂים אוֹתוֹ עַל יָם וְהָיָה כָּל הַנִּשְׁוֹךְ וְרָאָה אוֹתוֹ וְחָי*, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Make yourself a serpent and put it on a pole and let whoever is bitten look at it and live.'"

How could the same creature – the snake – cause death and life? (Granted, it was an actual snake that caused the illness, and a copper snake brought the healing; nevertheless, there is a lesson that we can learn from this similarity.) The Imrei Emes zt'l explains that this showed the nation that both healing and illness come from Hashem. When they sinned, they were bitten by snakes and became ill. When they did *teshuvah*, they were healed by a snake. This is as the Ramban (21:9) writes, "The snake was the source of their illness, but when they looked at the snake, they were healed. This was so they will know that Hashem gives life and the contrary."

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

8. Reb Mordechai Pogransky zy'a was in the Kovno Ghetto during the war. One day, he heard Yidden speaking on the street, bemoaning their lot. Reb Mordechai said, "Rabbousei, listen to me. I have two questions for you, and I know that you will agree with my answers: If a soldier decides to kill some Jews, will his colleagues bring him to court for that?"

They answered that nothing would happen to the soldier. He won't even be questioned for killing a Yid.

Reb Mordechai moved on to his second question, "So, maybe you can explain to me why he doesn't do what he wants to do? He wants to pour Jewish blood like water, so what stops him? He isn't afraid there will be consequences, so what holds him back from fulfilling his heart's desire? It must be that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is with us, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells him, 'No! Don't kill them!' Remember that Hashem is always with us, in these dark times." The men survived the war and said that they always remembered these words. From that day on, they didn't see the soldiers. They only saw Hashem, Who was with them, and decides at every moment what their fate should be.

People think that illness is from chance, and they believe healing is from medicine. This episode was a reminder that everything, the good and the bad, the sickness and the healing, comes from Hashem.⁹

The Rebbe of Tosh zt'l would send an envelope with money to a particular person every month. Even when the receiver of this monthly stipend moved to a different address, the Rebbe made the effort to get the correct address, so he could continue sending him this stipend. Once, the Rebbe told his driver the reason he gives this person a monthly stipend. The Rebbe once broke ice over a river to be tovel in it. When one does this, he must be cautious to tovel near the opening in the ice so that he can get out. But this man was there, and he cruelly covered the opening with a wooden plank. The Rebbe almost drowned. In the last minute, the man moved the plank away. This saved the Rebbe's life. The Tosher Rebbe explained that he isn't angry at this person for blocking the entrance, because he knows that it was from Hashem. So, why should he be angry with him? But this man moved the plank away from the entrance, which saved his life. For that, he owes him hakaras hatov.

This is the reason he sends him a monthly stipend.

People reading this story might say that this is a madreigah for tzaddikim of years ago, which doesn't apply to us. But remember that we are telling a story of someone who lived in our lifetime, not very long ago. He understood that everything is from Hashem, as Dovid HaMelech said (Shmuel 2, 16:10) *כִּי ה' אָמַר לוֹ קְלָל* "Hashem said to him, 'Curse him.'" Everything, the good and the opposite, is never by chance. Everything is from Hashem.

There is a wonderful vort taught by the Maharil Diskin zt'l (quoted in Har Tzvi). It states (21:23) *וְלֹא נָתַן סִיחֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹבֵר בְּגִבְלוֹ וַיִּצְאָה סִיחֹן אֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְיָת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּדְבָּרָה וַיָּבֵא יְהִצָּה וַיִּלָּחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל*, "But Sichon did not permit Yisrael to pass through his territory, and Sichon gathered all his people and went out to the desert toward Yisrael. He arrived at Yahatz and fought against Yisrael."

We wonder why Sichon wasn't afraid to fight this war. He should have known by now that Hashem fights the wars for Bnei Yisrael.

The Maharil Diskin answers that Sichon won a great, difficult war against Moav and he conquered the city Cheshbon. This caused

9. When Reb Gershon Eidelstein zt'l was a chasan, the family arranged a rental apartment for the new couple in Tel Aviv. On the night before the wedding, he went to his new apartment. He needed to use the bathroom, but after looking around, he realized that there was none! He went to the landlord to complain. "Why did you rent me an apartment without a bathroom?"

The landlord said, "You said you wanted a one-room apartment. If there were a bathroom, it would be a two-room apartment!"

Reb Gershon went outside to find a bathroom. He came to an old-age home. He told them his dilemma, that he rented an apartment without a bathroom, and the managers of the old-age home agreed to allow Reb Gershon Eidelstein and his rebbetzin to use the bathroom whenever they wanted.

Reb Gershon lived in his apartment, under these conditions, for a few months, until he moved to Bnei Brak.

Even after he moved to Bnei Brak, he kept up a connection with his old landlord and would invite him to all of his simchos. The landlord came to all his simchos, and Reb Gershon honored him tremendously, dancing with him and treating him as if he were the most honored guest. People asked Reb Gershon why he was so kind to this landlord. He replied, "He gave me a place to live, and I owe him hakaras hatov. Now, regarding his cynical joke about the 'two rooms', I forgave him. I know that it was from Hashem, so why should I be angry with him?"

him to think he was stronger than he really was. As Rashi (21:23) writes, *אלו היתה חשבון מלצה*, "Even if Cheshbon was filled with mosquitos, no human being could conquer it." When Sichon conquered Cheshbon, he mistakenly thought that he had won it with his own strength. He felt invincible, and he dared to fight with Bnei Yisrael.

He didn't realize that he won this war solely for the sake of Bnei Yisrael. As Rashi explains, it was forbidden for Bnei Yisrael to conquer the cities of Moav. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to give the city Cheshbon to the Jewish nation. So, Hakadosh Baruch Hu had Sichon conquer Cheshbon, so it no longer belonged to Moav, and now Bnei Yisrael were permitted to conquer it. Sichon didn't conquer Cheshbon on his own. Hashem conquered it for him.

If Sichon would have the true emunah that wars are won by Hashem (ה' איש מלחמה), he wouldn't have felt so arrogant, and wouldn't have fought against Yisrael, thereby losing his life and his kingdom.

Let us know that wars, successes, and everything man accomplishes – the good and the opposite – they are all decreed from Above. With this awareness, we won't lose our rational minds. Also, we won't lose our peace of mind when things don't go the way we hoped they would. We know that everything is in Hashem's hands, and we accept how Hashem leads us, and it will be

good for us in this world and in the next world.¹⁰

The Power of Positive Speech

One important aspect of speech is to talk gently. This is particularly important when the person you are speaking to is angry with you about something. Respond to them in soft tones, as it states (Mishlei 15:1) *מענה נדב ישיב*, "A gentle reply turns away wrath." This counsel will eliminate machlokes. Even if your fellow man is tough like a stone, when you speak kind words to him, he will be turned around to respond to you kindly as well.

This is alluded to in the pasuk (20:8) *ודברתם אל הסלע לענייהם ונתן מימיו*, "Speak to the rock... so that it will give forth its water." Speak soft words, and there will be good results.

Speech is also a powerful tool to influence and encourage people. Sometimes you meet someone who is hard like stone, it seems that he isn't interested in avodas Hashem, but words can turn him around.

When you speak to him with words of chizuk and encouragement, he will turn around and become inspired. This is also alluded to in the pasuk (20:8) *ודברתם אל הסלע לענייהם ונתן מימיו*, "Speak to the rock... so that it will give forth its water." The water represents Torah and good deeds. This can be accomplished with words of encouragement.

10. In his younger years, Rebbe Moshe of Kopishnitz zy'a worked in the New York diamond center, but there was a time when he wasn't making sales. He said to his father, Rebbe Avraham Yehoshua Hershel of Kopishnitz zy'a, *איך מאך גארנישט*, "I make nothing." (He meant that he wasn't earning anything). "I am worried about my family. How will I place food on the table, and how will I clothe them?"

His father told him, "You said it correctly. *איך מאך גארנישט*, 'I do nothing.' You must always remember these words. Parnassah isn't from one's work. It is from Hashem's decree."

Some weeks passed, and he still didn't make any sales. Friday afternoon, as he was returning his diamonds into the safe until next week, he said to Hashem *איך מאך גארנישט*, "I make nothing. Everything is from you." He said this with clarity that parnassah is from Hashem. Immediately, the phone rang. A diamond merchant was on the line, wanting to purchase a large quantity of diamonds. With this one sale, he earned what generally took him weeks to earn. His problems were resolved in a moment.

The Gemara (Eiruvim 54a) states, **האי עלמא כבי**, הלולא דמיא, this world is like a chasunah. This means that life is short, like a chasunah, and we have to take advantage of our time and use it in good ways. There is another Gemara that says (Brachos 6b) **אגרא דבי הלולא מילי**, the reward for a chasunah is words. This means that the primary reward at a chasunah is the kind words that one says to a chosson...

We can put both Gemaras together and explain that this world is like a chasunah, and we can accomplish a lot, particularly with our speech. Speech should be a person's activity in this world: to say many kind words to people, and to give them chizuk.

In Elul of תשפ"ב, the chaburah made a Shabbos together in Meron (שבת התוועדות). During the Shabbos, someone announced a miracle that occurred to one of the members of the chaburah. This person's child had the "disease" in the pancreas (which is very dangerous). In addition to tefillos, the father, a very special yungerman, made a kabbalah that

every day, he will say a kind word to a sad, lonely person.

This wasn't an easy kabbalah to keep. It is much easier to say a kind word to a friend, but to the lonely, broken people, no one pays attention to them, and it is hard to give them chizuk.

A short time after he made this kabbalah, the child had another checkup, and the disease disappeared. It was a miracle.

Reb S. Binyamin from Beis Shemesh was present at this Shabbos, and he heard about the miracle that occurred, due to the *kabbalah tova*. Reb S. Binyamin needed his own salvation. He had his own issue that he was dealing with. He had only one sixteen-year-old son, and he yearned to have more children. He made the same kabbalah – that every day he will give chizuk to a broken, lonely person. Nine months later, he had his second child, after seventeen years of waiting!¹¹

11. I repeat the following story, in the words of the baal hamaaseh:

I spent over five years in a hospital, to be with my daughter, who required extensive medical care. Over this time, I got to know several bachurim who were patients of that hospital, and I began to notice an unfortunate pattern: When the family and the bachur weren't on guard, it was common that bachurim requiring an extended hospital stay would experience a spiritual descent.

Once, a bachur from a family I know was hospitalized with "the disease." I understood that he would be there for quite some time, so I approached his father and advised him to be cautious and not leave his son alone in the hospital. Someone should always be with him. This will protect the bachur from befriending people that could negatively affect him, and from seeing things he shouldn't, r'l. I also advised the father to arrange a chavrusah for his son, so that he shouldn't lose his connection with the Torah. I told him I was speaking from experience, based on what I know and have witnessed over the years I spent in the hospital.

The father accepted my advice, and said he would do so. Nevertheless, to be extra cautious, I called the bachur's rosh yeshiva, and I requested that the yeshiva send someone to the hospital to learn with the bachur. This was arranged. The yeshiva sent a yungerman to learn with the bachur. The yungerman would also test the bachur, according to the amount he was expected to know. In this manner, the bachur maintained his yiras Shamayim and his Torah.

During the bachur's hospital stay, his family made a chasunah for one of their other children. Obviously, at the time of the simchah, the family couldn't come to the hospital, so during that time, I took care of the bachur. I spent many nights with him, and I took him to the medical tests that he had to take. We also had many conversations, and I helped him in various ways.

With Hashem's immense chesed, the bachur recovered, and he made a seudas hadoyah. I was also invited to this thanksgiving celebration. The peak of the celebration was when the bachur made a siyum on

Yesurim with Love

The first Rashi of the parashah discusses the *parah adumah*. The Goyim ask, "What is the reason for this mitzvah? What is the logic?" Hashem's response is, גזרה היא מלפני, אין, "It is a decree before Me, and you don't have permission to ask questions about it." The Kaliver Rebbe Shlita (may he have a refuah sheleimah) explains that this portion speaks about someone who died (because a parah adumah is brought to purify from טומאת מת).

When someone dies, now it is time to say גזרה היא מלפני, אין לך רשות להרהר אחריה "It is a decree before me, and you don't have permission to ask questions about it."¹²

The Shefa Chaim zy'a of Klausenberg lost his wife and his eleven children hy'd in the Holocaust. About this great sorrow, the Shefa Chaim said the following vort. It states (Tehillim 33:9) ה' צוה וַיַּעֲמֵד, "For He said and it came about; He commanded and it endured." ה' is an expression of tzaar (see

masechta Bava Kama. He learned the entire masechta in the hospital.

The rosh yeshiva spoke at the seudah. He said, "Just as you invited me to this seudah, I am looking forward to an invitation to your vort," and he gave him a brachah that he should get engaged soon.

When the rosh yeshiva said this, I thought to myself, "I would such a bachur as my son-in-law." I knew the bachur very well, I knew his qualities. In particular, I saw how strong he remained with his Yiddishkeit, in a trying environment, where many others fail.

But on the other hand, I knew this bachur's medical history, and it concerned me.

After the meal, I walked home together with one of the mashgichim of the yeshiva. Our conversation was obviously about this bachur, and the mashgiach told me about the qualities of the bachur, which he observed in the yeshiva. He told me how well the bachur learns, and so on.

When I got home, my elder daughter noticed that I was emotional about something, and she asked me about that. I told her that I was thinking that this bachur might be a good shidduch for her. She said, "So, what's stopping you?"

I told her, "For my part, I am prepared to drink l'chayim, but it is up to you."

I spoke to the doctors at the hospital. They couldn't give me all the details, due to privacy laws, but they gave me the basic general picture.

We checked into it well, made the necessary inquiries, and the shidduch was finalized.

(There were many other signs from heaven that this shidduch was meant to be. Both mechutanim experienced this.)

See the wonderful hashgachah pratis. Specifically the challenging times that the bachur and the father of the young girl experienced, led up to a wonderful shidduch.

Furthermore, there is a rule: What you do for others, you do for yourself. This can be seen in this story. He made efforts to help this bachur maintain his yiras Shamayim, without knowing that he was really doing this for himself and his daughter.

12. Thirty years ago, was niftar Harav HaTzaddik Reb Mordechai Twersky zt'l, the son of the Rachmistrivka Rebbe of America zt'l. The petirah of this holy son was sudden, and everyone cried and mourned this significant loss.

Soon afterwards, there was a chasunah in the Rachmistrivka family, and the father (the Rebbe zt'l) was extremely happy. His sons asked him how he could be happy amid such a loss and sadness. He replied, "What do you think, I am not made from flesh and blood? My heart is broken, and it's bleeding. But at the chuppah, when the chasan stepped on the glass cup and everyone shouted Mazal Tov, I thought to myself, what is the reason for this custom? It is to teach us that even if a cup shatters, one still has to shout out in a loud voice Mazal Tov and be happy."

Megillah 10b). The pasuk is saying **כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי**, the same Hashem Who brought on the tzaar, **הוּא צָוָה וַיַּעֲמֵד**, He commanded that we stop crying. We must get up from the earth and not be focused so deeply on the sorrow.¹³

It states (19:16) **וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יָגַע עַל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה בְּחָלָל חֶרֶב**, "Anyone who touches one slain by the sword, or a corpse, or a human bone or a grave, in an open field, he shall be tamei for seven days."

Why is this *tumah* so severe? The Chizkuni writes, "The Torah is more *machmir* with *tumas meis* than all other *tumos*.¹⁴ ... כְּדִי שֶׁלֹא יִהְיוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם מְצוּיִין אֶצֶל מוֹתֵיהֶן מִתּוֹךְ חֲבָתָם וַיִּצְטַעְרוּ יוֹתֵר מֵדָאִי, so people won't be around their dead because of their love and have too much tzaar."

This is similar to the Ramban (Devarim 14:1), who explains the reason it is forbidden for a person to cut himself or to make a **קְרָחָה לְמֶת**, baldness in the head, due to mourning. He explains that the soul lives forever; it remains eternally under Hashem's care, so there is no reason to mourn excessively.

The Ramban writes, "Neshamos will exist eternally before Hashem... because you are a holy nation, the treasure of Hashem... and Hashem thinks how no soul should ever be detached from Him. Therefore, there is no reason for a person to cut himself or to make baldness over the dead, even if someone died young... And this is the source for Chazal (Moad Kotton 27) who forbade mourning excessively over a dead."

This lesson doesn't solely apply to when someone dies, *chalilah*. Other losses can occur in a person's life, other disappointments, but it is forbidden to mourn excessively over these matters. With the belief that everything is for the good, there is no reason for excessive tears. Hashem wants a person to rise from the ashes and be strong with joy.

A person shouldn't say, "How can I be happy when I have this great tzaar?" The *emunah* that **הַצֹּר תָּמִיד פִּעְלוֹ**, that Hashem is leading us in the best way, **וְכָל דְּעֵבִיד רַחֲמָנָא לְטָב**, and everything Hashem does is for the good, will make it easier for him to accept the *yesurim*.

The four letters of Hashem's holy name can be rearranged and written in twelve combinations. Each month, another combination and order of Hashem's name shines. For example, for the month of Tamuz, the arrangement of the letters of Hashem's name is written backwards, like this: **הוה"י**. This comes from the final letters of the pasuk in megilas Esther (5:13) **וְכָל זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שְׂוָה לִי** "But all this is worth nothing to me..." Haman said that he has wealth, family, and honor, but he has nothing at all because Mordechai doesn't bow down to him.¹⁵

The Birkas Avraham quotes from *mekubalim* that the month of Tamuz fell into the hands of Eisav. Indeed, the attitude of Eisav and Haman is to complain that they have nothing. Even if they lack just one matter, they feel like they have nothing. In contrast, for Yaakov Avinu and his

13. Some years ago, the daughter of Harav HaTzaddik of Sea Gate zt'l was niftarah. At the end of the shivah, the rav gathered his family and showed them a bottle of milk. On it was written an expiration date. The rav said to his family, "Just as milk has an expiration date, after which the milk spoils, so too, mourning and crying have an end date. Past this time, it isn't right to cry anymore."

14. The *tumah* that comes from a dead person is greater than all other *tumos* because that *tumah* lasts for seven days, and is called **אָבִי אֲבוֹת הַטּוֹמָאָה**, "The father of the fathers of *tumah*."

15. Bnei Yissaschar (Rosh Chodesh 1:11) teaches that on rosh chodesh, when one says Hashem's name in the *brachah* **בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְרֹאשֵׁי הַדָּשִׁים**, he should concentrate on the letters of Hashem's name, as they appear that month. For example, for rosh chodesh Tamuz, he should think the name **הוה"י**, as the name shines during this month. Doing so, the Bnei Yissaschar teaches, is a *segulah* that his *tefillos* of the entire month will be answered.

descendants, they have תמו"ז, which is roshei teivos for תפאר ותרום זכרך מלכנו. We praise Hashem for all His kindness. We focus on what we have, and not on what we lack. We aren't like Haman who says וְכֵן יִהְיֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שְׂוֵה לִי, and וְכֵן means something small. This is because

Haman complains when he lacks even the smallest thing. In contrast, we, the descendants of Yaakov Avinu, say (Shemos 15:2) יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. It says יְהוָה in this pasuk, because even for the smallest matters, we praise and exult Hashem's name.¹⁶

16. Rebbe Meir of Premishlan zt'l related the following: "I was once on a wagon, together with my rebbe, Rebbe Mordechai of Kremnitz zt'l. We were riding down a steep hill, and I was afraid the wagon would turn over. I wanted to jump off the wagon, but Rebbe Mordechai of Kremnitz grabbed me with his holy hand and said, 'Stay here. Nothing will happen.' And, indeed, we passed this steep mountain in peace. Later, we were riding on a straight plane, and the wagon turned over, and we were thrown into the snow. The Kremintzer said, 'Nu, nu. Now you see,' but I didn't know what he meant. I thought about his words many times, and I tried to understand what my rebbe was telling me. What did I see? Years later, I understood that he was teaching me a lesson in avodas Hashem. Sometimes a person is afraid that he might fall into the trap the yetzer hara placed in front of him. When one is afraid, Hashem helps him, and he won't fall into the yetzer hara's hands. But there are times when a person feels he is going on a safe road and doesn't realize that the yetzer hara is plotting against him. That is when he is in danger of falling into the yetzer hara's net.