

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Chukas*



# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Chukas

## Success is from Hashem

Cheshbon was a large city that was part of Moav's territory, and Hashem wanted to give it to Bnei Yisrael. However, it was forbidden for Bnei Yisrael to wage war with Moav, as it states (Devarim 2:9) אַל תַּצַּר אֶת מוֹאָב וְאַל תִּתְּנֶנּוּ בָּם מִלְחָמָה כִּי לֹא אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ מֵאֶרֶץ יִרְשָׁה כִּי לְבָנֵי לוֹט נָתַתִּי אֶת עַר יִרְשָׁה, "You shall not distress Moav and you should not provoke war with them, for I shall not give you an inheritance from their land, for to the children of Lot have I given Or as an inheritance." What did Hashem do? Sichon was the mighty king who ruled over the Amori. Hashem placed into Sichon's heart a desire to conquer Cheshbon, making it a part of the Amorite dynasty. The Jewish people were permitted to wage war against the Amori, and they took Cheshbon from them. This is how Cheshbon became the property of Bnei Yisrael.

This is discussed in the pasukim of this week's parashah (21:25-26): וַיִּקַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כָּל הָעָרִים: הָאֵלֶּה גִּישָׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל עָרֵי הָאֲמֹרִי בְּחֶשְׁבוֹן וּבְכָל בְּנֵי יִתְּיָה, כִּי חֶשְׁבוֹן עִיר סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי הוּא וְהוּא נִלְחַם בְּמֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב יִשְׂרָאֵל, הִרְאִשׁוּן וַיִּקַּח אֶת כָּל אֶרְצוֹ מִיַּדוֹ

cities, and Yisrael settled in the Amorite cities, in Cheshbon and all its suburbs. For Cheshbon – it was the city of Sichon king of the Amorites. He had fought against the first king of Moav and took all his land from his control..."<sup>1</sup>

The miforshim explain that Sichon conquered Cheshbon with miracles. Naturally, Sichon couldn't conquer Cheshbon. As Rashi (21:23) writes, אֵילוּ הִיְתָה, "If Cheshbon would be filled with mosquitoes, no creature could conquer it..." Sichon was very powerful; he was a mighty king. Nevertheless, Rashi tells us אֵין כָּל בְּרִיה יְכוּלָה לִכְבֹּשָׁה, no human being could possibly conquer Cheshbon. Even the powerful Sichon couldn't conquer Cheshbon without miracles from Above. Hashem certainly performed these miracles to enable the Jewish nation to conquer Cheshbon.<sup>2</sup>

When the population saw that Sichon conquered Cheshbon, they thought that Sichon must be super powerful. How else did he manage to conquer this very difficult

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1. Rashi writes, למה הוצרך להכתב, why did the Torah find it necessary to teach us the history of Cheshbon, that the Amori conquered it from Moav? It is because it states (Devarim 2:9) אַל תַּצַּר אֶת מוֹאָב וְאַל תִּתְּנֶנּוּ בָּם מִלְחָמָה, "You shall not distress Moav and you should not provoke war with them." Therefore, one might wonder: How did Yisrael conquer Cheshbon? Therefore, the Torah tells us that Sichon conquered Cheshbon from Moav. על ידו טהרה לישראל, that purified Cheshbon for the Jewish nation [to be permitted to take it].

2. The Jewish nation's conquest of Cheshbon was also miraculous. Rashi (21:23) writes, אֵילוּ הִיְתָה חֶשְׁבוֹן מְלֵאָה, "Had Cheshbon been full of mosquitoes, no creature could have conquered it, and had Sichon been [living in] a weak country, no man could have conquered it. How much more so [was it invincible] since he [Sichon] was in Cheshbon." The king was mighty, the city was unconquerable, but Hashem can do anything, and Hashem shone success unto Bnei Yisrael.

They easily won the war, as Rashi writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Why should I trouble My children to besiege every city?' He gave all the warriors the idea to leave the cities, and they all gathered in one place, where they were slain. From there, Yisrael proceeded to the cities, where they met with no resistance, since only the women and children were there."

We praise Hashem for the miracles of this war (Tehillim 136:18-19) וַיְהִיג מְלָכִים אֲדִירִים כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדוֹ, לְסִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי כִּי, "To Him who smote mighty kings, for His kindness endures forever. Sichon, king of the Amorite, for His kindness endures forever..."

land? Likely, Sichon also thought that he won the war because he was so powerful. But obviously, it wasn't so. He won the war because this was Hashem's decree – to make the land available for the Jewish nation to conquer.

This is an important lesson because it applies to all areas of life. We think things happen because of our deeds. Everything is Hashem's plan.

We wonder why Sichon wasn't afraid to battle a war against the Jewish nation. It states (21:23) וְלֹא נָתַן סִיחֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבַר בְּגִבְלוֹ וַיֵּאָסֶף סִיחֹן אֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְאָת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּדְבָּרָה וַיָּבֵא יְהִצְהָ וַיִּלְחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, "Sichon did not permit Yisrael to pass through his border, and Sichon assembled his entire people and went out against Yisrael to the desert. He arrived at Yahatz and waged war against Yisrael."

He should have been afraid to battle Bnei Yisrael, knowing that Hashem fights wars for Bnei Yisrael. The Mahari"l Diskin zt"l says that Sichon misjudged his strength. When he conquered Cheshbon from Moav, he thought he had super-powers and that he had nothing to fear.

This is the great pitfall for those who think that they do things on their own. Their

misconception causes them to trust in themselves, and then they have their downfall. As it states (Koheles 9:11) כִּי לֹא לְקִלְיִם הַמְרוּץ וְלֹא לְגִבּוֹרִים הַמְלֻחָמָה וְגַם לֹא לְחֻכְמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם לֹא לְנִבְנִים עִשָּׂר, "The race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent..."

Tzaddikim explain, וְגַם לֹא לְחֻכְמִים לֶחֶם, that the pasuk isn't only saying that wisdom doesn't guarantee wealth. The pasuk is also implying that at times their wisdom is the problem. וְגַם לֹא לְחֻכְמִים לֶחֶם, because they are wise, they lack bread. When they trust in themselves too much, they forget Hashem. (They might also have times in the past that they succeeded, and they think that it is because of their intelligence.) This results that they don't feel it necessary to trust in Hashem – and then they have their downfall.<sup>3</sup>

### Hashem Helps All - Including those who Don't Deserve It

The Yerushalmi (Brachos 5:1) says, "This pasuk should always be on your lips: (Tehillim 46:8) ה' צְבָאוֹת עִמָּנוּ מוֹשָׁב לָנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב סֶלָה "Hashem... is with us, a stronghold for us is the G-d of Yaakov."

3. It states in Avos (2:3) הָיוּ זְהִירוֹן בְּרִשׁוֹת, שֶׁאִין מְקַרְבִּין לוֹ לְאָדָם אֶלָּא לְצָרָךְ עֲצָמֹן. וְנִרְאִין פְּאוּהֶבִין בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּאֻתָן, וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת דְּחָקוֹ (2:3), "Be wary of the authorities, for they befriend a person only for their own needs. They appear to be friends when it is beneficial to them, but they do not stand by a person at the time of his distress."

Rabbeinu Yonah explains: A person can't do good or bad to another person, on his own, unless it was commanded and decreed by Hashem. This includes mighty kings. It appears to people that he can do as he pleases, but in reality, he can't do anything on his own. If Hashem wants to do kindness to a certain person, Hashem will place in the heart of the king to love that person and to desire to elevate him. If Hashem desires to punish someone, Hashem will place in the king's heart a hatred towards that person. This is the meaning of (Mishlei 21:1) פְּלִגֵי מַיִם לֵב מֶלֶךְ בְּיַד ה' עַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִחְפֹּץ יַשֵּׂנוּ, "A king's heart is like streams of water in Hashem's hand; wherever He wishes, He turns it." Like a stream of water, a person can direct it in any direction he desires, so too is the heart of a king in Hashem's hands. He controls the king's desires and actions.

Therefore, continues Rabbeinu Yonah, the Mishnah states, הָיוּ זְהִירוֹן בְּרִשׁוֹת, be wary of kings and other authority because, וְנִרְאִין פְּאוּהֶבִין, it appears that they love us, but it isn't really so. Hashem placed in their hearts to love us, when Hashem wanted to give us good, וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת דְּחָקוֹ, and they won't offer help when one is in a difficult situation. This is because if a trouble and difficulty were decreed on someone, no one in the government can help him, if Heaven decrees the opposite. Therefore, there is no reason to befriend high-ranking government officials, because they won't be able to help you anyway.

A second opinion in the Yerushalmi states that the following pasuk should always be on your lips: (Tehillim 84:13) ה' צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁרֵי אָדָם בֵּטַח בְּךָ, "Hashem... praiseworthy is the man who trusts in you."

The Shefa Chaim (Klausenberg Rebbe) zt'l explains that the first pasuk is saying that Hashem is with the people who deserve to be helped. Therefore, it states אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, which implies that they are accepting upon themselves the yoke of heaven. They deserve that ה' צְבָאוֹת עִמָּנוּ מִשָּׁגֵב לָנוּ, that Hashem should be with them and protect them.

The other pasuk refers to those who lack good deeds, but they trust in Hashem; they have bitachon. About such people, it states ה' צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁרֵי אָדָם בֵּטַח בְּךָ, "Hashem... praiseworthy is the man who trusts in You." Hashem will help such people, because they trust in His kindness. Even if they lack good deeds, Hashem will help them.

The Yerushalmi (Brachos 9:1) says, לִי יִצוּחַ וְאֲנִי, "[Hashem says] 'He shouts out to me, I will answer him immediately.'" As it states (Yoel 3:5) וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' יִמְלֹט, "... and it will be that anyone who calls in the Name of Hashem will escape..." The words וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' יִמְלֹט tell us that all people will be helped by Hashem. Whoever calls out to Hashem will be saved. Hashem answers their tefillos and saves them.

The Yerushalmi tells the following story: Rav went to the חַמֵי טְבֵרְיָה, the hot springs in Tveriah, and there were Romans there who asked him, שֶׁל מִי אַתָּה, "who do you belong to?" Rav replied, "Suffeinus"! (Suffeinus was the name of a Roman official, and Rav was saying that he was from his people.) When they heard that he was from Suffeinus's people, they let him be.

That night, these Romans went to Suffeinus, and they asked him why he included Jews in his group and protected them. Suffeinus told them that he doesn't have any Jews in his group, and he doesn't know what they are talking about. In the end, it was understood that Rav said that he was from Suffeinus's people, but it wasn't

true. It was something he said to save himself. Nevertheless, Suffeinus said to the people who came to him, "It is good you didn't harm him, because he trusted in me."

Suffeinus felt that someone who trusts in him should be helped, even if the person's claim wasn't true.

The Yerushalmi learns from this story the following lesson: "If for trusting in a human being, one is saved, kal v'chomer, those who trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu will be saved. This is the meaning of (Yoel 3:5) וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' יִמְלֹט, "And it shall come to pass that whoever shall call in the name of Hashem shall be saved." The Shefa Chaim quotes this Yerushalmi and says that the Yerushalmi is teaching us that when one trusts in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, but he isn't entirely loyal to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, nevertheless, Hashem will help him. This is a kal v'chomer. Rav expressed trust in Suffeinus, and Suffeinus agreed to help him. Therefore, it will certainly be that whoever trusts in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, even if he isn't worthy, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will save him.

It states in this week's parashah (21:19) וּמִמִּתְּנָה נִחְלִיאֵל. The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l (Divrei Emes) explains as follows: "There are people who know their faults, and they perceive a drop of Hashem's greatness. They understand that whenever we receive from Hashem some goodness, it is certainly not because we deserve it... The goodness we receive is a מִתְּנָה, a gift. When one believes this, נִחְלִיאֵל, he will draw down bounty from Hashem." This is the meaning of וּמִמִּתְּנָה נִחְלִיאֵל. When you know that everything you have is a gift from Hashem and not what you deserve, you will receive more goodness from Hashem.

### Tzaros Prepare the Good that Follows

עַל כֵּן יֹאמֵר בְּסִפּוּר מִלְחָמוֹת ה' אֶת וְהָב (21:14) בְּסוּפָה. Rashi explains that this means just as we tell the miracles that occurred in the Yam Suf, we should tell the miracles that occurred נַחֲלֵי אֲרָגוֹן.

Bnei Yisrael had to cross נחל ארנון, the river of Arnon, and there were two mountains on either side. One mountain was on the Amorite side of the river. It had many tunnels. The mountain opposite it, on the other side of the river, in Eretz Canaan, was jagged. Parts of the mountain protruded outwards, bulging above its surface. The Amorites hid in the tunnels with arrows and heavy boulders (אבני בליסטרות). They planned to throw them on Bnei Yisrael as they passed through.

What did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? When Bnei Yisrael were passing through, the mountain on the side of Eretz Yisrael moved forward towards the mountain on the side of the Amorites. The jagged protrusions of the mountain entered the caves of the other mountain, and the enemies of Bnei Yisrael hiding in the mountains were crushed to death.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "Who will tell My children these miracles?" After Bnei Yisrael passed, the mountains returned to their places. The באר (well of Bnei Yisrael) went into the river of נחל ארנון and raised from there the blood, the arms, and the limbs of the Amorites who were crushed in the caves, and brought them to the camp of Bnei Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael saw this, and they sang Shirah (praises to Hashem). As it states (21:17) אָז יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת עָלֵי בְּאֵר עֲנֵנוּ לָהּ, "Then Yisrael sang this song: "'Ascend, O well,' sing to it...!"

As we wrote above, Rashi writes that just as we tell the miracles that occurred in the Yam Suf, we should tell the miracles that occurred in נחלי ארנון,

We ask two questions:

1) What is special about this miracle that we are obligated to speak about it just like we speak about the miracles of kriyas Yam Suf? There were many other miracles that occurred in the desert, such as the manna falling in the desert and the באר של מרים, Miriam's well, which miraculously gave water to Bnei Yisrael from a stone. We aren't

specifically obligated to speak about these miracles, so why is the miracle of נחל ארנון singled out?

2) From the words of the Shirah that Bnei Yisrael sang, it seems that the focus of the praise was that the באר raised the limbs of the Amorites and showed them to the Jewish nation. Why didn't they praise Hashem for killing the Amorites and for saving their lives when the two mountains crushed into one another?

The explanation is as follows: Bnei Yisrael went through many hard times with the באר, because of the essential need for water. Soon after the nation came to the desert, it states (Shemos 17:1) וַיֵּאָדוּן מֵיִם לְשִׁתּוֹת הָעָם, "there was no water for the people to drink." There was no water until Moshe hit the stone with his staff, and water came forth and satiated the nation, as it states (ibid 17:6) וְהִבִּיתָ בְּצוּר וַיֵּצֵאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מַיִם, "You shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, and the people will drink. Moshe did so before the eyes of the elders of Yisrael."

Forty years later, when Miriam was niftarah, the well ended, and the nation needed water once again. As this is discussed in this week's parashah (20:2-13), the entire story of the באר, until water was returned to Bnei Yisrael.

Now, as Bnei Yisrael were passing through the נחל ארנון, suddenly the באר left them once again. It seemed like a great tzarah. What would they drink? It is easy to imagine the great fear that befell the nation when they saw that the באר wasn't with them anymore. However, unbeknownst to them, the באר left for a short time to inform them of the great miracles that Hashem performed. It was a moment of worry, but it was for their benefit, to reveal to Bnei Yisrael how much Hashem loves them.

Hashem told us to discuss this miracle, specifically, so we will know that even when it appears that there is distress, it is all for the good. It may appear bad, but it is a

preparation for the good that will come in its aftermath.

This is similar to the miracles of kriyas Yam Suf. Before the Yam Suf split, Klal Yisrael was very afraid. The Mitzrim pursued from behind, and the sea was in front of them. They had nowhere to escape. But this problem became the miracle of kriyas Yam Suf, and the Mitzrim drowned in the sea.<sup>4</sup>

### The Potential of Teshuvah

Before discussing the episode of Moshe hitting the stone instead of speaking to it, we have to clarify that Moshe Rabbeinu's high levels are far above and beyond our perception.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, we are supposed to learn lessons from this incident that can make us better people.

The Divrei Shmuel of Slonim ז"ל (ד"ה יען) explains that when Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim and entered the desert, they didn't have water. At that time, Hashem said to Moshe that he should smite a stone, and water would come forth. Forty years later, when the nation once again needed water, Moshe made a kal v'chomer. When they first left

Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael were on a very high level because the nation had seen yetzias Mitzrayim and kriyas Yam Suf. Even so, a stone had to be hit for water to come forth. Now it was forty years later, and they had sinned with the egel and with the meraglim, etc. They were at a lower place. Certainly, to bring water, he would have to smite the stone! How could speaking to the stone help?

But this wasn't a valid kal v'chomer because, as surprising as it might sound, they were on a *higher level* now. This is because teshuvah and *hischazkus* after performing an aveirah elevate people to a very high place, and even higher than if they hadn't ever sinned. They had reached a level where just by speaking to the stone, water would come forth for the nation.

This is a beautiful explanation, and it reveals to us the potential of teshuvah. People who have sinned several times, and perhaps for many years, often think that they won't be able to return to Hashem. Even if they do teshuvah, they think that they can never reach high levels, of the kind

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4. The Gemara (Brachos 59a) states לא נבראו רעמים אלא לפשת עקמומיות שבלב, "Thunder was created solely to straighten out the crookedness of the heart." The fear that comes from a clap of thunder causes people to straighten their ways and do teshuvah. Reb Elyah Lopian ז"ל (Yisro, p.120) asks that if this is the purpose of thunder, why does it come specifically before it rains?

It is because Hashem wants to give rain to the world, but people may not be worthy of it; therefore, Hashem first brings thunder. This brings people to teshuvah. Their hearts are straightened out, and now they are worthy of receiving Hashem's brachah of rain.

This is how it is with all tzaros that we endure. They are for our good, and they ready us for the good that follows the hard times.

Chazal praise those who are שמחים ביסורים, rejoice with pain. The question is, how can a person rejoice while in pain? The Chofetz Chaim (Shemiras Halashon, Shaar HaTevunah 8) answers that a person attains this level when he lives with the holy emunah that Hashem leads each person with hashgachah pratis, as it states (Iyov 34:21) כִּי עֵינָיו עַל דַּרְכֵי אִישׁ וְגַל צִדְקוֹ יִרְאֶה, "For His eyes are upon man's ways, and He sees all his steps". With this emunah, we know that everything is from Hashem, and everything is for our good.

5. The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz ז"ל said, "Halavei that by my petirah, I should have kavanos that Moshe Rabbeinu had when he hit the stone."

The Ramban notes that the Torah doesn't explicitly write what the aveirah of Moshe and Aharon was. This shows us that it wasn't an outright aveirah, and whatever pgam, imperfection, that was there, it was merely a דק שבדק, very subtle.

they would have reached had they never sinned. But it isn't exactly so. Real teshuvah brings people to very high places, higher than if they had never sinned.

The Bas Ayin teaches a similar explanation. He begins with Rashi's explanation. Rashi teaches that Moshe's error was that he hit the rock and didn't speak to it. The Or HaChaim HaKadosh says that his error was when he rebuked the nation when he said, שמעו נא המורים, listen, rebellious ones." המורים also means foolish people, see Rashi (20:10).

The Ohr HaChaim writes, "Hashem's *hakpadah* (complaint) was that Moshe said to the [holy Jewish nation], children of the living G-d, המורים, 'Rebellious ones' (or 'foolish ones'), and it isn't proper for a *chossid* to disgrace and belittle the children of Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov."

The Bas Ayin combines both explanations. At first, Moshe disgraced the nation when he said שמעו נא המורים. After saying this, Moshe was to speak to the stone to bring forth water. But after disgracing the nation, Moshe thought that his words wouldn't be effective anymore. He thought, "How can a mouth

that just insulted the holy Jewish nation bring water from a stone? In my situation, words won't help anymore."

Moshe's error was that he underestimated the potential of *teshuvah*. After his *teshuvah*, he could once again perform wonders with his words.<sup>6</sup>

### Never Lose Hope

Rashi (19:2) explains the reason the mitzvah of parah adumah (discussed at the beginning of the parashah) is called חקה, as it states ואת חקת התורה. It is known that a חק is a mitzvah whose reason we don't know. Rashi writes, "The Satan and the nations of the world taunt Yisrael, saying, 'What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?' Therefore, the Torah uses the term חקה. 'I have decreed it; You have no right to question it.'"

This Rashi seems difficult because soon afterward, Rashi writes from Reb Moshe HaDarshan that the purpose of the parah adumah was to atone for the *egel*. It seems that the reason is known. Why then is it called חקה, a mitzvah for which we don't know the reason?

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6. The Midrash says that had Moshe Rabbeinu spoken to the stone, the Beis HaMikdash would have never been destroyed.

We wonder what the connection is. How would speaking to the stone prevent the Churban? The Beis HaMikdash was destroyed due to the aveiros *sinas chinam* and *lashon hara*. How would speaking to the stone change matters?

The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that people speak *lashon hara* because they think mere words won't cause harm. (This is obviously not true. Words are very powerful. How many machlokes, hatred, heartache, etc. are the result of *lashon hara*?) Had Moshe spoken to the stone and brought forth water through his words, it would have demonstrated the tremendous power of speech. And by extension, the nation would appreciate the severity of *lashon hara*. They would thus refrain from *lashon hara*, and the Beis HaMikdash wouldn't be destroyed.

Reb Moshe Benzelovitz zt'l, a chassid of the Imrei Emes of Gur zt'l, was experiencing severe tooth pain. To keep his mind off the pain, he paced back and forth. The Imrei Emes called for him, and Reb Moshe immediately presented himself before his rebbe, despite the pain. The rebbe said, "I heard that you have a toothache. It is because you speak *lashon hara*. Stop speaking *lashon hara* on Yidden, and the pain will disappear."

Reb Moshe Benzelovitz said that this counsel healed him. He never spoke *lashon hara* again, and he didn't suffer from tooth pain anymore. This went on for many years. One night, he spoke *avak lashon hara* (a lighter form of *lashon hara*), and he was in excruciating pain the entire night. He immediately made another *kabalah* never to speak *lashon hara*; since then, the pain never returned.

We can explain that the yetzer hara tells people that they have aveiros. The yetzer hara tells people, "Do you remember that you sinned with the *egel*... and with that sin and with that sin..." He does this to cause people to feel distressed and broken. Therefore, Rashi writes, גזרה היא מלפני, אין לך רשות להרהר אחריה, it is a decree before Me, and you don't have permission to think about it." In other words, after the aveirah was performed, don't dwell on it. Don't mope. אין רשות להרהר אחריה, לך רשות להרהר אחריה, don't think about the aveirah. If you will, you will feel depressed, and you will never be able to do teshuvah.

Avos d'Reb Noson (ch.25:42, and also Sanhedrin 68a) talks about the day that Reb Eliezer was *niftar*. On that day, he said to the chachamim, "I wonder if the talmidei chachamim of this generation won't be punished from Heaven."

They asked him, מפני מה, "For what reason should they be punished?"

He replied, "It is because they didn't come to learn Torah from me."

Reb Eliezer said to Reb Akiva that it is especially bad that he didn't learn from him, and he warned him that he might be punished, because לבך פתוח כאולם, Reb Akiva had an open heart for Torah, and he could have gained so much if he had learned Torah from Reb Eliezer. Reb Akiva sat before Reb Eliezer and said, "Rebbe, teach me Torah now."

We certainly have no perception of the great *chachamim*, the *Tanaim*, and their holy

discussions, but let's take one lesson from this. Reb Eliezer warned Reb Akiva that his punishment would be worse than all the others because he should have learned Torah from him. Reb Akiva didn't cry and bemoan a lost opportunity. Instead, on the final day of Reb Eliezer's life, he sought to amend what he could and asked Reb Eliezer to teach him Torah. He understood that moping over the past won't accomplish anything. Grasping every new opportunity will rectify the past.

The Sifsei Tzaddik (#54) says that the parah adumah is made from ashes. The cow is burned to ashes, and the ashes bring purity to thousands of Yidden. This should encourage every Yid, not to lose hope and feel like he is ashes, and that there is no purpose for him. He must know that there is still hope. From his lowly level, he can still do great things in his life.

The Bas Ayin in this week's parashah (ד"ה עור וכל לאמר) teaches that the correction of the sin of the *egel* is to know that even when one is in the darkness [of aveiros], the light of the Shechinah is with him. אור ישראל is gematria חושך, light and darkness.

He writes that this is alluded to in the words at the beginning of the parashah, וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר, וְזֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְקַחוּ אֵלֶיךָ. Hashem told Moshe that he should tell Bnei Yisrael the process to rectify the sin of the *egel*. The counsel is וַיְקַחוּ אֵלֶיךָ, and אֵלֶיךָ is gematria ישראל. (He explains that the final letters of מוֹנֵפֵיךָ, the ך is gematria 500.<sup>7</sup> אֵלֶיךָ is gematria 541, the same as ישראל. As we wrote

7. This is because the final letter of the alef beis is a ת, which is gematria 400. Then we go to the double letters of מוֹנֵפֵיךָ. The first of the double letters is the double כ"ף. The long ך is gematria 500. The final mem is gematria 600. The final nun is gematria 700. ך is 800, and ך is 900. With this calculation, אֵלֶיךָ is gematria 541, the same as ישראל, and אור חושך, light darkness. The belief that there is light even in the darkness is the rectification for the Jewish nation.

The Bas Ayin adds that part of the tikun of the *egel* is וְזֹאת, hinted in the pasuk (ibid.) וְזֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה. The gematria of וְזֹאת is the same as חשק, and חשק alludes to the avos, Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov. As the Zohar (see Tikunei Zohar 20b) explains, חשק is roshei teivos for the three nekudos, חוֹלֵם שְׁבַע קִמְצִים, which allude to the three avos. When the Jewish nation knows that even when they are in darkness, the light of the Shechinah is with them, and they can rise to higher levels, even the levels of the avos, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, this brings about the rectification for the sin of the *egel*.

above, ישראל is gematria אור חושך (541) light and darkness). This tells us that one must know that even in the darkness, Hashem is there. This emunah will rectify the severe aveirah of the *egel*.

### Benefits of Yesurim

The Vilna Gaon teaches, "When a person loses a silver coin, he should praise Hashem

as though he found one. And if he loses two silver coins, he should be happy as though he had found two silver coins. The same is true for every bad thing that happens to him; he should realize that the bad is good... והטובה היא לפי ערך הרעה, because the good is in accordance with the extent of the bad." This means that when things seem very bad, it is Hashem's kindness in concealment to an even greater extent.<sup>8</sup>

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This is alluded to in (Tehillim 91:14) כִּי בָיַת ה' אֵינִי, "For he yearns for Me..." is gematria חשק, to hint that the Jewish nation should elevate themselves to the levels of the avos – to the extent possible.

8. Rav Shach zt'l handed a cup of tea with honey to a person who was suffering from adversaries. Rav Shach said, "Bees frighten people and sometimes sting, but they also provide us with honey. Similarly, regarding those who oppose you, trust that something sweet will come from it."

Reb Yitzchak Eizik of Zutchka zt'l (*Korach*) writes the following story. (Its origin is from early sources):

A student asked his rebbe to teach him שׂוֹחֵת חַיִּים וְעוֹפֹת, the languages of birds and animals, because birds and animals can tell the future.

His rebbe refused, saying that the student would be better off without this knowledge. "Do as Rashi (*Devarim* 18:13) writes on the *pasuk*, תָּמִים תְּהִיָּה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, 'Go with Hashem with *temimus* [with the belief that Hashem leads us in the very best way]. Don't try to figure out what the future holds."

But the student kept badgering his rebbe to teach him this wisdom, so the rebbe obliged and taught him the languages of the animals.

One morning, the student went to the barn to feed his animals, and he heard the oxen speaking with each other. Now that he understood their language, he knew what they were saying. One ox was moaning and groaning, and another ox asked why it was whining so much. The ox replied, "I sense that we are going to be smitten with a *mageifah*, plague. All barn animals will die."

The student thought, "I am fortunate that I learned the language of animals. Now I can protect myself from this financial loss."

He sold all his cattle to a butcher.

A month later, he was feeding his chickens and heard one chicken say to another that disease was going to ruin the crops.

The student quickly sold his crops.

Once again, his wisdom saved him from financial loss. He was glad he had learned the languages of animals.

A few days later, he heard an animal shouting, and he came closer to listen to what it was saying. He heard the following message, "Woe to our owner. He is about to die."

The student ran to his rebbe and told him the dreadful message he had heard. His rebbe replied, "The *Zohar* (*Tikunei Zohar* 143:) states, 'Some are punished with their lives, and others with their money.' Hashem wanted to punish you with your money to spare your life. Hashem first decreed that your cattle should die – that would be instead of your death. Your cattle would die, and you would live. But you sold your cattle to protect yourself from the financial loss. Then Hashem decreed that your crop should be destroyed. The financial loss would have been your atonement, and you would survive. But you found out about the decree, and you sold your crops. The problem is that you don't have anything to grant you atonement;

The Or Hachaim writes, "All the characteristics of the *parah adumah* represent *dinim* (hardships, *yesurim*). It's red, which is the color of harsh *din*. In fact, it must be completely red. It can't even have two black hairs. Even the horns and hooves must be red. They certainly can't be white (the color of *chesed*). Another feature of the *parah adumah* is *אשר לא עלה עליה עול*, that it never carried a yoke on its neck. This is because a yoke (hardships, *yesurim*) removes *din*, as Chazal (*Brachos* 5.) say, *יסורין ממרקיין כל עוונותיו של אדם*, 'afflictions cleanse all sins,' and sins are *din*. The cow is burned in a fire, and fire is *din*. All these aspects of *din* become concentrated in the ashes of the *parah adumah*, and that pulls the *tumah* out of a man who came in contact with a human corpse."

The *parah adumah's* ashes represent a strong force of *din* – like a magnetic force, which attracts all *dinim* to it. When the ashes are sprinkled on the person who became *tamei*, the *tumah*, which is a form of *din*, flees from him.

We quote this Or HaChaim here to remind us that one of the conditions of the *parah adumah* is *אשר לא עלה עליה עול*, that it never worked and never toiled. This was needed so that all the *dinim* should remain in it because when one struggles and endures hardships, it mitigates the *dinim*.

Therefore, trust Hashem and believe everything is for the good, for it is always so.

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therefore, now the *gezeirah* is on your life!"

The lesson is that we must know that everything that happens to us is for our benefit. Sometimes we don't understand how it is good, but it certainly is.

A relative of Reb Eisik Sher of Slabodka zt'l broke her foot, and she was homebound for a long time until it healed. Reb Eizik visited her to give her *chizuk*.

He asked her, "Do you remember the pain of pregnancy and childbirth?"

"Of course, I remember."

"Are those bitter memories or happy memories? I'm certain they are happy memories because they brought you a child who gives you much *nachas*. Similarly, all suffering in life is like childbirth because something very good will come from it. We must believe that it is so."

The purpose of hardship is to help people remember Hashem. When everything goes smoothly, people tend to forget about Hashem. It shouldn't be that way. We should remember Hashem during the good times and praise Him. But our nature is to forget Hashem when things go well, and to turn to Hashem in hard times.

The Jewish nation was near Eretz Yisrael, but they couldn't enter. Edom didn't let them pass through their land. The nation worried they would have to remain in the desert, and they began complaining about the manna, the water, etc. As a punishment, Hashem sent snakes that bit many people.

When the Yidden repented, Hashem told Moshe (21:8) *עשה לך שרף ושים אתו על נס והיה כל הנשוך וראה אתו וחי*, "Make a snake and put it on a staff. Whoever was bitten will see it and live."

The Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah* 29.) explains: "Could a snake cause death, and could a snake generate life? [How could looking at Moshe Rabbeinu's copper snake heal them?] The answer is: When Yisrael turned their eyes to heaven, and connected their heart to their Father in heaven, they were healed, and otherwise, they were ill."

It wasn't the copper snake that healed them. But when the Jewish nation looked up towards the copper snake, they also turned their hearts to Hashem and put their trust in Him, and that is what healed them.<sup>9</sup>

The Or HaChaim (21:8) writes, "Hashem didn't remove the snakes. He allowed them to continue biting, and the nation was healed when they looked up to their Father in heaven. This is because Hashem wanted their heart to always be close to Him, like a son who eats at his father's table morning and night." The Or HaChaim concludes that a life of ease causes people to lose sight of Hashem's hashgachah completely!

Similarly, the Rabbeinu B'Chaya writes on the pasuk (21:5) *כי אין לחם ואין מים*, "There is no bread and no water.": "This complaint is surprising since they had *man*; it fell every single day. They also had plenty of water because of the miracle of the *sela*, where Moshe Rabbeinu brought forth water from a stone."

Rabbeinu B'Chaya answers: "Their complaint was: Our life is unusual since we don't have bread and water like all the other nations. The other nations, regardless of whether they are worthy or not, have plenty of bread to satiate their hunger, and they certainly have water. But we receive our

food and drink in unnatural ways. We only receive enough food for that day. Even water, which is free for the entire world and one cannot live without it, was taken from us when Miriam died, and the well disappeared. We are led on a path of reward and punishment. We are led in a very unusual way, in comparison to the nations of the world."

They didn't realize that these difficulties were all for their benefit. As the Rabbeinu B'Chaya writes:

"Because of the greatness of the *dor hamidbar* [the generation who lived in the desert], they received *manna* every day so that they should turn their eyes to heaven. The purpose was to get them accustomed to having emunah and bitachon in Hashem."<sup>10</sup>

Everyone goes through some form of struggle in life. We wish they weren't there; we would prefer not to have these problems. But we should know that all of these problems help us. They cause us to turn to Hashem, and that is the

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9. The Sfas Emes asks: If the purpose of the copper snake was to remind people to turn their eyes up to Hashem, why did there need to be a copper snake in the first place? Why didn't Hashem command the nation to look up to heaven, and they would be healed?

The answer is that Hashem wanted the salvation to be masked in physical matter, and at the same time, the Yidden should realize that it is Hashem who is healing them, and not the snake. This is the same way medication works. Hashem commanded us to take medication and to engage the standard processes for refuah, but at the same time, we should realize that it isn't the medication that heals. It is Hashem Who heals us.

10. The nation complained: (21:5) *כי אין לחם ואין מים ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלקל*, "There is no bread and no water, and our souls are disgusted from the spoiled bread" [in reference to the *man*]. Rabbeinu B'Chaya writes: "Since they spoke lashon hara on the *man*, they were punished by snakes, because the snake also spoke lashon hara."

There were many species of snakes in the desert. Generally, these snakes couldn't harm the nation because Hashem protected them. But at this time of sin, the snakes, which filled the desert, began to strike them. The Torah says, (Devarim 8) *המוליכך במדבר הגדול והנורא נחש שרף ועקרב*, "Who led you in this great and awesome desert, a place of poisonous snakes and scorpions." These were the snakes that bit them.

Rabbeinu B'Chaya explains: "For forty years, no one was bitten, because one of the seven clouds of glory went in front of them and killed the snakes and scorpions. This cloud was designated to perform this miracle. Now, on the fortieth year, when they spoke *lashon hara* on the *man*, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sent the poisonous snakes. This is the reason it states, *הנחשים*, 'the snakes.'" The *heh* at the beginning of the word implies that the poisonous snakes were there already; they weren't a new creation.

## Purity in Our Generation

We don't have the *parah adumah* anymore, but there are ways to attain purity even in our generation.

The ashes of the *parah adumah* were sprinkled on the *tamei* person on the third and seventh day after he became *tamei*. The Be'er Mayim Chaim *zt'l* explains that the third day represents Torah (see footnote),<sup>11</sup> and the seventh day symbolizes Shabbos. This tells us that learning Torah and keeping Shabbos purifies the Jewish nation from the *tumah* caused by *aveiros*.<sup>12</sup>

We begin with the purity of the Torah. The Shlah (Chukas) writes, "Although we don't have the ashes of the *parah adumah* anymore, a person can purify himself when he attaches himself to studying Torah, teaching it, and keeping it."<sup>13</sup>

Torah study requires toil, but that is for our benefit. As it states, לפום צערא אגרא, the reward is according to the hardship.

It states (*Avos* 5:5), עומדים צפופים ומשתחוים רווחים, The Ra'v Bartanura *zt'l* explains, "צפופים" comes from the word צף על המים, to float. Very many people pressed together in the Beis HaMikdash, until their feet were raised above the ground, and they stood in the air. Nevertheless, משתחוים רווחים, when they bowed down, a miracle occurred, and they bowed down with plenty of space. Each person was four *amos* away from his fellow man. This way, no one would hear his friend's *viduy*, when he repents on his *aveiros*."

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (שו"ת יו"ד רל"ד ד"ה ופר"ט) asks that Hashem could have made a miracle that there should be enough place for everyone even when they stood upright. What was

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**11.** The Torah is three, as Chazal (*Shabbos* 88.) say, "Blessed is Hashem who gave a three-part Torah (Torah, *Nevi'im*, *Kesuvim*), to a nation comprised of three (*kohanim*, *levi'im*, *yisraelim*) by the third (Moshe, who was the third child in his family) on the third day (of שלשת ימי הגבלה) and in the third month (Sivan)."

**12.** The Lev Simchah *zt'l* (*Eikev*) adds that the third day also represents Shabbos. The ashes of the seventh day hint at the purity that is attained from keeping Shabbos, while the ashes sprinkled on the third day hint that the purity of Shabbos is enhanced and increased when one prepares for it during the weekdays.

**13.** The importance of studying Torah is found in this week's parashah, in the pasuk (19:14) זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל. Chazal say, "Where do you find Torah? By those who die in the tents of Torah." To "die in the tents of Torah" means to study Torah with all your strength.

Chazal (*Shabbos* 31) say that we will be asked in heaven, קבעת עיתים לתורה, "Did you set aside times for Torah study?" One translation of קבע is to steal (see *Mishlei* 22:23). The Kotzker *zt'l* said that we will be asked, קבעת, עיתים לתורה, did you steal time away from your busy schedule to study Torah?

Rebbe Aharon Roth *zt'l* (*Shomer Emunim*) writes in a letter that there was a time when he tasted death in every word of Torah and tefillah. He was going through a spiritually difficult time, and he couldn't say a single word without feeling a most bitter experience.

One day, he went to a tzaddik's grave and prayed there with tears that he should pass this difficult test. Then, he took out a Gemara and opened it at a random place. It opened to the *Rosh* in *hilchos mikvaos*. He told himself, "I'm not leaving this spot until I understand this." It was bitter, but he kept on studying. And then he tasted the sweetness of Torah, and that difficult test left him.

This is hinted in the words, זאת התורה, the acquisition of Torah is, אדם כי ימות באהל, when you allow yourself to feel the bitter taste of death, and even then, you don't stop learning. You keep on studying until the Torah becomes sweet.

The Tiferes Shlomo (*Chukas*) explains that זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל means that one should imagine that he is dead, and that he was granted just one day to return to the world to study Torah. If you live with that mindset, you will devote all your strength and concentration to studying Torah.

the benefit of standing tightly together in the Beis HaMikdash?

The answer is that this increased their reward. As Chazal (*Brachos* 6:) say, אגרא דכלה דוחקא, the reward for attending a crowded Torah *shiur* is for being squeezed by the many people present.

Similarly, for all those who have a hard time learning Torah, we tell them that this is for their benefit. Because of their hardships, they will earn a greater reward.

The Magen Avraham (end of 580) writes, "Friday *parashas Chukas*, some people fast because on this day, twenty wagons filled with *sefarim* were burned in France. The fast wasn't established on the date of the month that this tragedy occurred. Instead, the fast is on the Friday *erev Shabbos Chukas* because a *shaalas chalom* (a prophetic dream) revealed that the tragedy was associated with the *parashah*. Because on the words זאת חקת התורה, Onkelus writes, דא גזירת אורייתא, this is the decree on the Torah. Another reason for this fast is that on this day, two large communities were destroyed in the massacres of the years ת"ח ת"ט, as written in the *selichos* authored by the Shach."

Today, most people don't fast on this day. Nevertheless, since the Torah was burned, *r'l*, on this day, we should utilize it to accept upon ourselves the yoke of Torah, to love Torah, and to make its study our life's mission.

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

Tzaddikim said that a more common translation of עמילין is toil. Thus, Chazal are hinting that toiling in Torah draws out and removes a person's זוהמא, and impurities.

## Shabbos

We now discuss the second purity, the purity we attain from the day of Shabbos. It is very important to put aside all troubling

thoughts on Shabbos and to be happy. It states (*Bamidbar* 10:10), וביום שמחתכם, "On your day of joy," and Chazal (*Sifri* 19) say that this refers to Shabbos.

As we say in the *zemiros*, ביום השבת קודש, שישו ושמחו כמקבלי מתן נחליאל, "Be happy and joyous on Shabbos as those who received the Torah." The joy of Shabbos sanctifies and purifies us.

*Masuk m'Dvash* (from Reb Yitzchak Parchi *zt'l* 6) writes, "We saw, with our own eyes, people who had a problem when Shabbos arrived, but took their minds off their *tzarah*, they were happy with the Shabbos and didn't let their worries enter their heart. When Shabbos ended, the problem was gone. Everything turned around to joy. They were saved from their *tzaros* through wonderful miracles."

Singing *zemiros* on Shabbos is an old custom. The Gemara (*Megillah* 12:) states that at Achashveirosh's feast, the Jewish nation sang *zemiros*. One of the benefits of *zemiros*, it helps us be happy on this holy day.

Tosfos (*Sanhedrin* 37: ד"ה מכנה) writes, "The *Teshuvos HaGeonim* writes that the people in Eretz Yisrael only say *kedushah* on Shabbos. This is because it states (*Yeshayah* 6:2), שש כנפים, לאחד, that the *malachim* called "*chayos hakodesh*" have six wings, and with each wing, it sings a song on each day of the week. When Shabbos arrives, the *chayos* say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'We don't have another wing with which to sing before You.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'I have another wing, which will sing before Me. As it states (*Yeshayah* 24:16), מכנה הארץ זמירות שמענו, 'Songs will be heard from the wing that's upon the earth.'" This is referring to Bnei Yisrael, who sing songs to Hashem on Shabbos.

We can't begin to imagine the holiness of the *malachim*. Yet, on Shabbos, we take their place when we sing to Hashem. In fact, our songs are more precious to Hashem than the beautiful songs of the *malachim*.

The Chidushei HaRim (quoted in *Sfas Emes, Vayikra*, תרי"ח) adds that singing is called כנף, wing, because with song we fly up to high levels.