

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Shlita*

Bamidbar



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Torah Wellsprings - Bamidbar

Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan

Erev rosh chodesh Sivan is a time when many say a tefillah for good children, authored by the Shelah HaKadosh. He writes, "My heart tells me that the best time to say this tefillah is *erev rosh chodesh* Sivan, the month we received the Torah and became Hashem's children. Parents should fast on this day and do teshuvah, and they should cleanse their home [from aveiros] in the areas of *isur v'heter, tumah v'taharah*, and all matters. They should also give tzedakah to worthy, poor people."

While excessive fasting isn't recommended in our times, the other directives from the Shelah to merit good children are applicable at all times. On *erev rosh chodesh* Sivan, parents should daven for their children, examine their deeds, do teshuvah, and give tzedakah to the poor.

Although Erev rosh chodesh Sivan is an auspicious time to daven for good children, we should really daven for this every day.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l said at the chasunah of one of his children, "Believe me, every day I shed tears that Hashem should grant me that my children should become greater than me. It should be (*Devarim* 30:5), והטבך והרבך, מאבותיך, that your children will be better than their father."¹

Reb Michel Lefkowitz zt'l was in chinuch for many years. (My father learned by him, and so did I. Some families were his students for three generations.) Reb Michel zt'l said that he found

an unusual phenomenon. Generally, the child who wasn't successful in Torah in his youth becomes the most successful in his family later in life. For some reason, the outstanding child of the family is precisely the one who didn't excel in his younger years. Sometimes, his success is in Torah and mitzvos or in business, but the pattern is that the one who seemed least likely to succeed ultimately outshines the others.

Reb Michel added, "I don't know why, but I think it is because the parents invested many tefillos for this child. They davened for all their children, but for this child, they cried, and their tefillos were answered."

The Baal Shem Tov said, "A segulah for good children is to wash in hot [water] every morning and night." He meant that parents should shed hot tears for their children at least twice daily.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said, "I don't miss a *Shemonah Esrei* to daven for my son, Ahrele."²

Reb Aharon of Belz zt'l said, "How can we have good children if we finish a tefillah with our eyes dry?"

Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba (18) brings a story of a kohen who would daven every day, with all his heart and soul, that his children shouldn't sin, and his tefillos were accepted. We quote, "There was a kohen who feared heaven... He had ten children, six boys and four girls. Every day, he davened, bowed, pleaded, asked for compassion, and his tongue licked the earth"³

1. In our generation, it is especially important to daven for good children. We live in trying times, and no one is guaranteed success.

2. *Shemonah Esrei* does not contain an explicit tefillah for good children. However, Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said that it is implied in the words of *Modim*, לדור ודור נודה לך, "From generation to generation we will praise you..."

3. Hashem said to Yaakov Avinu (*Bereishis* 28:14), והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ, "Your seed shall be as the dust of the earth."

that none of his children should ever sin or do something disgusting... When Ezra brought the Yidden up from Bavel, this kohen came up with them, and he merited children and grandchildren kohanim and kohanim gedolim."

A man from an irreligious kibbutz, raised by nonreligious parents, did teshuvah. The Chazon Ish zt'l explained that this man's grandfather cried bitterly when his son left the path. His tefillos didn't work for his son, but they took effect on his grandson.

The Chazon Ish zt'l once said that sometimes a bachur turns around in a moment. Yesterday he didn't understand Torah, and today he does. What happened? This is because his mother davened and cried for her son to succeed in Torah, but a kitrug blocked the tefillos from going up. The moment the *kitrug* was removed, everything turned around.

There were twin brothers that were learning in the same cheder. One was an exceptional student, and the other a very weak one. The teachers were amazed at how twins could be so different. One day, however, everything changed. The weaker student suddenly became a *masmid* and began understanding and enjoying Torah. The change was so quick and drastic that people wanted to know how it happened. The principal asked the father for an explanation. At first, he didn't answer, but when the *menahel* kept asking, he replied that he made a kabbalah to say *birchas haTorah* with kavanah. The day he made this kabbalah, his weaker son began to excel in Torah.

We say in *birchas haTorah*, וְנָתַתּוּ אֵת חַסְדְּךָ וְיָדְעֵי שְׂמֶךְךָ וְלִמּוּדֵי תוֹרָתְךָ לְשִׁמְחָה וְצִדְקָתְךָ... יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמחה, we daven and ask that our children succeed in Torah study.

Reb Moshe Sternbuch zt'l once said a marvelous idea in Torah at the Tchebiner Rav's shiur. The Tchebiner Rav reacted by saying, "It isn't your explanation! It is your mother's, because you were only able to say such a good *pshat* due to your mother's tears."

Reb Shlomo Wolbe zt'l says that he thinks the main chinuch of a child is tefillah. He said that his success in Torah and harbatzas Torah (teaching Torah) is because of his mother's tears.

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk zt'l and Rebbe Zusha of Honipoli zt'l saw a very special young child, and they asked the mother to tell them the ways of her husband because they wanted to understand how he merited to have this special child. The mother said that her husband is a regular, good person, nothing out of the ordinary.

They asked her to tell them his *seder hayom*. When she began speaking about Shabbos, she suddenly remembered something. She said, "During *shalosh seudos*, when he says, וּזְכַנּוּ לְרֵאוֹת בָּנִים וּבְנֵי בָנִים עֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה, לשמחה, he repeats the words many times, with immense hislahavus, in a loud voice, until he faints. This happens each week."

This young child became renowned as Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l.

A seventy-year-old man came to the rosh yeshiva of a baal teshuvah yeshiva and said he wanted to do teshuvah.

The rosh yeshiva asked him why he wanted to do teshuvah at this point in his life. (It isn't common for people to do teshuvah and to totally change their life around at that age.)

The man explained that his father was burned in Auschwitz, and his mother became irreligious. She sent him to an orphanage, which the Ponovitzer Rav zt'l ran. When she

A similar brachah was given to Avraham Avinu (see *Bereishis* 13:16). We can explain that hinted in עַפְרַיִם הָאָרֶץ is that if one is מְלַכְךָ בְּלִשְׁוֹנוֹ עֵפֶר, licks earth (the expression used in Tana d'Bei Eliyahu to express intense tefillos), then he will merit special children.

visited the orphanage and discovered it was a religious institute, she immediately took her son back home to Tel Aviv.

The next time the Ponovizher Rav visited the orphanage, he noticed that one of the children was missing. The staff told him what happened.

The Rav immediately went to the woman's home in Tel Aviv. It was Friday afternoon, but his pain from losing a Jewish child was so great that he couldn't push it off. When the mother saw the Rav, she said, "If you came to convince me to return our son to the orphanage, I want you to know that there is nothing to talk about! I was in Auschwitz..." and she told him that she abandoned Yiddishkeit. The Ponovizher Rav didn't respond - he just sat there and cried.

When this son turned seventy, he came to the rosh yeshiva of the baal teshuvah yeshiva and said, "The Rav's tears chased me for sixty years, and that's why I am here today to do teshuvah."

There was an outstanding student learning in Gur, and the rosh yeshiva, the Pnei Menachem zt'l, enjoyed speaking with him in learning.

The boy's father visited the Pnei Menachem to ask about his son's progress. The Pnei Menachem replied, "He's doing well. He learns well," but didn't elaborate. He didn't tell him how special his son was.

Soon after, the father returned to the Pnei Menachem and asked why he gave him such a cold report. "The students of the yeshiva told me that you enjoy speaking with my son in learning, and you talk with him all the time. So why didn't you give me a more enthusiastic report when I asked about my son?"

The Pnei Menachem explained, "Parents have to daven for their children, and I didn't want to take that away from you. If I had praised your son, you would feel confident that everything is fine, and you would stop davening for your son's success, which would be a great loss."

The Pnei Menachem added, "I was born from my parent's second marriage. My mother had children of her own before she married my father, the Imrei Emes.⁴ Once, she cried before her husband, the Imrei Emes, that one of her sons was called for the army draft. The Imrei Emes replied with a brachah, "May Hashem help." He davened but didn't tell her she had nothing to worry about and that her son won't be drafted.

"My mother went to her mother and told her how worried she was about her son. Her mother was the sister of the Imrei Emes. So she went to the Imrei Emes and asked him about her grandson. The Imrei Emes replied, 'Don't worry. He won't be drafted.' When he gave this *havtachah* (promise), everyone calmed down, and baruch Hashem, there was a salvation.

"My mother asked the Imrei Emes, 'If you knew my son wouldn't be drafted, why didn't you tell me? I was so worried.'

"The Imrei Emes replied, 'A mother must daven. I knew there would be a *yeshuah*, but your tears were needed. If you had known for sure that everything would be okay, you would stop davening and crying, and your tears were needed for the *yeshuah*!'"

The Pnei Menachem turned to the father, "This is why I didn't elaborate on your son's success. I didn't want you to feel that everything is perfect. A parent must daven."⁵

4. The Imrei Emes was her uncle, and they married after their first spouses were niftar. The Lev Simchah zt'l and the Beis Yisrael zt'l (renowned rebbes of Gur) were half-brothers to the Pnei Menachem since the Pnei Menachem was born from a different mother.

5. Melamdin and magidei shiur shouldn't follow this counsel. When fathers ask how their sons are doing,

Preparation

There are twenty-six *pesukim* from the words בהודש השלישי (Shemos 19:1) until the *Aseres HaDibros*. The *Aseres HaDibros*, itself, has thirteen *pesukim*. (The *gematriya* of 26 and 13 hints to יהו"ה אחד.) Notice that there are twice the amount of *pesukim* about preparing for *mattan Torah* than *pesukim* that discuss *mattan Torah* itself. This hints to what chassidim say, "The preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the mitzvah itself."

The Kedushas Levi *zt'l* writes, "If a person merits it, every Shavuot he will hear Hashem's voice announce אנכי ה' אלקיך. How could a person not prepare for this...?"⁶

The importance of preparing for *mattan Torah* is stated in the Chumash because it states (Shemos 19:11), והיו נכונים ליום השלישי, "Be prepared for the third day." The *Torah* told the nation explicitly that they must prepare for *mattan Torah*.

We can add that the *nekudos* of והיו נכונים (with a *kametz* under the ה) implies that they were *already* prepared. (Otherwise, it would

state והיו נכונים, with a *segol* under the ה, which would mean "be prepared.") The *pasuk* hints that if you do your part to prepare yourselves, Hashem promises, והיו נכונים, you will be prepared.

The Or HaChaim (Shemos 19:3) writes, "Moshe took the initiative and began climbing up the mountain (as it states, משה עלה אל האלקים), and then Hashem called him, immediately (as it states, ויקרא אליו ה'). Because holiness doesn't come to a person unless he prepares for it. As the *Zohar* states, 'An awakening below causes the awakening Above.'" Similarly, we must prepare ourselves for *mattan Torah*, and then we will receive the holiness of *mattan Torah*.

One way to prepare for *mattan Torah* is to take on a good *kabbalah* (resolution).

When taking on a *kabbalah*, it is essential to know your abilities – what you can do and what you can't. To explain, consider the following *mashal*:

A *talmid chacham* went into a shoe store and asked for a pair of shoes, size 8. The

they should give elaborate praises when due. The message is that parents shouldn't stop shedding tears and praying for their children.

Hashem tells Rachel (Yirmiyahu 31:15), מנעי קולך מבכי, "Refrain your voice from crying." But it wasn't only Rachel who cried. Leah also cried, as is implied in the words (Bereishis 29:17), ועיני לאה רכות, "and Leah's eyes were moist." She was crying that she shouldn't become Eisav's wife. Rashi writes, "Rivkah had two sons (Yaakov and Eisav), and Lavan had two daughters (Rachel and Leah). People were saying, the older daughter to the older son (Leah for Eisav), and the younger daughter to the younger son (Rachel for Yaakov)." Leah was worried that she would marry Eisav, and therefore she cried. Hashem doesn't tell her to stop crying because Hashem loves such tears. Tears for spiritual success are good tears.

The Torah (Bereishis 32:1) tells us that Lavan blessed his daughters. The Seporno writes, "Chazal tell us that a *birkas hedyot*, the blessing of a simple person, shouldn't be trivial in our eyes. However, the Torah tells us that Lavan blessed his daughters to teach us that when a father blesses his children, it is with all his heart, and no doubt the brachos will take effect because this is the *segulah* of a brachah from a human being who was created with a *tzelem Elokim*, as it states (Bereishis 27:4), בעבור תברכך נפשי, 'So my soul can bless you.'"

6. In the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, we say, אילו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה דינו, "If Hashem brought us to Har Sinai and He didn't give us the Torah it would also be enough..." The commentaries ask, what would we gain from coming to Har Sinai without receiving the Torah?

The Chida (Leiv Dovid 31) *zt'l* answers that when they stood at Har Sinai, they prepared themselves to receive the Torah, and as a result of their preparations, they perceived divine secrets of the Torah, even before the Torah was given.

generous store owner replied, "You're a *talmid chacham*, so I want to give you a bigger number. I'll give you a size 10."

The man replied, "A size 10 shoe will slip off my foot; I need a size 8."

As for the *nimshal*, there are great, impressive kabbalos that one can take on, but if they are beyond his ability, he will fail. This is hinted at in the words וספרתם לכם. Find the *kabbalah* and *avodah* that is לכם, at your level.

Sefiras Ha'omer

Sefiras ha'omer prepares us for *mattan Torah*, as we say in the tefillah following *sefiras ha'omer*, רבוננו של עולם אתה צויתנו על ידי משה, עבדך לספר ספירת העומר כדי לטהרנו מקלפתנו ומטמאתנו, "Ribono Shel Olam, You commanded us...to count *sefiras ha'omer*, to purify us from our *kelipos* and our *tumah*." But what should a person do if almost all of *sefiras ha'omer* passed, and he didn't take advantage of these special days?

The Chidushei HaRim said that even on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer*, one can fix everything. This is hinted at in the *pasuk*, עד, ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום, "until the morrow of the seventh week, count fifty days." This implies that even on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer*, you can count all fifty days.

The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l* adds that even if it is already Shavuos and he didn't improve his ways at all during the entire seven weeks of *sefiras ha'Omer*, it also isn't too late. It states (about Shavuos, *Vayikra* 23:21), וקראתם בעצם, היום הזה מקרא קודש יהיה לכם. This *pasuk* implies that even בעצם היום הזה in the middle of Shavuos you can make a decision of מקרא קודש, to draw yourself towards holiness – and that will be sufficient.

The Arugas HaBosem writes, "Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the Jewish people would be on a very low level in *galus*, and they won't be able to prepare themselves to be fitting to receive the light of the *yom tov*

of *mattan Torah*. But he yearned for each Yid to experience the light of the King's face that shines on Shavuos. Therefore, Moshe added another day on his own [and the Torah was given a day later, on the fifty-first day] *ha'omer*... If Shavuos would immediately follow *sefiras ha'omer*, one would understand that it's impossible to receive the light of *mattan Torah* without keeping the *sefirah* properly. But since Shavuos didn't directly follow the *sefirah*, this shows that they are not interdependent... Even if the Jewish nation can't purify themselves properly [during *sefiras ha'omer*], the light of *mattan Torah* will not be lost."

Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah

An opportune time for preparation is during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the three days before Shavuos. Rebbe Avraham HaMalach instructed his students not to come to him during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* because he needed those days to study Torah by himself.

The students didn't obey, and they came to their Rebbe during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* because they yearned to hear his *divrei Torah*. The Rebbe locked his door and didn't let them in. He explained, "One's success in Torah for the entire year is dependent upon one's *hasmadah* in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Old Yerushalayimer Yidden still remember that the stores of Yerushalayim would close at midday during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, so the shopkeepers could spend the rest of the day immersed in Torah.

In Poland, two weeks before Shavuos, the batei midrashim were filled to capacity.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* once entered a beis medresh in Yerushalayim during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the *alter heim* (the Jewish communities of Europe from before the War)?"

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* would tell the following story: Once, in Poland, during

sheloshes yemei hagbalah, someone came into the beis medresh and watched with envy the passion for Torah in the beis medresh. He turned to the wall and cried because he wished to be like them. But unlike many, instead of just giving a *krechitz*, he took action. He reached for the first Gemara he saw, sat down, and was immediately engrossed in Torah.

That moment changed his life. He experienced the sweetness of Torah and became a *masmid* and a great *talmid chacham*.

Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer had one bookshelf where he kept *sefarim* that were written with *ruach hakadosh*, and that man's *sefer* was stored on that shelf.

The daughter of a Lelover chassid was engaged to marry the son of Rebbe Elazar Mendel zt'l, the Lelover Rebbe of Yerushalayim. The chassid was thrilled that his daughter was to marry into such a prestigious family, but his wife didn't share his enthusiasm. She was upset that the Rebbe's family wasn't sending gifts to the kallah, as was customary. They sent gifts to the chassan, but they received nothing in return. (Primarily, this was because the Rebbe gave away every penny he had to tzedakah, to support the poor of Yerushalayim - no money was available for gifts.)⁷

The chassid's wife encouraged her husband to ask the Rebbe to send a gift to the kallah. The chassid promised his wife that he would do so, but kept pushing it off because he felt uncomfortable raising the issue with his Rebbe.

Each time he went to the Rebbe, his wife reminded him to bring up the matter, but he was always in awe when in the Rebbe's

presence and couldn't bring himself to discuss it.

During *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the Rebbe's custom was to daven *Maariv* and count *sefiras ha'omer* at the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik, and then go to the Kosel haMaaravi to daven some more. The chassid planned to accompany the Rebbe to these holy sites. His wife told him, "Tonight, you must speak with the Rebbe. I've asked you many times, and you keep pushing it off. This time you must act. Otherwise, don't come home."

Her husband knew that it was more than just a threat.

So, later that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he waited for the Rebbe to open the door, the husband thought to himself, "My wife is right. The Rebbe is a holy man, but why doesn't he send a gift to our daughter? Even a small pin would suffice. Why can't the Rebbe give our daughter a small pin?"

The Rebbe answered the door, "*Mechuten shlita!* I didn't think that during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, you'd be going around with pins in your head."

He was astounded at the Rebbe's *ruach hakadosh*. He went home and told his wife, "Our *mechutan* has *ruach hakadosh*. Don't bother me any more about gifts..."

The lesson from this story is that *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* isn't the right time to think about petty matters. Now it is time to be immersed in Torah study.

People don't eat matzah before Pesach, so that they can eat the matzah with an appetite at the Seder. The Sfas Emes zt'l asked why don't we do the same before Shavuos? We

7. It is told that Rebbe Elazar Mendel once received a large sum of money to distribute for *kimcha d'Pischa* to help the poor of Yerushalayim for Pesach, and he distributed every penny without keeping anything for himself. That Pesach, the Tzanzer Rav zt'l praised Rebbe Elazar Mendel's seder. (The Tzanzer Rav saw through *ruach hakodesh* that Rebbe Elazar Mendel's Seder shone brightly.) Reb Elazar Mendel merited this because he gave away all the money to others.

should stop learning Torah before Shavuos, and then on Shavuos we will be hungry for Torah and study Torah with thirst!

But the answer is that Torah is different from all other pleasures. One doesn't become tired of it. On the contrary, the more one studies, the more he loves the Torah. If he learns Torah before Shavuos, he will be even more thirsty for Torah on Shavuos.

Torah Study

The Gemara (Succah 45:) writes that there are eighteen thousand tzaddikim in every generation who merit to see the Shechinah, keviyachol, but not clearly (אספקריא שאינה מאירה), and there are thirty-six tzaddikim in every generation who see the Shechinah, keviyachol, with clarity. There are the few unique tzaddikim (like Reb Shimon bar Yochai and his son Reb Elazar) who can enter heaven whenever they want (דעיילי בלא בר).

The Or HaChaim (*Vayikra* 26:3 אם בהקתי תלכו, explanation 18) writes, "The Gemara says that there are three levels of tzaddikim. Some see [the Shechinah] without clarity, some with clarity, and some can enter without permission. His master, Hashem, permits him to come in whenever he desires. But we don't know how to attain this high spiritual level and honor. Therefore, the Torah writes אם בהקתי, meaning that when one studies Torah properly, you don't need to ask permission. תלכו, you can walk in without permission."

Many benefits, in this world and the next world, b'gashmiyos and b'ruchniyos, come to those who study Torah. It states (*Vayikra* 26:11), ונתתי משכני בתוכם, "I will place My dwelling place in your midst."

The Or HaChaim writes that this means Hashem will dwell in the neshamah of a Yid. He earns this by learning Torah.

The Avodas Yisrael zt'l says, "A person's Gan Eden is in Heaven, and Hashem's Gan Eden is in the heart of a Yid." And one

prepares his heart to be a place for Hashem through learning Torah.

Among the gains of studying Torah is parnassah. As we have written several times, it isn't as people think, that studying Torah decreases the time available to work and therefore detracts from one's parnassah. Instead, the opposite is true - studying Torah opens the gates of heaven to bestow parnassah.

Someone came to the Beis Yisrael zt'l and asked for a brachah for parnassah. The Beis Yisrael replied, "I have a better idea for you. Study Torah, and you will receive a brachah from all of Klal Yisrael because they will say in kaddish d'Rabbanan, ... וכל מאן דעסקין באורייתא... יהא להון... מזוני רויהי Torah...may they have...parnassah in abundance."

Furthermore, when one studies Torah and performs mitzvos, he is the happiest person in the world. Nothing can compete with the joy Torah scholars and tzaddikim experience. The Or HaChaim (*Vayikra* 26:14) writes, "It is certain that if a person would perceive a drop of the sweetness of Hashem's divine light, he would despise [pleasures of this world, and even of] being the most powerful king in this world, in comparison to performing one mitzvah."

Yom HaMeyuchas

Likutei Maharich writes, "The second day of Sivan is called Yom HaMeyuchas (the day of *yichus*), and people say that it is because on this day Hashem said to the Jewish nation (*Shemos* 19:6), ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, 'You shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation.' They became *meyuchasim* on this day."

האליף לך שלמה writes, "People call this day Yom HaMeyuchas because it is in between two holy days, between *rosh chodesh* and *shloshes yemei hagbalah*."

The Aruch HaShulchan (494:7) writes, "We certainly don't say tachanun on *rosh chodesh*,

and the three days before Shavuos are the *shloshes yemei hagbalah*, festive days. Therefore, the day in between also becomes part of the celebration. Furthermore, on this day, Moshe told the nation to be holy [and to begin their preparations for *mattan Torah*], it is therefore called Yom HaMeyuchas. Another factor is that the day of the week that will be Yom HaMeyuchas will also be the following Yom Kippur."

To summarize, we have seen four reasons why the second day of Sivan is called Yom HaMeyuchas: (1) On this day, Hashem told the nation that they would become a ממלכת (2) It is between *rosh chodesh* and *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*. (3) Moshe told the nation on this day to be holy and to prepare for *mattan Torah*. (4) It is on the same day of the week as Yom Kippur.

For these reasons, we don't say Tachanun on this day. It is also the day we should begin preparing for *mattan Torah*. Furthermore, Yom HaMeyuchas reminds us of our *yichus*, our greatness, and our closeness to Hashem. We should recognize that we are Hashem's chosen nation and understand its significance.

We say in the yom tov *Shemonah Esrei* and Kiddush, ורוממתנו מכל הלשונוֹת, "You exalted us above all languages [nationalities]." Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* says that this means the greatness of the Jewish nation cannot be expressed in words. Using words in any language won't suffice to express the greatness that Hashem gave us.

On Yom HaMeyuchas, Hashem told the nation (Shemos 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא, "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Me."

We will explain these words with a *mashal*:

An eagle crawled along the seashore, eating tiny ants and bugs it found there.

Someone called out, "Eagle, Eagle! Why are you crawling on the seashore? You have wings. Raise your wings and fly." The eagle

raised its wings and flew above the ocean. It swooped down and caught a fish and was satiated.

The *nimshal* is when the Jewish nation was in Egypt, they weren't aware of their greatness. But when they were about to receive the Torah, Hashem told them (Shemos 19:5-6) והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים...ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת "You will become My treasure among all nations... You will be a kingdom of princes, a holy nation." Hashem showed them that they had tremendous potential. They aren't simple people. They are the beloved royal nation. If they lift their wings, they will soar and reach the highest spiritual levels.

Use Your Talents to Serve Hashem

It states (*Mishlei* 16:4), כל פעל ה' למענהו, "Everything Hashem created, is for His praise." Therefore, we should use everything Hashem gives us to increase His honor and praise. So, if Hashem gave you a talent, you should use it for His service.

The Midrash states, "If you have a beautiful voice, daven before the *amud*..."

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei*, התקל"ב) writes the following:

"Reb Elazar Hakapar's nephew, Chiya, had a beautiful voice. Reb Elazar Hakapar would tell him, 'Chiya, honor Hashem with the talent Hashem gave you. Remember what happened to Navos (mentioned in Malachim 1, ch.21). Navos had a beautiful voice. When he went to Yerushalayim for the *yomim tovim*, everyone gathered to hear him sing. One year, he didn't go to Yerushalayim...and he was killed that year. Why did he die? Because he didn't go to Yerushalayim to honor Hashem with the talent Hashem gave him.'"

It states in the *Aseres HaDibros* (Shemos 20:6), לא תשא שם ה' אלקיך לשוא כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר, "Don't carry Hashem's name in vain because Hashem will not forgive those who carry His name in vain." The Netziv *zt'l*

explains that this *pasuk* refers to the unique talents that Hashem grants each individual. Some sing well, and some excel in teaching Torah, while others are talented storytellers, and so on. The talent is שם ה', Hashem's name. The Torah says that one mustn't carry his talent לשווא, for no purpose. כי לא ינקה ה' את, אשר ישא שמו לשווא, Hashem won't forgive him for doing so.

Where Your Heart Pulls You

How does one identify his life mission? We discussed that one should utilize his unique talents, but that isn't all. Another way is to see what you enjoy doing and where your heart pulls you. Hashem placed this desire into your heart because He wants you to excel in that realm.

The Netziv (*Haamek Davar* 15:39) writes, "If someone will ask you: Which approach of Torah study should I follow, and which mitzvos should I focus on the most? Reply (*Koheles* 11:9), והלך בדרך לבך, 'Follow your heart.' The place where your heart pulls you is a sign that your mazal understands this is a good path for your soul."

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 118:) states, תיתי לי, דקיימת ג' סעודות שבת, "I deserve reward because I keep the three meals of Shabbos."

Reb Yehudah said, "I deserve reward because I daven with *kavanah*."

Rav Hunah (son of Rav Yehoshua) said, "I deserve reward because I never walk four *amos* without a head-covering."

Rav Sheshes said, "I deserve reward because I keep the mitzvah of tefillin" (he wouldn't walk four *amos* without tefillin - *Rashi*).

Reb Nachman said, "I deserve reward because I keep the mitzvah of tzitzis" (he wouldn't walk four *amos* without tzitzis - *Rashi*).

Rav Yosef said to Rav Yosef (son of Rabba), "What was your father most cautious with?"

"It was tzitzis. Once, he was climbing a ladder, and a string of his tzitzis ripped off. He wouldn't come down until it was fixed."

Abaya said, "I deserve reward because whenever I see a talmid chacham finish a *masechta*, I make a *yom tov* for the *chachamim*."

Rava said, "I deserve reward because when a Torah scholar comes before me in a *din Torah*, I won't lie my head down until I find a merit for him."

The Netziv explains that each of these scholars chose a particular mitzvah to excel in; the mitzvah that tugged at their hearts. They understood that Hashem gave them this yearning, talent, and desire because that would help them excel in their service and fulfill their mission.

This rule also applies to approaches in Torah study. There are many approaches to Torah study, and the heart's pull to a particular section of Torah is a sign that Hashem wants him to excel in that area.

Shevet Mussar (1:13) teaches, "I will now tell you an idea that you should chase. It is life for your soul and a necklace around your neck: Your primary study in Torah should always be what your heart desires. If it is Gemara, let it be Gemara. If it is *drush*, let it be *drush*. If it is the path of *remez* or *kabbalah*, follow your desire. As it states (*Tehillim* 1:2), כי אם בתורת ה' חפצנו, This hints that Torah study is dependent on חפצנו, what the individual wants to study. As the Arizal (*Shaar HaGilgulim* 3) teaches, "There are people who desire the realm of *pshat* in Torah. Some prefer *drush* or *remez*. Some like to study *gematriyos* or *kabbalah*. [These desires are] dependent on why he came to the world this time as a *gilgul*. In his previous lives, he completed his soul with the other parts of Torah. It isn't necessary to study all parts of Torah in every *gilgul*."

The Shevet Mussar concludes, "Don't pay attention to those who will oppose you when they see your desire to study *pshat*, or *drash*, etc., and they will ask you, 'Why are you spending all your days in this section of Torah? Why don't you study other sections?' Because you came to the world to focus on the parts of Torah you enjoy studying."

Flags

This week's parashah discusses the *degelim*, the four flags whose banners waved over the camps of Bnei Yisrael (דגל מוחנה יהודה דגל, דגל מוחנה ראובן, דגל מוחנה אפרים, דגל מוחנה דן – *Bamidbar* 2:2-10).

Rebbe Yitzchak of Radvil *zt'l* (*Or Yitzchak*) writes, "The Torah tells us that the nation had flags to help each tribe know where their camp is located, just as an army has flags so that the soldiers could find their camp. But it can't be that this is what the flags are about." There must be a deeper meaning to the flags.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma* 14) states, "When Hashem came to Har Sinai, He came with 22,000 *malachim*. They were divided into groups according to their flags. When the Jewish nation saw that, they said, 'I wish we could also have flags like them... I wish Hashem will show His love to us [and give us flags].' ... It states (*Tehillim* 20), 'נרננה בישועתך, ובשם אלקינו נדגול, 'Let us sing praises for Your salvation, and in the name of Hashem, let us raise our flags.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'ימלא ה' כל משאלותיך, 'Hashem grants all your desires. You desired flags; I swear I will do your will.' Hashem immediately demonstrated His love for Bnei Yisrael and said to Moshe, 'Make flags for them because they are yearning for them... In the future, I will redeem them in the merit of the flags.'"

We see clearly from this Midrash that the flags had profound meaning and importance. But what is their significance?

Tzaddikim explain that the flags remind us of everyone's differences and how each individual serves Hashem in his unique way. The *malachim* are divided into four groups, and they have four flags. This

indicates that each camp of *malachim* serves Hashem differently. Malach Michael's camp serves Hashem with love, Malach Gavriel's camp serves Hashem with fear, and so on. The Jewish nation, too, was divided into four camps and had four flags to imply that each division served Hashem in its unique way.⁸

In addition to the four primary groups, each Yid serves Hashem in his own unique manner and is endowed with a divine mission that only he can accomplish.

These ideas give us a lot of *chizuk*. Sometimes we see the beautiful *avodas* Hashem of others, and we feel discouraged because we know we can't serve Hashem as well as they do. However, the flags reveal that we shouldn't despair, and we shouldn't feel unimportant. Every person has his portion in *avodos* Hashem, and in his area, he excels better than everyone else.

This week's parashah also discusses the counting of the Jewish nation. Rashi writes, "מתוך חיבתו לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה, "Because Hashem loves the Jewish nation, He counts them all the time." The message is the same as the flags. Counting them demonstrates to them that no Yid is superfluous. Each Yid is counted and needed. Each person has something new to add to Hashem's service that no one else can do.

The Torah tells us the count of Levi's family. There were 2630 men (between the ages of thirty and fifty) in Gershon's family, 3200 men in Merari's family, and 2750 in Kehos's family. Then the Torah tells us the subtotal: (Bamidbar 4:48), ויהיו פקדיהם שמנת אלפים וחמש מאות, "Their tally: eight thousand, five hundred and eighty."

8. The Shelah HaKadosh (*Bamidbar*) writes in the name of the Arizal, "Just as there are four camps of *malachim* in heaven, similarly, there are four camps within Klal Yisrael, and each has their own *minhagim*. They are איטלייא, אשכנז, קטלוניא, אשכנז, ספרד, the Spanish, German, Catalanian, and Italian Jews. Each should remain by their flag and keep their *minhagim*."

The Shelah concludes, אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים, each of these communities has valid and authentic customs and approaches to serving Hashem.

The Midrash (*Naso* 6:10) states, "After Kehos was counted separately, and Gershon was counted separately, and Merari was counted separately, the Torah combines them. This is so we shall know that Hashem loves them all the same."

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Igra d'Pirka* 96) explains, "Kehos's service was more exalted than Gershon's and Merari's (because Kehos carried the *aron* and the other utensils of the Mishkan). Gershon's service (to carry the sheets of the Mishkan) was more exalted than Merari's (who carried the wooden walls of the Mishkan). Nevertheless, when Merari's family did the service incumbent upon them, it was as special before Hakadosh Baruch Hu as Kehos's service..." The Torah counts them all together to tell us that they were all equal in importance before Hashem.

The Bnei Yissaschar concludes, "Don't be jealous of your fellow man, not even in *avodas Hashem*. Instead, be happy with the mission Hashem gave you..." Why should you be jealous? Your mission and service are as valuable as theirs, even when it appears less spectacular.⁹

The Bnei Yissaschar proves this from the malachim who are *מתנשאים לעומת השרפים*, which means the malachim (*האופנים והיות הקודש*) feel equal to the malachim of higher levels (*השרפים*)

because they know they are doing the service that is incumbent on them.

There's a halachic discussion whether the brachah of *Elokai neshamah* should come after or before birchas haTorah. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l recommends saying it after birchas haTorah, because *Elokai neshamah* is thanking Hashem for life, and without Torah study, life has no purpose.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l was in the Siberian prison, and one morning, he couldn't bring himself to say Modeh Ani upon awakening in the morning. He asked himself, "I can't study Torah or perform mitzvos here. So why should I praise Hashem for returning my neshamah?" He felt that life didn't have a purpose if he couldn't study Torah and perform mitzvos.

Then he told himself that he could serve Hashem by believing in Hashem. This was a great *avodah* because it meant not asking questions about Hashem's ways and why he must suffer so much. When he realized that he could serve Hashem in this manner, he immediately said Modeh Ani with joy and thanked Hashem for another day of life, another day to serve Hashem with the only thing he had left: his emunah.

9. Reb Mendel Futerfas zt'l spoke about a time when he was imprisoned in Siberia. The warden forbade the prisoners to play cards. (There was no reason for this rule other than to break the spirit of the prisoners.) Nevertheless, some prisoners smuggled in a deck of cards and played in their barracks.

Once, the guards heard that there were cards in prison, so they came to the barracks and searched all over for the cards, but they couldn't find anything.

This is what happened: One of the prisoners was an expert at pickpocketing. (Probably that was the reason he was imprisoned.) He knew how to take a wallet out of another person's pocket without the person feeling anything. This time, instead of picking a pocket, he used his talents to place the deck of cards into the pocket of the guard searching the barracks.

The guard looked for the deck of cards under the beds, inside the drawers, and in everyone's pockets, and he didn't realize that it was in his own pocket. On his way out, the pickpocket slid the cards back out of the guard's pocket.

The nimshal is that people think the treasure is elsewhere. They want to copy others because they believe that others know how to serve Hashem better than they do. But this isn't necessarily true. Each person has his own treasure in his pocket. All he must do is to discover it and master it.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky related this episode to the Rayatz of Lubavitz zt'l, who replied, "The entire Siberia was worthwhile, so that you should say those words."

This story is an example of recognizing the greatness of our avodas Hashem when we carry out the mission Hashem sent us to do, even when it isn't the avodas Hashem that we would have chosen for ourselves if we had the choice.

Chazal say, איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו, "Who is wealthy? It is someone happy with his portion." The Tiferes Shlomo zt'l and the Sfas Emes zt'l both explain that this also means to be satisfied with one's spiritual portion. Even if it isn't the portion you would ideally choose for yourself, if this is the portion Hashem prepared for you, be happy with it. This is the way Hashem wants you to serve Him.

The Holiness of Klal Yisrael

Let us return to the *pasuk* mentioned above: ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואביא אתכם אלי... "I carried you on eagles' wings, and I brought you to Me... And you shall be to Me a kingdom of princes..."

The Kli Yakar elaborates that the *pasuk* is discussing three outstanding levels of Bnei Yisrael in their relationship with Hashem.

"Three levels are written here, one higher than the other. The first level is ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, 'I carried you on eagles' wings.' This is like a parent who carries his nursing child. This represents the times when Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the father and Bnei Yisrael is the child. Afterwards, it states, ואביא אתכם אלי, 'I brought you to Me.' This is when it appears that [Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish nation] are equal, like brothers at the same level. And then it states, ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת, 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom...' This is when Yisrael are *keviyachol* like Hashem's king, as it states (*Shmuel* 2 23:3), צדיק מושל ביראת ה', 'A tzaddik rules [keviyachol] over Hashem.'"

The Kli Yakar shows that these three marvelous levels that klal Yisrael attains – son, brother, and king – are mentioned in the Midrash.

"This is as the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 3:11) states on the *pasuk*, בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו, "It can be compared to a king who had an only daughter whom he loved immensely. At first, he called her בתי 'my daughter.' Later he called her אחותי, 'my sister.' Then, לא זז מהבנה, his love increased until he called her אמי, 'my mother.' Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves the Jewish nation, and He calls them בתי 'My daughter' and then אחותי 'My sister. He doesn't stop loving them until He calls them אמי, 'My mother.'"

"Now, it seems that this Midrash isn't discussing greater and higher degrees of love because it begins with calling the Jewish nation a daughter, and then it calls them a sister, and...a person loves his daughter more than he loves his sister. Rather, the Midrash refers to the degrees of rulership that the Jewish nation has. A father rules over his daughter, while brothers and sisters are equals. Hakadosh Baruch Hu first calls Klal Yisrael "daughter," because of His love for the Jewish nation. But at that stage, Hashem rules over them as a father rules over his daughter. This was in the days of Avaraham...and this is the first level mentioned here, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, 'I carried you on eagle's wings.' It is like a father carrying his infant. Then Hakadosh Baruch Hu raises them to a higher level and calls them אחותי, My sister. This means they are equal to Hashem. [About this level, Chazal say that] Hakadosh Baruch Hu requires us to respect and to be in awe of the tzaddikim equal to the degree that we must respect and fear Hashem. When we are at this stage, tzaddikim become like partners with Hashem. This is how it was in Yitzchak Avinu's time because Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him (*Bereishis* 26:3) ואהיה עמך 'I will be with you.' This means equal with you. This is because Yitzchak's merits were added onto Avraham's merits [and with both merits combined, they reach a higher level]. This is

the reason Hashem didn't say to Avraham *ואהיה עמך*, 'I will be with you,' as He said it to Yitzchak...

"This is the meaning of *ואביא אתכם אלי*, 'I brought you to Me,' which is similar to *ואהיה עמך*, 'I will be with you.'

"Then, When Yaakov Avinu came, he acquired all three merits [his own, his father Yitzchak's, and his grandfather Avraham's], and Hashem raised him to an even higher level to call him *אם*, mother, like a mother who rules over her children, similarly, Chazal (*Moed Katan* 16:) tell us [that Hashem decrees and a tzaddik annuls the decree]. Therefore, to Yaakov, Hashem said (*Bereishis* 32:29) *כי שרית עם אלקים*, 'You have commanding power with Hashem...' [which indicates that Yaakov rules *keviyachol* over Hashem]... This is implied by the words *ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת*, meaning you will be like kings *לי*, over Me, Hashem. I decree, and a tzaddik annuls it. Klal Yisrael also merits this level because they are Bnei Yisrael [descendants of Yaakov Avinu]..."

Yisrael

We continue with the topic of the greatness of Bnei Yisrael.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 44.) says, *אע"פ שחטא*, "Even if one sins, he remains a Yisrael." He never becomes detached from the holy nation, Bnei Yisrael. The Gemara learns this from Achan, a rasha, who transgressed Yehoshua's decree (and took from the spoils of the first war in Eretz Yisrael in the conquest of Yericho). The Gemara elaborates on Achan's many sins. It wasn't merely that he took from the spoils of the war; he transgressed several severe aveiros.

About Achan's sin, it states (*Yehoshua* 7:11) *חטא ישראל וגם עברו את בריתי אשר צויתי אותם וגם לקחו מן החרם וגם גנבו וגם כחשו וגם שמו בכליהם*. "Yisrael has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them; and they have also taken of the consecrated thing, and have also stolen, and also dissembled, and they have also put into

their vessels." Important lessons are concealed in this *pasuk*. The word *גם*, "also," is written five times in this *pasuk*. The Gemara says that this means Achan transgressed the five *chumashim* of the Torah. Nevertheless, Hashem calls him a Yisrael, as the *pasuk* begins, *חטא ישראל*, "Yisrael sinned." This means that even the greatest sinners remain with their esteemed title, "Yisrael."

Another point to notice: Hashem didn't mention the name of the sinner. He said ambiguously *ישראל חטא*, "A Yid sinned." Yehoshua asked who it was, and Hashem replied that he didn't want to slander. Yehoshua drew lots, and it fell on Achan, and he admitted that he took the spoils of war. Notice, Hashem didn't want to speak *lashon hara* on Achan, the rasha! This is because, despite his many aveiros, a Yid remains a Yid, no matter what.

Now, we repeat a wonderful lesson from Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen zt'l. He asks that it usually isn't the way of the Torah to focus on the bad of the Jewish nation. So, why does the Gemara list the many sins Achan committed?

Rebbe Tzaddok Hakohen answers that from Achan we learn the important principle, *אע"פ שחטא ישראל הוא*, that even if one sins, he remains a Yisrael. So, the Gemara wants to pile on as many sins as it can on Achan, so we will know that even for such a Yid, Hashem says that he is still a Yisrael, and he is still a member of the holy and beloved Jewish nation.

The Gemara adds, "This is as people say, a *hadas*, even when it grows among thorns, it's still a *hadas*." Similarly, a Yid, even if he has many sins, remains a Yid.

In the song *Azamer Bishvachin* (said Friday night before Kiddush) we say, *מדאני אסא להתקפה*, "two *hadas* branches to fortify the weak." We can explain that this alludes to the specialness of Bnei Yisrael, who are compared to a *hadas*. A *hadas* among thorns remains a *hadas*, as a Yid immersed in aveiros remains a Yid. This concept is *להתקפה*

הלשין; it fortifies the weak and encourages all Yidden, to know that no matter what they do, they remain part of Hashem's nation.

Chazal (*Shabbos* 33) tell us that Reb Shimon bar Yochai and his son Reb Elazar were very upset when they left the cave and saw people engaged in Olam HaZeh. But when they

saw a person running with two *hadasim*, one for זכור and one for שמור, they were appeased because they saw that they loved the mitzvos.

We can explain that when they saw the *hadasim*, which grow among thorns, they remembered that Hashem loves the Jewish nation under all circumstances. "A Yisrael, even if he sins, he remains a Yisrael."¹⁰

10. A teacher took a hundred-dollar bill, trampled it, crumbled it, and stuck it into the mud, and then he asked his students, "Who wants it?" All hands shot up. They all wanted it because even in the mud and trampled, it maintains \$100. The teacher then told them that the same is with the Jewish soul. No matter what a person does, he remains a precious and holy Jewish soul.