

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Shlita*

Vayikra



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Torah Wellsprings - Vayikra

Hashem's Call

The first word *Parashas Vayikra* is ויקרא, "And [Hashem] called..." where the ך is small. The Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* explains that this hints that even the small and seemingly insignificant matters in life are Hashem's calling. He wants to arouse us, awaken us, and draw us close to Him.

ך is comprised of three letters. A ך"י on top, a ך"י below, and a ך"י" that connects them. The Baal HaTanya *zt'l* taught that the ך"י above alludes to Hashem, the ך"י below is this world, and the ך"י" that connects them indicates that we must connect everything that happens below, to Hashem above. We must know that everything comes from Hashem, and everything that happens is Hashem's calling to us.

The Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l* once watched a daredevil jump off the roof of a three-story house and land, standing on his feet. Everyone was astonished. The Ropshitzer Rav asked him how he did it. The daredevil showed him a skinny, transparent rope that hung from the roof to the ground. The daredevil simply slid down the rope to the ground. He didn't really jump off the roof.

The Ropshitzer Rav commented that when one knows that everything that happens below is connected to Above, he will never get hurt. Even when he goes through hard times, he knows that it's all connected and planned from Above.

It states, ה' מְלֶכֶךְ ה' מְלֶכֶךְ ה' ימְלוֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. This means, "Hashem is King, Hashem was King, and Hashem will be King forever." We wonder about the order of the phrase, which is first present, then past, and future. Why is this phrase not written in chronological order of past, present, then future?

Perhaps, because believing that Hashem is the king at the present moment is the primary and the most challenging test.

People find it easier to proclaim that Hashem *was* king and that He *will be* king, but it is hard for them to say that Hashem is king *right now* and that everything is happening according to His plan. Where one goes and the issues he deals with are all the calling and the decision of Hashem.

A mashal is told about a king who was looking for a confidante, someone he could confide in and tell him his deepest secrets.

Somebody applied for the position. His resume described him as a law-abiding citizen, and he guaranteed the king could trust him with his deepest secrets. So the king appointed a committee to test his loyalty. They asked him, "If the king asks you for your home, will you be willing to give your house away?"

"I am willing to do so. I will do everything for the king."

"If the king asks for your fields, too, what will you do?"

"I will celebrate my good fortune to serve the king whom I love, and I will give all my fields to the king."

He seemed to be the perfect candidate. How many people are so loyal to the king? But the committee had to test him once more to see him carry out his word.

So, the committee members asked, "We know you have a chicken. The king wants your chicken."

"No, I'm sorry. I won't give that away to the king," he replied.

Hearing that, he was informed that he was unfit for the position.

Back home, his family asked him, "You were willing to give away your house and your fields; why were you so stubborn and unwilling to give away your chicken?"

He replied, "I don't own a house, and I don't own fields, therefore, I didn't mind giving them away. But I do own a chicken, and I would never give that away..."

The *nimshal* is that people are ready to give Hashem their past and future because the past and the future aren't with them right now. What's difficult is to recognize that even what's happening now is also from Hashem.

Nisan

The month of Nisan is an exceptional time.

The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* (*Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim* 336) writes in a letter, "I received your letter *Erev Shabbos* close to *Shabbos*. You asked that I answer some of your questions regarding *Pesach*. That isn't a small request because these are priceless days – each hour is like a day.¹ Nevertheless, since you expressed your strong desire that I answer you, and you wrote that it will be your pleasure and *simchas yom tov*, I devoted some time to write this letter..."

The Shem MiShmuel *zt'l* said that his father, the Avnei Nezer, would be *מסובב והולך בעולמות העליונים*, "Walked in the upper worlds" throughout Nisan. (*Avir HaRo'im* 264). Once, the Shem MiShmuel heard his father say that during Nisan he doesn't need to sleep due to the holiness of these days (*Avir HaRo'im* 299).

Shulchan Aruch (429:2) states, "We don't say *tachanun* the entire month of Nisan."

The Shlah Hakadosh (*Pesachim, Ner Mitzvah*, 7) explains that this is because the entire month has the kedushah of *Rosh chodesh*. He writes, "It states, *החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים*, 'This month is for you *Rosh chodesh*.' This means each day of Nisan is like *ראש חדש*. The entire month is *Rosh chodesh*."²

The Agra d'Kala (*Pikudei*) teaches in the name of Rebbe Mendel of Riminov *zt'l* that the first twelve days of Nisan represent the twelve months of the year, and *tzaddikim* can perceive on these days what will occur in the world in the corresponding months. "The Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* would write down what he perceived with his *ruach hakodesh* would happen that year. On א' ניסן he wrote what would happen in Nisan. ב' ניסן he wrote what would happen in Iyar, and so on. When it was the final year of his life, he only wrote down what would occur up to Av. He didn't write what would happen in the world in the following months because that year, he was *niftar* in Av. This story is known among the Chozeh's students."³

Preparing for Pesach

There was once a *baalebusta* who didn't know how to make *cholent*, so when she saw an advertisement for a *Shabbos* cooking course called "Cholent 'N' More," she immediately signed up. After several months of studying, she graduated and even received

1. In the Avnei Nezer's words, *אם כי הקשה לשאול כי ימים אלו יקרי הערך, שעה ליום יחשב*

2. The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* writes, "Don't think that it is only in Nisan [that the entire month is considered like *rosh chodesh*]. It is the same by all months. If we observe *rosh chodesh* properly, the entire month becomes like *rosh chodesh*. As the saying goes, *גופא בתר רישא אויל*, the body follows the head. [If the head, *rosh chodesh*, is good, this influences the entire month]. Therefore, it is proper for the wise to serve Hashem on *rosh chodesh*, which will make the whole month good. Even if just one hour of *rosh chodesh* is kept properly, the entire month will be good [and imbued with the holiness of *rosh chodesh*].

3. The Beis Avraham *zt'l* writes, "*החודש הזה לכם ראש*", means that Nisan is *mesugal* to correct one's head. Even if his thoughts were filled with temptations or heresy, *rachmana litzlan*, he can become like a new person this month. *ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה*. Someone who makes himself like new and accepts on himself to serve Hashem this month, it will help him all the months of the year."

a diploma, stating that she was an expert and capable of making a pot of cholent.

That Shabbos, she told her husband that she would make the *cholent*. On Shabbos morning, however, there was a foul odor coming from the kitchen. The *cholent* spoiled, and the food was inedible.

She called her teacher on *Motzei Shabbos* to find out what she did wrong. Her teacher asked a few questions, but it seemed that her graduated pupil did everything right. Then the teacher asked, "Did you clean the pot before you began?"

She remembered that she didn't. Whatever was in the pot ruined the taste of her cooking.

Pesach is approaching, and we hope to receive the many blessings that this yom tov offers. But we must first clean our heart, mind, and body so we can accept this great light of the yom tov. When the "utensil" isn't clean, the final product won't turn out right.

There's a Jewish expression people use to describe a fool. They call him "a *chacham* from the *Mah Nishtanah*," the wise *chacham* of the Seder.

It's said that the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* asked, "Why do we call him *chacham*? It would be more appropriate to call him "the *חכם* from the *Mah Nishtanah*." The answer is that the *chacham* comes on the Seder night and asks wise questions, but where was he until now? Didn't he see everyone cleaning for Pesach, buying matzah, and so on? Why didn't he ask his questions then? Why did he wake up now? Ay, the *chacham* from the *Mah Nishtanah* isn't very wise after all.

Let's not be that *chacham*, and let's not wake up only at the Seder to realize that something special is going on. Instead, we should be awake beforehand and prepare ourselves for these holy days.

Once, at the start of Nisan, the directors of Satmar institutions came to the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* to discuss the institutions' finances. The Satmar Rebbe asked them to return after *Pesach*. He explained, "Reb Yehoshua of Kroli *zt'l* said if one doesn't attain *ruach hakadosh* at the Seder, he isn't a human being.⁴ "So, we must prepare. Therefore, I prefer to discuss financial issues after *Pesach*."

The Avodas Yisrael *zt'l* (*Shabbos HaGadol*, ד"ה בגמרא) writes, "By all other holidays [Succos, Shavuos, and so on], the holiness of the yom tov arrives gradually. Each tefillah ushers in another aspect of the holiday. But *Pesach*, the *kedushah* of the yom tov comes at once. It is called *פסח*, which literally means *to jump* [because it doesn't come in gradually, step by step. One jumps right into the peak of the *kedushah* of the yom tov]. So, *Pesach* needs preparation. A bright spiritual light will come down to us regardless of our deeds, but one needs to be pure to receive this bright light. It can be compared to the sun that shines brightly, but the sun's rays can't enter one's home if the window shades are closed..."

So, it is a time to prepare, to live with holiness and purity, so that when the great light of *Pesach* shines, we will be able to perceive it.

There are many ways to prepare for *Pesach*. For example, you can daven for a good yom tov, yearn for it, learn about the mitzvos, etc. Furthermore, every good deed you do that adds to your *kedushah* and *taharah* (such as learning a daf Gemara and so on) can be intended as a preparation for the upcoming mitzvah. And when it comes to the yom tov *Pesach*, in particular, every preparation for the yom tov (which includes cleaning, baking, and cooking) purifies us immensely and makes us fitting candidates for the upcoming holy yom tov.

4. Some say that Reb Yehoshua of Kroli said, "If one doesn't have *giluy Eliyahu* at the Seder night and on Yom Kippur, it is a sign his forefathers weren't at Har Sinai."

The Kav HaYashar (90) writes, "I received a *kabbalah* that every effort that one invests in honor of Pesach, and he becomes tired and exhausted from that work, it kills all the *mazikim* that are called נגעי בני אדם. When one works for Pesach, this rectifies [very severe sins]. The heart knows the bitter truth that almost none of us are clean from that [severe] sin. Therefore, everyone is obligated to fix whatever he can, and Hashem, with His immense mercy and kindness, will accept the thoughts of the Jewish people, His nation, and will redeem us quickly."

One of the primary preparations people are busy with at this time of year is cleaning the home from chametz. It isn't easy; it's toil; it's tiring; and as the Kav HaYashar teaches, it atones for severe sins.⁵

The *Radvaz* (3: 977) writes, "You asked me for my opinion, why is chametz on Pesach different than other prohibitions of the Torah, that the Torah was stringent, and requires that we should search for it, burn it, destroy it, and also annul it in our hearts (בטול). The *chachamim* added more precautions to these prohibitions and required one to search for it in all cracks and crevices of his home and to banish it from your property. One transgresses בל יראה ובל ימצא for owning chametz. Even a drop of chametz is forbidden, and [when mixed in with other foods] it never becomes annulled (בטל). Such stringencies aren't found in other prohibitions of the Torah. And if you will say that that is because chametz is severe because it is punished with *kares*, behold חלב (forbidden fats) and blood are also punished with *kares*, and they don't have these strict regulations. And if you will say that it's because we

aren't permitted to even derive pleasure from chametz, behold *klayim* (כלאי הכרם) and שור הנסקל we are also forbidden to derive pleasure from them, and they don't have these strict rules... And if you will say that it is because דלא בדילי מיניה, that people are accustomed to eating bread and they are not used to separating themselves from it, behold wine for a *nazir*, which he isn't separated from wine the entire year, and חדש, which people are accustomed to eating grains the entire year, and they don't have these stringencies!"

The *Radva"z* gives a few answers, but he isn't satisfied with them. Then he writes, "I, therefore, explain it according to the Midrash that teaches that *chametz* on Pesach represents the *yetzer hara*.⁶ Therefore, one must banish the *yetzer hara* from himself and search for it in all corners of his thoughts. Even the smallest drop must be eradicated. This explanation is correct and true, in my humble opinion."

The *Avodas Yisrael zt'l* (*Shabbos HaGadol*, ד"ה בגמרא) writes, "חמץ symbolizes the *yetzer hara*. We burn the *chametz* (the *yetzer hara*) on *erev Pesach* so that we can receive the great holiness revealed on the night of Pesach..."

Chazal tell us that the purity of Yom Kippur remains for the next four days after it is over since people are busy preparing for the Yom Tov of Succos, choosing the four *minim* and building a succah. It is for this reason that Succos is called ראשון לחשבון עוונות, the first day for the accounting of sins. When Succos arrives, we don't have any aveiros at all.

The *Chidushei HaRim zt'l* says that the same happens each year at Pesach. Before

5. The *Gemara* (*Beitzah* 2) says, "Every egg laid today was finished yesterday." If an egg was laid today, its shell was completed yesterday. The *Imrei Emes zt'l* says that this is the reason we place an egg on the קערה (Seder plate). The egg is a reminder that whatever happens tonight at the Seder was completed and prepared earlier. The amount of *kedushah* one receives depends on how much one prepared for it.

6. The *Gemara* (*Berachos* 17) states: "Master of the world, it is revealed and known to you that our will is to do Your will. What prevents us? שאור שבעיסה ושיעבוד גליות, the sourdough and government oppression." *Rashi* explains that sourdough is a reference to the *yetzer hara*."

Pesach, everyone is cleaning, searching, and burning the chametz, and this represents cleansing ourselves from aveiros. When we come to the Seder, we're entirely clean from aveiros, and we are fitting to receive the holiness of the yom tov.

Rebbe Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev *zy'a* said, "By cleaning for Pesach, one should be able to attain *ruach hakadosh*; only anger ruins it."⁷ We must remember this when cleaning for Pesach. Yes, there are often matters that can get under our skin and arouse anger, but we must be cautious and avoid them.

Chazal (*Shabbos* 105) say, כל הנועם כאילו עובד, עבודה זרה "Whoever becomes angry, it is as though he worshiped idols."

Why is anger compared to idol worship? We can explain that it's because they both don't accomplish anything. One doesn't gain anything from idol worship, as we say in *Hallel*: ...להם ולא ידברו, "They have a mouth, but they can't speak..." Anger is also futile, as Chazal (*Kiddushin* 41.) say, "Whoever becomes angry, all that he has is anger." Nothing else was accomplished.

Rebbe Asher of Stolín *zt'l* explained that this is the reason the *passuk* puts together the mitzvah of Pesach with *avodah zarah*, as it states (*Shemos* 34:17-18) חג לא תעשה לך את חג אלהי מסכה, המצות תשמר, "Don't make molten gods for yourself. Keep the holiday Pesach..." What is the connection between *avodah zarah* and Pesach? When people prepare for Pesach, they are often liable to become angry, and the *passuk* warns us to be cautious.

And when we clean for Pesach and are careful to avoid anger, this is an excellent preparation for the yom tov that is approaching.

Chessed

In addition to cleaning the homes, one of the preparations we do for Pesach is to help the poor obtain all their needs for Pesach.

At the beginning of *Hilchos Pesach*, it states מנהג לקנות חיטים לחלקן לעניים לצורך פסח, "There is a custom to buy wheat and to distribute it to the poor for Pesach" (429:1). In our generation, we give matzah (and other yom tov products) to the poor for Pesach.⁸

7. Rebbe Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev *zy'a* once saw women cleaning and scrubbing their homes for Pesach and said, "May the *malachim* that come forth from קשר"ק, which is an acronym for קראצין שאיערין רייבין קיערין (different versions of cleaning and scouring) should go up before Hashem's throne and arouse mercy for the Jewish nation." He called it קשר"ק, alluding to the *malachim* that are associated with *tekiyas shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, as written in *machzorim*.)

8. Immense reward is granted to those who help the poor.

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* shared the following story:

There was a poor woman who, despite her poverty, tried to help those less fortunate than her. Every day, she baked four loaves of bread. She would keep one loaf for herself and her family and distribute the other three to the poor.

One morning, after distributing the three breads, a poor man came to her door begging for food. He said he hadn't eaten for days. She compassionately gave him the loaf of bread she had prepared for her family. "I can bake another bread," she told herself.

As she no longer had wheat for that day, she took a bag of wheat kernels to the seashore where there was a communal mill and ground the grain into flour. She filled her bag with the flour and flung it over her shoulder to head home and bake bread for her family. Just then, a powerful gust of wind snatched the bag out of her hands and tossed it into the sea. She was left with nothing and cried, "Why do I deserve this punishment? Is this the reward for my *tzedakah*?"

There was a yeshiva near the shore, so she went inside and asked the *rosh yeshiva* for an explanation. "I

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* would have high levels of *ruach hakodesh* at his Seder, and after the Seder, he would speak about how other tzaddikim of his time conducted their Seder that year. (He saw with his *ruach hakadosh* the Sedarim of other tzaddikim, and the impression that these Sedarim made in Heaven, and he would speak about them.) One year, he particularly praised the Seder of Rebbe Eliezer Mendel of Lelov *zt'l*. "The Seder of Rebbe Eliezer Mendel of Lelov *zt'l* shone this year more than the Sedarim of all other *tzaddikim*."

Until this point, the story is known. But I heard an addition to this story:

What was so unique about Rebbe Eliezer Mendel's Seder that year? He lived in Yerushalayim, and that year he received a sizeable sum of money from a wealthy person in *chutz l'aretz* to distribute to the poor Yidden of Yerushalayim. Rebbe Eliezer Mendel distributed all the money. He didn't take a cent for himself, although he was also

poor. This merit elevated his Seder to such great heights.

You don't need to look far to find someone in need of help. You can begin with your own home.

Reb Shimshon Aharon Polanski, the Tepliker Rav *zt'l*, once came to his beis medresh in Yerushalayim a few days before Pesach and saw that the beis medresh was full. Everyone was learning with *hasmadah* as though they had no worries or obligations. So he went up to the *bimah* and announced, "*Rabboisai!* There are many *almanos*/widows in Yerushalayim who need help cleaning for Pesach."

Everyone stopped what they were doing and seemed ready to help out. The Tepliker Rav explained, "I was referring to your wives. They need help. Why are you letting them struggle alone as if they were widows? Why aren't you helping them get ready for *yom tov*?"

gave extra *tzedakah* today. I gave away my family's bread. And now I have nothing. Is this my reward for my charitable deeds?"

The *rosh yeshiva* agreed that he didn't understand why this happened to her. But, nevertheless, he encouraged her to believe that it was *bashert* and for a good reason.

The woman was still in the yeshiva when suddenly, two merchants entered with two jugs filled with gold coins. "These are for the yeshiva," they said.

The *rosh yeshiva* was shocked and asked why they were donating so much money to the yeshiva.

"It is to express our gratitude to Hashem for the miracle He performed for us. We have just returned from a business venture overseas," they began. "The water was stormy, and the ship crashed into a large boulder. Water came pouring into the ship; our lives were in danger. We vowed that if we survived, we would donate a large sum of money to the first yeshiva we found. As soon as we made this pledge, something miraculously plugged the hole in the ship. That's why we're bringing you these jars filled with gold."

"Do you know what sealed the hole of the ship?" the *rosh yeshiva* asked.

"When we got off the boat, we looked to see what saved our lives. We were surprised to see that it was a sack of flour! The flour became dough in the sea and glued the bag onto the ship, exactly in the right place to save our lives!"

The poor woman was astonished when she heard this story. The *rosh yeshiva* told her, "Now you have the answer to your question. You wondered why your bag flew out of your hands and why you were punished after you gave *tzedakah* with *mesirus nefesh*. But now you understand that it wasn't a punishment at all. It was a reward. In the merit of your *tzedakah*, you were granted the merit to save all the people on the ship. This is your reward for giving *tzedakah* with *mesirus nefesh*."

Deeds of *Chessed* with Speech

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* would spend much time speaking to people, helping them with good advice. Someone asked him, "Wouldn't it be better to spend this time learning Torah?"

The Chazon Ish replied, "If I were wealthy, I would spend a lot of my time distributing money to the poor and needy. But I'm not wealthy. So, this is my way of doing *chessed*."

Those who aren't able to give too much *tzedakah* can also help their fellow man with kind words. There is so much to offer with words.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* was very cautious with his speech. Who can be compared to the Chofetz Chaim, who measured every word before he spoke it? Yet, it is known that he was very talkative. When someone came to him, he always had words of *mussar* and encouragement to tell people, and he spiced his lessons with *mashalim*, anecdotes, and stories. This is another form of *chessed* one can do with words. To encourage people with sweet words onto the path of Torah and *mitzvos*.

The Gemara (*Tanis* 22) tells us that Reb Broka asked Eliyahu HaNavi, "Is there anyone in the marketplace who is a *ben Olam HaBa*?"

Eliyahu pointed out two people and said, "These two people are *bnei Olam Haba*."

Reb Broka went over to them and asked them what they do.

"We are happy people, and we make people happy. If we see two people in a

fight, we toil until we restore peace between them."

There is so much kindness that one can do with words. The Beis Avraham *zy'a* said that *מחיה מתים במאמר* (*Maariv Shabbos*) can mean, "One can blow a breath of life and happiness into a broken person with a kind word."

The renowned *mechanech* Reb Gad'l Eizner *zt'l* said, "I studied the nature of man and I discovered that a kind word can knock down fortified walls."

In his sefer *Me'il Tzedakah* (תתש"ט), the Shevet Mussar teaches, "There is a form of charity that is easy to do, and the reward is great. This is to say kind words and bring joy to someone anxious and worried about some matter. [It doesn't cost money], it is only words, so one shouldn't be stingy with them. He should speak a lot [of such words to comfort and encourage those going through hard times]. I experienced the importance of this myself because once I was speaking to someone feeling down. Sometime later, he told me that if I hadn't spoken to him then, he would have committed suicide."⁹

In *Koheles* (5:1) it states, *כי אלקים בשמים ואתה על הארץ*, "Hashem is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore, let your words be few." Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zy'a* says the *passuk* hints at the power of our speech. He translated the *passuk* in the following way: *אל תבהל את פך ולבך אל ימהר להוציא*: *דבר לפני אלקים*, be cautious with your speech. *כי ואתה על הארץ* because Hashem leads the world from heaven with His speech. *אל תבהל את פך ולבך אל ימהר להוציא*, and you lead the world from the earth. (Hashem has given you the ability to lead the world with your speech from the earth.) *על כן יהיו דבריך מעטים*, therefore, be cautious with your words. Speak primarily words of Torah,

9. One of the *sefarim* that Shevet Mussar wrote is called *Eizur Eliyahu* (Eliyahu's belt) because of a miracle that happened to him. Once, he awoke in the middle of the night and wanted to daven and study Torah, but he needed a belt. So, in the dark room, he bent down, picked up what he thought was a belt, and wrapped himself with it. In the morning, he saw that he had wrapped himself with a snake. In commemoration of this miracle, he named his sefer *Eizur Eliyahu* (the belt of Eliyahu).

tefillah, and *chessed* because, with holy words, you bring goodness to the world, but if you are careless with your words, *chas veshalom*, you bring on destruction and heartache.

Don't Hold a Grudge

A chassid of Reb Michel of Zlotchev *zt'l* was poor and had to collect money to support his family and to cover the costs of his son's *chasunah*. He asked the Rebbe for a *hamlatzah* letter, which appeals to wealthy people to give generously to the cause.

Reb Michel of Zlotchev told him, "I don't give *hamlatzos*."

The chassid pleaded, but the Rebbe repeated that he doesn't give *hamlatzos*.

The chassid said, "I accept the Rebbe's wishes, but please tell me the reason. Why doesn't the Rebbe want to write up this letter?"

The Zlotchever Magid replied, "What will you do if you go to a wealthy person with my letter and he gives you just a few pennies, or perhaps he doesn't give you anything at all?"

"I would slap him twice," the chassid replied. "He is disgracing the Rebbe. He saw the Rebbe's letter; why doesn't he give generously?"

The Zlotchever Magid replied, "That is exactly why I don't want to write this letter. In heaven there is a list of people who will help you and exactly how much each person will give. If someone doesn't give you, that doesn't mean he is a cruel, uncaring person.

It is just that he isn't written on that list. If you believed this, you wouldn't be angry when someone doesn't give you money."

The chassid said, "I accept what the Rebbe is teaching me, and if someone doesn't give generously, I will know that it wasn't *bashert*."

Reb Michel said, "Now I can write a *hamlatzah* for you."

The chassid went to a wealthy chassid of Reb Michel of Zlotchev and showed him the letter. After reading the letter, the wealthy man gave just a few coins and wished him a good day.

The poor chassid was very disappointed and on the verge of anger, but he remembered the Rebbe's lesson. Under his breath, he repeated to himself over and over, "He isn't on the Rebbe's list. He isn't on Hashem's list. He isn't on the list in heaven."

The wealthy person asked him what he was mumbling.

"It's nothing. It's just something private between the Rebbe and me."

"No. You said something about me not being on the Rebbe's list and not being on Heaven's list! What type of list is it? Perhaps you mean the list of the living, or perhaps it is the list of the wealthy! And what will be with me if I'm not on the list?"

"It is nothing. It is just a private matter between the Rebbe and me."

The wealthy person was worried, so he said, "I will give you all the money you need; just tell me what you meant."

10. Reb Yitzchak Elchanon Spector would study Torah many hours every day; he hardly slept. Someone asked him, "Doesn't the Rambam say that one should sleep eight hours a night?"

He answered, "I was up many nights to answer this Rambam as well."

He battled the *maskilim* (who followed the Enlightenment movement). There was another person who worked together with him. However, this person wasn't interested in fighting the *maskilim*; he simply enjoyed the excitement involved.

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan once told him, "Do you know the difference between us? I'll tell you with a *mashal*.

"I will tell you after you give me the money," the poor man replied.

After he handed over a very large sum of money, the poor man explained. "The Rebbe told me that Hashem has a list in heaven of who will give me money and exactly how much they will give. If someone doesn't help me, he is obviously not on that list. But now, we have discovered that you are on Hashem's list in heaven!"

This lesson applies to us all. People tend to complain about others, "Why doesn't he help me?" Realize that there are lists up in heaven, and everything is *bashert*. So why be angry with others? It is just that he isn't on the list.

Reb Elchanan Wasserman *zt'l hy'd, rosh yeshivas* Ohel Torah in Baranowitz, came to America to raise funds for his yeshiva. In one beis medresh, he spoke about the importance of supporting Torah, and he described to the community the poverty and lack of food the yeshiva *bachurim* were subjected to. Then he made his pitch: "For \$11.43 you can sponsor one day in the yeshiva. For \$80.00 you can support one week in the yeshiva. Please, become our partners, and support a week, or at least a day in the yeshiva."

Then the Rav of the beis medresh got up to speak. He wanted to help Reb Elchanan, but he made a big mistake. This Rav spoke about the great privilege of giving even just one dollar to the yeshiva. Reb Elchanan set the tariff at \$11.43, or hopefully \$80.00, and lowered it to a dollar.

Reb Elchanan didn't earn much in that beis medresh, and the Rav asked *mechilah* on his behalf and on behalf of his congregation.

Reb Elchanan told him, "Hashem told Moshe to appoint Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur of *shevet* Yehudah to build the Mishkan. Imagine the following scene:

"Moshe Rabbeinu comes down from the mountain and asks someone, 'I need to find Betzalel ben Uri. Are you Betzalel ben Uri?'"

"I'm Shimon."

"Moshe asks another person, 'Perhaps you're Betzalel ben Uri?'"

"Sorry, I'm Aminadov."

"Will Moshe be upset with them for not being Betzalel ben Uri? Of course not! They weren't the person he was searching for. Similarly, why should I be upset with you or your beis medresh for not helping the yeshiva? It is destined in heaven who will help the yeshiva, and obviously, the members of your beis medresh weren't on the list. I have no reason to be angry with you. I just have to go elsewhere to find my Betzalel ben Uri."

Once, Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky *zt'l* asked Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* why he appeared extraordinarily happy that day. Reb Moshe told him what occurred:

"Three months ago, there was a financial dispute, and I *paskened* according to Torah. Later that same day, I got a call. The caller said, 'I'm the person whom you obligated to pay money in your court case. Be aware that you ruled erroneously...' and he let loose some disrespectful words.

"Today, this man came to me again and asked me to give him a *haskamah* for *shechitah* (approbation to be a *shochet*). I wanted to tell him to leave. A few months ago, he spoke disrespectfully to me, and now he wants me to do him a favor? But I remembered that Yom Kippur had passed since that cruel, unfortunate episode, and I had forgiven him since then. I tested him on the laws of *shechitah*, he knew the laws well, so I wrote a letter, deeming him fit to be a *shochet*. Then I rebuked him for how he spoke to me some

months before, explaining that it wasn't proper to speak that way.

"He didn't know what I was talking about. He told me that he never called me and never complained about the *psak*... We then understood that another person (who was upset with the results of the *din Torah*) called up and impersonated him.

"Now you understand the reason I am happy," Reb Moshe told Reb Yaakov. "I may have held a grudge against this person forever, and it would be for naught. He didn't deserve it."

Loving those Who are Imperfect

There are different approaches to studying Torah. One method is called *derech hapilpul*. This approach is comprised of deep thinking and innovative ideas. Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* appreciated this approach in particular and would learn in this manner often. He also instructed his children to buy the sefer *Chidushei HaRim* on *Shas* because it was written in the approach of *pilpul*.

He explained, "With *pilpul*, one can always find an answer to explain a difficult *Yid*." Rebbe Yissacher Dov didn't want to think negatively about any *Yid*. By using the *derech hapilpul*, he found innovative ways to explain and find some merit, even for sinful Jews.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:4-6) teaches, "A *baal teshuvah* shouldn't think that he is far from the levels of the *tzaddikim* because of the sins he committed. It isn't so. He is beloved and precious to Hashem, as though he never sinned... His reward is greater because he tasted the taste of sin, left it, and overcame the *yetzer hara*. Chazal say the greatest *tzaddikim* cannot stand in the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand.' This means their level is above those who never sinned because they [must] control their *yetzer* more..."

The Rambam continues, "*Teshuvah* is great because it brings the person close to

the *Shechinah*.... *Teshuvah* brings closer those who are distant. Yesterday, Hashem hated him. He was disgusting, revolting, and distanced. Today, [Hashem] loves him; he is precious, close, and a friend..."

Reb Nachum Yasser *zt"l* heard some *yungerleit* discussing this Rambam, and they found it difficult to comprehend that someone's status could change so rapidly. Yesterday Hashem hated him, and today he is beloved. How could this change happen so quickly?

Reb Nachum had a son who unfortunately went off the *derech*. He never spoke about this son (because it caused him too much pain), but this time he said, "If my son would enter the *beis medresh* right now, come over to me and say that he is ready to be a religious *Yid*, I would love him and kiss him. His status with me would change in a moment. This is what happens when a *Yid* does *teshuvah*."

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan Spector *zt"l*, the *rav* of Kovno, received a letter from residents of another town. In the letter, they wrote to him the *psak* (halachic decision) that their *Rav* had reached regarding some halachic matter.

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan immediately understood the intentions of the writers. They were trying to remove the *Rav* from his position. They therefore showed Reb Yitzchak Elchanan how their *Rav* ruled erroneously in some halachic matter because he had forgotten a *Shach* (one of the primary commentaries on *Shulchan Aruch*). They hoped that Reb Yitzchak Elchanan would write back that the *Rav's psak* was wrong, which would embarrass the *Rav* and ultimately lead him to leave his post.

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan didn't consider this mistake a valid reason to send the *Rav* away. He sent a telegram to the community, stating that his conclusion on the halachic question was exactly the same as the scholarly *Rav* of their community had reached.

When the people received the telegram, they were shocked—had the Rav of Kovno also forgotten the *Shach*?

A few hours later, another telegram was received. It said, "I retract my previous *psak*, because I just realized that the *Shach* rules differently..."

In this manner, Reb Yitzchak Elchanan showed the town that he respects their rav, and it isn't so terrible if a Rav forgets a *Shach*. Even Reb Yitzchak Elchanan, from the *gedolei hador*, also forgot the *Shach* at first. Then, with his second telegram, he ensured the Torah law would be kept.¹⁰

Remember Your Fellow Man

There is an important rule in life:

Don't let your goal to grow in avodas Hashem prevent you from helping your fellow man in need. You want to improve your Torah study, daven with kavanah, and perform mitzvos with all your heart and soul, but you mustn't forget that helping your fellow man is also an important mitzvah.

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner zt'l gave an example of a person who is so busy doing teshuvah on erev Yom Kippur that he doesn't have time to speak to a broken person in need of a kind word.

Reb Yisrael Salanter zt'l met a person on erev Yom Kippur who was in a very bitter mood. Reb Yisrael commented, "If he is worried about his aveiros, why do I need to suffer?"¹¹

In contrast, Rav Shach zt'l tells that the Chofetz Chaim zt'l once spent a lot of time

on Yom Kippur night giving chizuk to a lonely Yid.

Pirkei Avos (5:20) states ...קל כנשר ורץ כצבי... הוי...קל כנשר ורץ כצבי... לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים "Be...swift as an eagle and run like a deer...to do the will of your Father in heaven."¹²

Reb Shimon Sofer zt'l explains that קל כנשר (swift as an eagle) means we should do avodas Hashem with zrizus. רץ כצבי (run like a deer) is another lesson. It means that when we are swift like an eagle to do our avodas Hashem, we should simultaneously have the nature of a deer. Chazal say that the nature of a deer is that when it runs away, it keeps turning its head back. This describes how one should be swift with avodas Hashem. Even while growing in his avodas Hashem, he shouldn't forget to look back at others in need. His spiritual growth shouldn't cause him to lose sight of the plight of others.

A poor person came to Rebbe Dovid Lelover zy"a asking for tzedakah. All the rebbe had in his home at the time was special *shmurah matzah* that he had prepared for the *seder*. He gave those to the poor man.

Rebbe Dovid's Rebbetzin asked him why he did so. He replied, "Rashi has two explanations to the words (Shemos 12:17) ושמרתם את המצות. One is that we should have *shmurah matzos* at the Seder. The other explanation reads the word as though it was written "mitzvos" (and not matzos). The *passuk* says, 'Just as you are careful that the matzos shouldn't become *chametz*, so must you be quick with the mitzvos. When a mitzvah comes your way, do it right away.'"

Rebbe Dovid Lelover concluded, "Instead of keeping Rashi's first commentary, I kept

11. Reb Yisrael Salanter called a person with a sad face, "בור ברשות הרבים" a public hazard" because he causes others to feel sad together with him.

12. Reb Shimon Sofer asked: (1) After stating that one should be "swift as an eagle," why does it say the slower pace, "run like a deer"? This would be like saying, "Be quick like an airplane and a car." (2) Where do we find in *Tanach* that a deer runs quickly, that the *mishnah* uses it as an example? Due to these questions, Reb Shimon Sofer learned that רץ כצבי, running like a deer, refers to the attitude of running in avodas Hashem while constantly keeping in mind our fellow men in need.

the second commentary and helped the poor person right away."

His ambition to do Hashem's mitzvos in the best way didn't blind him from the importance of helping another Yid.

The Shaarei Teshuvah writes that a band of murderers and thieves once caught a Yid, and they granted him a final wish. He said that he wanted to say Kiddush *Levanah*. They agreed. He jumped three times (as is the custom when saying the words *כשם שאני רוקד כנגד*). While he was still airborne, a strong wind lifted him and sent him far away from the thieves, saving his life. The Shaarei Teshuvah explains that this is because kiddush *levanah* is mesugal to be protected from murderers, r'l.

The Magid (angel) told the Beis Yosef, "After you say Kiddush *Levanah*, you will certainly live out the month."

However, even while saying this special prayer of kiddush *levanah*, if someone greets you and says *shalom aleichem*, you must answer. Say three times *shalom aleichem* (as this is part of the *nusach* of *kiddush levanah*) because one must bear in mind others, even in the most exalted moments.

Shulchan Aruch (55:1) states, "The time to read Shema in the morning is when it is light enough that one can recognize his friend from a distance of four cubits." *Kriyas* Reciting Shema is one of the most exalted acts of the day, when we accept the yoke of

heaven. At this special time, we must be able to see our friends.

The Bas Ayin writes in the name of the Kedushas Levi of Berdichev zt'l that אה"ד is *roshei teivos* for אה"ת, the brother of the poor. So, even as we say the holiest words of Shma Yisrael and proclaim our *emunah*, we must remember those in need. We should consider them as our brothers and be devoted to assisting them.

When a rav isn't sure of a halachah, there is a tendency to rule *l'chumrah* (stringently). He figures that if he is stringent, he is certainly safe. The Shevet Musar disagrees. He points out that by being stringent, he is avoiding a sin *bein adam lamokom* (to Hashem), but he may be sinning *bein adam lechaveiro* (to his fellow man). Yom Kippur atones for *aveiros bein adam lamakom*, but not for *bein adam lechaveiro*, so one must be careful.

When a question regarding *kashrus* was brought to Reb Moshe Klirs zt'l, the Rav of Teveria, he was very careful to rule correctly. He would repeat the Shevet Mussar's *vort* and explain that if he makes a mistake and rules that the food is not kosher, he may be causing a poor person to lose money. That is a sin *bein adam lechaveiro*, for which Yom Kippur doesn't atone.¹³

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk zy"a and his brother Rebbe Zusha zy"a were at an inn one night, sleeping on mattresses on the ground. (This happened during the years when

13. The Shaagas Aryeh zt'l would occasionally go into exile, traveling from place to place, without telling people who he was or about his greatness in Torah. He wouldn't eat by others because he was meticulous not to eat *chadash*. So he traveled with a package of *yashan* barley and asked people to cook it for him.

One day, he attended a wedding. Everyone was eating except for the Shaagas Aryeh. He was hoping that people would notice that he wasn't eating and ask him about this, and he would tell them that he needed someone to cook his barley. But no one noticed or asked him why he wasn't eating. This went on for hours as the Shaagas Aryeh waited in hunger.

At the end of the *chasunah*, people realized that someone had stolen some silverware, and they suspected the Shaagas Aryeh. The Shaagas Aryeh commented that he now understood the *passuk* (Tehillim 31:13) *נשכחתי כמות מלך*, I was forgotten like a dead person. No one asked about me and my needs or why I was not eating. It was as if I had already died. *הייתי ככלי אבד*, I came into existence in people's eyes when a utensil was lost. Suddenly, now people realize I exist."

these two tzaddikim traveled in 'galus' to purify themselves, and they attained extremely high levels.) In the middle of the night, a rowdy group of *Goyim* arrived at the inn. They were drinking vodka, and for entertainment, they wanted to hurt a yid, *chalilah*. Rebbe Zusha and Rebbe Elimelech were sleeping in one of the corners of the room. Rebbe Elimelech was sleeping closer to the wall, and Rebbe Zusha was closer to them, so they woke Rebbe Zusha and hit him. When they finished their cruel deed and laughter, they returned to their drinks, and Rebbe Zusha returned to his mattress. Soon, the goyim were thirsty for more cruelty. They took Rebbe Zusha and hurt him again. This happened several times. Rebbe Elimelech said to Rebbe Zusha, "Let's change places. Why should they beat you all the time?"

When the goyim returned, one of them said, "Why should we hurt this Jew again? Let his friend also remember that he was here." So, they took the yid who was sleeping near the wall and hit him. They thought they were hitting someone else, but it was Rebbe Zusha again since they had changed places.

Rebbe Zusha said to Rebbe Elimelech, "Beloved brother, do you see? When it is *bashert* that someone be beaten, there is nothing one can do to prevent it. Wherever he is, they will find him to give him his share."

The Kedushas Tzion of Bobov zy"l shared the same story, but with some variations, and the lesson is also different.

The Kedushas Tzion related that it was the *chassidim* of Rebbe Elimelech and Rebbe Zusha who were in the inn (and not the rebbes themselves). The rest of the story is similar. The goyim got drunk and beat the one sleeping closer to them several times. The chasid pleaded with his friend, who was sleeping closer to the wall, that they change places. The chasid near the wall agreed to do so out of *rachmanus* on his friend, who was being beaten repeatedly. But this time, the goyim decided to beat the person sleeping near the wall, which means they hit the same person again.

The chasidim came to Rebbe Elimelech and told him what happened. Rebbe Elimelech replied, "A Yid mustn't seek to make his life better. Had he remained at his original spot, he would have been spared the final beatings."

The chassidim asked, "Is it wrong to strive to live better?" It doesn't seem reasonable that a person mustn't seek to make his life better and easier.

The rebbe clarified, "True, but one mustn't try to make his life better at another person's expense."¹⁴

14. Reb Yosef Liberman zt"l writes in the introduction to his *sefer* that although his intention isn't to write stories in his *sefer*, there is one story he feels he must include. This is the story:

A person made some sound investments after his wedding and became very wealthy. He also had *nachas*. One of his children married the child of Reb Shimon Sofer zt"l.

Someone asked him, "How did you become so successful?"

He replied, "The first Shabbos after my *chasunah*, when I came to my in-law's home, I saw my mother-in-law lighting *Shabbos lecht* in an earthenware utensil. So, I asked my father-in-law, 'You gave us such a beautiful *laichter*. Why don't you have one for yourselves?'

"My father-in-law replied, 'The candelabra that you own used to be ours. We gave it to you because we promised to give you a Shabbos *laichter*.'

"And why is your dining room set so poor and rickety? We have a much nicer set."

"Your dining set was also once ours. I gave it to you for your *nadan* (dowry)."

"I asked about some other essential items that were missing in my in-law's home, and my *shver* told me the same answer: He used to have these utensils, but he gave them to the new couple because when the shidduch was finalized, he promised he would provide these items.

After Shabbos, the son-in-law told his wife, "We are giving everything back. I won't enjoy the gifts, knowing that my in-laws suffer because of it."

He returned the dining room set, the *laichter*, and all other gifts that used to be his in-laws.

But now they lacked basic household items, so he took a loan. With the loan, he bought everything their home needed and invested the extra money in a business. In the merit of his good deed, the investment prospered, and within a short time was able to pay off his debt and became wealthy. He concluded that he felt this good deed brought him financial success and nachas.

Reb Yosef Liberman tells this story to encourage young people to have in mind their in-laws. He says, "The children shouldn't only give back the *laichter*, they should give back their in-law's heart as well," because