

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Shlita

Shmini

HaChodesh



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Shmini - HaChodesh

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Shabbos - The Source of Bracha | 4 |
| The Test is on Friday | 5 |
| Counsels for Peace | 7 |
| Focus on the Good of Others | 8 |
| Judge Favorably..... | 9 |
| The Greatness of Bnei Yisrael | 11 |
| Never Too Late..... | 11 |
| <i>Shabbos HaChodesh</i> | 13 |
| Nisan..... | 13 |
| Kashrus | 15 |
| More on Kashrus | 17 |
| Ahavas Yisrael | 18 |

Torah Wellsprings - Shmini - HaChodesh

Shabbos – The Source of Bracha

The *Zohar* says, מיינה מתברכין כל שתא יומין, "The six days of the week receive their blessings from Shabbos."

The Gemara (Shabbos 119.) asks, from which good deed do the wealthy people in Eretz Yisrael earn their wealth? The Gemara replies that it is because they give maaser.

"How do the wealthy in Bavel earn wealth? It is because they honor the Torah.

"In other countries, what merit do they have to become wealthy? It is because they honor the Shabbos. Reb Chiya bar Aba said that he once came to the home of a wealthy person in Ludkiya, where they brought a table made of gold before the host. It was so heavy that sixteen people had to carry it. Sixteen silver chains were attached to it... and all types of foods, sweets, and besamim were on it. I asked him, 'My son, for which good deeds did you receive this wealth?' He replied, 'I used to be a butcher. When I saw a beautiful animal, I said to put it aside for Shabbos.'" In the merit of honoring Shabbos, he merited wealth.

Also, today, people earn wealth from giving maaser, honoring the Torah, and honoring Shabbos. It seems from the Gemara that most people in chutz l'aretz earned their wealth from honoring Shabbos. Therefore, let us invest in Shabbos with good food, song, divrei Torah, and joy. One of the many benefits will be wealth in this world.

But remember, the Mishnah states (*Uktzin* 3:12), לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל, אלא השלום, that the vessel in which to receive brachos is peace. Hashem gives His brachos when we honor Shabbos, but we need vessels to receive Hashem's brachos. The vessel is peace, shalom bayis, shalom with our fellow man, also in thought, and no machlokes.

We must always be cautious not to become angry, but it is even more important not to become angry on Shabbos because anger on Shabbos can cause us to forfeit receiving Hashem's amazing brachos.

It states (Shemos 35:3), לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם, ביום השבת, "Do not kindle a fire in all your dwelling places on the Shabbos day." Literally, this means we may not make a fire on Shabbos. However, the *Zohar* says this is referring to the fire of anger. We must be cautious not to become angry on Shabbos because then we will lose all the brachos and wealth that come from Shabbos.

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l gives a *mashal* of an oil merchant who came to a town to sell oil. Everyone came with their vessels, to have something to hold the oil. When their vessels were full, they said, "We want to buy more, but we don't have jugs to hold the oil."

The merchant replied, "I want to sell you more, but I have nowhere to put it."

The *nimshal* is that Hashem gives brachos, but we need a vessel in which to receive the brachos. From keeping and honoring Shabbos, one can receive tremendous *bracha*, but he needs a vessel. The vessel is peace. When that is lacking, the brachos come down, but there is nowhere for them to go.

Rebbe Eizik of Kaliv zt'l asked a merchant, "Do you have potatoes?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you have a basket?"

"No, I don't have that either."

Rebbe Aizik commented to his gabbai, "He doesn't have a basket, and therefore he doesn't have potatoes."

The point is that to receive *shefa*, bounty, a vessel is required to obtain the blessings.

And the primary vessel is peace and harmony.

The Navi (Malachim 2, 4) says that the wife of Navi Ovadyah told Elisha that her husband was niftar and that a creditor threatened to take her two sons as slaves for the payment.

Elisha asked her, "What do you have in your house?"

She replied that she had a jar of oil.

"Borrow empty vessels from your neighbors..." The oil in her jar became like a fountain, and she poured the oil and filled all the empty vessels. When all the vessels in the home were full, and there were no more, the oil stopped.

From this episode, the *meforshim* learn that vessels are required to receive bounty. One can't receive shefa if he doesn't have where to put it.

And, as we explained, the primary vessel is peace.¹

The Test is on Friday

The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that on Fridays, the yetzer hara works extra hard to get people angry and to put them in a lousy mood to prevent them from receiving Hashem's brachos that descend on Shabbos. Therefore, the Torah obligates us, לא תבערו, לא תבערו... בימים השבת, that we should avoid anger on Shabbos.²

1. Another vessel is hishtadlus. Hishtadlus creates a vessel in which Hashem places the parnassah.

Rebbe Mordechai of Neshchiz zt'l says that in the desert, the mon was packaged in טל, dew. Today, parnassah is essentially the mon, in a more physical form. It is also packaged in טל, the מלאכות, thirty-nine categories of work that people perform to earn their parnassah. This is the package, the vessel, with which Hashem gives us parnassah.

2. The Gemara (*Gittin* 52) tells us about a couple that the Satan caused to bicker every Friday evening. The holy *tana*, Reb Meir, came to pay them a visit on Friday because he knew they wouldn't fight in his presence. He went there for three weeks in a row, and then Reb Meir heard the Satan say, "Woe! Reb Meir drove me out of the house."

The Chasam Sofer explains that this story happens in many homes on Fridays. The yetzer hara comes and tries to disturb the peace to prevent them from receiving Hashem's blessings.

The holy sefarim write that if your wife or daughter etc., did something wrong on Erev Shabbos (they didn't clean or cook properly, and there are countless other examples), you shouldn't become angry with them. They aren't at fault. The culprit is the yetzer hara, who desires to stir up a fight in your home on Fridays. With this awareness, it is easier to avoid getting angry at that time.

The words of the Gemara are, ווי דאפקיה ר' מאיר להוויא גברא מביתיה, "Woe, Reb Meir drove *this man* out of his home." It seems that the Satan was referring to himself, that Reb Meir banished him from the house. So why does it state להוויא גברא, "that man"? The Satan isn't a man.

B'derech tzachus, we can answer that "that man" refers to the husband. Reb Meir taught the husband that he shouldn't be home too much on Fridays. He advised him to go to beis medresh to be maavir sedra, do some shopping, or take the children for a walk, but he shouldn't sit around at home. Reb Meir understood that this would help their shalom bayis. Sometimes, the best advice for shalom bayis is for the husband and the wife to give each other some breathing space.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 56:) says, "There are three signs of peace: a river, a bird, and a pot." When one sees a river, a bird, or a pot in his dream, it is a sign that he will have peace. The Gemara adds that when a person sees a pot in his dreams when he wakes up, he should say (*Yeshayah* 26:12), ד' ישפוט שלום לנו, "Hashem, arrange peace for us."

Why is a pot a sign of peace?

The miforshim explain that water and fire are opposites, but when a pot goes between them, they can coexist and unite to create a better product.

Reb Moshe Aryeh Freund zt'l (the Rav of Yerushalayim) heard the following story from his father-in-law. His father-in-law and a friend were in the *beis hachayim* (cemetery) in Lemberg, and they saw a *kever*, which read, "Here lies the *tzaddik nistar*, a hidden *tzaddik*..." It was alongside the *kever* of the Rav of Lemberg.

They went to the *chevra Kadisha* and asked them about this *tzaddik nistar*. The *chevra kadisha* replied, "If you pay us for the effort, we can open up the files (*pinkus*) of the *chevra kadisha* and check. After paying the price, the *chevra kadisha* searched their notes and found the following:

One Erev Shabbos, the Lemberger Rav went to the *mikvah* where he met a poor person. The poor man tapped the Lemberger Rav on his back with a broom and said, "You fasted today, you fasted yesterday, and so did I."

He tapped him again with the broom and said, "You fasted the entire week, and so did I because I didn't have money to buy food. The difference between us will be seen tonight because you will have challah, fish, soup, and a full meal, but I will have only dry bread and a drop of water. But if you hear that a cat ate your portion of fish and you will become angry, you will lose all the merits you earned from your fast."

That night, the Rebbetzin didn't serve fish. She informed the Rav that a cat had eaten his portion. The Rav of Lemberg was shocked. The poor man had *ruach hakodesh*! He followed the poor man's counsel and didn't become angry.

He told his *shamash* to bring the poor man to him. Now that he discovered the holiness of this unassuming poor man, he wanted to get to know him better. When the *shamash* arrived at the poor man's home, the man said, "I am from the thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim*, and now that my identity has been revealed, I will be *niftar*. It is a shame the Lemberger Rav didn't come himself to call me. I would have told him secrets of the Torah."

The *shamash* quickly returned and repeated what he had heard. The Lemberger Rav rushed to the poor man's home, but it was too late. The *tzaddik nistar* had already passed on to the next world.

Reb Moshe Aryeh repeated this story, which he heard from his father-in-law, and added: Take note of the importance of avoiding anger (especially on Shabbos). The *tzaddik nistar* allowed himself to be revealed, even though he knew this meant his demise, to prevent the Lemberger Rav from becoming angry.

One early Friday morning, the Beis Aharon zt'l was traveling with his son, Reb Asher zt'l, and they saw smoke coming out of every chimney. The women of this town were already awake, baking and cooking for Shabbos. The Beis Aharon told his son, "Women could obtain *ruach hakodesh* from their cooking, baking, and preparing for Shabbos, but anger ruins it."

The Berditchever Rav zt'l said the same statement regarding cleaning for Pesach. When women clean for Pesach, they can attain *ruach hakodesh*. But if they become angry, they lose this opportunity.³

The pot represents peace as it creates a barrier between two opposing forces. So, we see that, at times, division is beneficial. Also, in the home, often when the husband spends less time in the house on Friday, it can improve the *shalom bayis*. So, we can explain that the Satan shouted, "Woe! Reb Meir sent יהוה גברא, the husband, out of the house. And if he isn't at home, the *yetzer hara* won't be able to bring them to *machlokes*."

3. The Reishis Chachmah zt'l writes in the name of his teacher, the Remak zt'l, that erev Shabbos, we should prepare large *lecht*, prepare the bed, and remove all cobwebs from the house. "And I will reveal a secret: These [cobwebs] are the *kelipos* that try to ruin the *shalom bayis*."

Counsels for Peace

How can we overcome anger?

The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l said that in public, such as at the workplace or in a beis medresh, people generally control their anger. They don't want to make a scene in front of others. The true test of anger is at home. The Chozeh, therefore, advises that before you enter your home in the morning and at night, make a kabbalah, a firm decision, that you will control your anger. The Chozeh said that this is hinted in the words (Bamidbar 28:4) את הכבש אחד תעשה בבקר ואת הכבש השני תעשה בין הערבים, "One כבש you shall offer up in the morning, and the other כבש you shall offer up in the afternoon." Literally, כבש is a lamb, and the pasuk discusses the two daily *korbanos tamid*. The Chozeh says that כבש can also be translated to mean "to press down, to control." The pasuk alludes to the two times each day that a person is tested with anger. One is in the morning when he comes home from shacharis, and the second time is towards evening when he comes home from work. The Torah warns us that at these two times, כבש control your anger.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l says that every person has his boundary. He can be very rational regarding most matters, but when someone or something threatens his soft spot, he can act totally unreasonable. For some, their threshold is honor; for others, their limit is money; for others, it is jealousy or some other matter. They are fine, great people, but when their money is threatened (or whatever else is their boundary), they lose their minds and can do the most foolish things to protect themselves.⁴

The pasuk states (Tehillim 147:14) השם גבולך שלום חלב חטים ישיבעך, "Within your borders He makes peace; with the best of the wheat, He will sate you." The Chasam Sofer explains that the pasuk is saying that you should make שלום, peace, your boundary. The goal of peace should be so important to you that it should be your boundary, the place where you will act irrationally to attain it.

For example, logic tells you that this person did something wrong and that you have reason to be upset with him. But for the sake of peace, you think ridiculously, and you come up with all kinds of reasons why you can't be angry at him. You tell yourself, "He didn't mean it. He didn't do

The Kaf HaChaim (*siman* 250) writes that the spiderwebs should be removed before the 5th hour of the day (an hour before *chatzos*) because that is when the light of Shabbos begins to shine.

Rebbe Hershele of Ziditchov zt'l recommended spreading the Shabbos tablecloth Friday before midday as a segulah for shalom bayis.

As a segulah for refuah, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l advises that wine and challoos should be on the table already on Friday morning, before daybreak.

Humor is also mesugal for shalom bayis. Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz zt'l was once giving a *drashah* in his yeshiva when a nudnik interrupted him and asked, "Why are the mouth and the eyes set in the face while the ears and the nose protrude?"

Reb Chaim replied calmly, "The ears and the nose protrude to hold up the eyeglasses," everyone laughed, and he continued teaching.

With wisdom and humor, he avoided anger. Humor can be used at home, as well, to increase peace.

A woman shouted and hollered at her husband and then poured a bucket of water on him. He responded, "I'm not surprised. After thunder and lightning always come the pouring rain."

4. This is the reason you see people fighting for honor. It is irrational. The fight for honor, itself, belittles them, but people act irrationally when their weaknesses are challenged.

it." You tell yourself whatever you can because peace is so important to you; you refuse to think angry thoughts. And when you do so, הלב חטים ישיב, you will receive parnassah in abundance.

Focus on the Good of Others

Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l was walking through a forest to get to Lizhensk, but he lost his way and couldn't find his way out. An elderly person arrived and walked him out of the forest.

As they walked, the old man taught Rebbe Dovid two essential lessons on getting along with one's fellow man. He said, when one wants to connect two wooden planks, but one of them has a protruding knob, you don't cut out the knob. Instead, you should make an indentation on the other plank, and then they will be able to bind together.

Furthermore, don't focus on the faults of others. Focus on your faults. See the many things that you have to fix. And when you look at your fellow man, see only his qualities and goodness.

After saying these two things and showing Rebbe Dovid the way out of the forest, the old man disappeared. That is when Rebbe Dovid understood that this old man was Eliyahu HaNavi, who taught him two wonderful *itzos* for attaining peace.

Instead of focusing on other people's faults, and instead of trying to change them by removing their 'knobs,' focus on your own faults. Carve yourself out to accommodate and accept your fellow man's knobs and imperfections.

It is easier to change yourself than to change others. So, instead of trying to remove your fellow man's knobs, find a way to accept and to ignore.⁵

5. I heard this story from a youngerman from Monsey, to whom this story occurred. I write it as he told it to me:

"I arrived at shul and found a Yid crying. I asked him why he was upset. He answered me that he had gotten divorced a few years before, and his son's bar mitzvah was that night, and he wasn't invited!

"I asked for the phone number of his former wife, he gave it to me, and I tried to convince her to invite her ex-husband to the bar mitzvah, but she refused.

"But then I had an idea: I told the father to make a bar mitzvah kiddush for his son on the Shabbos after the bar mitzvah. The father liked the idea. I spoke to the mother again, and she agreed (with certain conditions).

"I prepared a very large kiddush with delicious food. I spoke to the gabai of the beis medresh, and I told him the story, and about the grand kiddush I would be preparing. I said, 'Erev Shabbos, I will bring the kugels and the cholent.'

The gabai immediately replied, "You can't bring cholent. That is one of the *takanos* of the beis medresh."

"Why did you make this *takanah*?"

"The floor becomes very dirty, and we can't daven Minchah properly after a kiddush with cholent.'

"I replied, 'I will arrange for a goy to clean up the beis medresh. By minchah time, the beis medresh will be clean.'

"Shabbos morning, the gabai complained, 'Why did you make cholent? I told you that it is against the *takanos*!'

"I replied, 'You told me the problem is the mess. I hired a goy to clean up, so there won't be a mess in the beis medresh.'

"No,' the gabai insisted. 'This is a *takanah*, and it cannot be changed.'

Judge Favorably

A way to attain peace is to judge your fellow man favorably and give him the benefit of the doubt.

Once, in a yeshiva, the gabai called up a wealthy person for *maftir*. People started whispering, "Why did the gabai give *maftir* to the wealthy person? There's a *chasan* in the beis medresh, and *maftir* belongs to the *chasan*! Furthermore, this *chasan* is an orphan! The gabai shouldn't have slighted him by giving him a regular *aliyah*."

The *chasan* heard their hushed conversation and clarified the matter. "I asked the gabai not to give me *maftir* because the haftarah is long, and I'm shy to recite it."

Had the *chasan* remained silent, people would have judged the gabai wrongly. They would have said that his desire to flatter the wealthy man caused him to slight the *chasan*.

We must train ourselves to judge our fellow man favorably, especially since our first assumptions are often wrong.

Two neighbors didn't get along well. They didn't fight, but their conversations were always tense when they met.

But then something happened that could have turned this cold relationship into an outright fight. One of the neighbors told his Rav, "My neighbor's son is getting married, and they placed an empty envelope in my mailbox! It is obvious that they are hinting that they don't want me to come to the *chasunah*. And it isn't right. I'm a neighbor, after all. If that's how he wants it, I will stop pretending to like him. I will create a real *machlokes*..."

The Rav replied, "You must judge your neighbor favorably. Perhaps he forgot to put the invitation into the envelope."

The man replied, "Did you ever receive an invitation envelope with nothing inside?"

The Rav admitted that it never happened to him. "Nevertheless, you are obligated to judge him favorably."

"I asked the gabai when this *takanah* was made because a wealthy person made a kiddush a week earlier and served cholent. I said, 'It seems you made this *takanah* just this week. So I request that you postpone the implementation of the *takanah* for one week...'

The gabai refused to relent and stood by the kitchen door to prevent the serving of the cholent. But some clever bachurim passed the cholent out of the kitchen's window and back into the beis medresh from another window, and when the gabai returned to the beis medresh, he found cholent dishes on all the tables.

The gabai got so angry that he threw a plate of cholent at me. Now, my talis was more brown than white. He also wanted to throw me out of the beis medresh, and due to his attempts, my *beketche* tore. In the end, I remained in the beis medresh, dirty, ripped, and humiliated.

Back home, I didn't tell my wife what happened. I told her that the kiddush was beautiful, which it was (aside from a minor episode).

"But my wife saw on my son's expressions that something had happened, and she asked him to tell her, and my son told her what occurred. She was seething with anger, and she had the right to feel that way. I said, 'Let's not speak about this. And we will give the merit of our silence to our neighbor who is childless after seven years of marriage.'

"That year, the neighbor had a son. A few years afterward, they brought the son to the cheder where I teach, and I read the alef beis with the little boy. My *simchah* knew no bounds. To this day, the father doesn't know that his child was born through the merit of me remaining silent at a time of a *machlokes*. He attributes the miracle to a *brachah* he received from a *tzaddik*. But I know I gave him the merit, which blessed him with children."

Later that day, this man received an invitation in the mail to some other *chasunah*. He opened the envelope, and lo and behold, there was no invitation inside! Hashem showed him that sometimes people forget to place the invitation inside, and he should judge his neighbor favorably.

He saved the envelope as a remembrance to judge people favorably.

There was a *kollel yungerman* who was marrying off a child and asked his friends in the *kollel* to help him with the large expenses. They all gave him what they could because they knew he was poor. But when he handed out the wedding invitations, they discovered that the *chasunah* would be in the large Wagshall Hall, one of the luxurious halls in Bnei Brak. Now, his fellow *kollel* members were upset with him. "Is that why he took our money to make the *chasunah* in an expensive hall? Why can't he make his *chasunah* in a regular hall, like we do?"

But they kept their thoughts to themselves.

Shortly after this incident, a generous donor sent money to the *kollel*, and those in need had a right to come forward to receive a bonus. The man said, "Now that I'm making a *chasunah*, I certainly need this bonus."

But the person in charge of the distribution refused to give him money.

"Why am I less eligible than anyone else? Now that I am making a *chasunah*, I probably need the money more than others!"

The person in charge replied, "You have plenty of money. You don't need this bonus. How else can you make a *chasunah* in Wagshall's large hall?"

The *yungerman* replied, "If I could tell you why, you would understand. But I can't tell you." And he left.

Some *yungerleit* heard this exchange, and they judged this man wrongly. They didn't believe he had a valid explanation for spending so much money on the hall.

The following day, this *kollel yungerman* came to *kollel* and said to the person in charge of the distribution and to the other *yungerleit*, "I wasn't able to tell you yesterday, but I can tell you now. I don't have money, so I wanted to make the *chasunah* in Wagshall's small hall. I spoke with the manager of the hall to book the small hall. The manager asked me who my father was, and I told him. He exclaimed, 'Your father saved my life in the Holocaust! I searched for him for years so I could repay him.' The manager requested that I make the *chasunah* in the large hall, and he said he would give it to me for free, on condition that I don't tell anyone. Yesterday, I told him I'm losing money and my respect in the *kollel* due to this secret, so he allowed me to tell the story."

The entire *kollel* was ashamed that they suspected him. They learned to judge their fellow man favorably.

The following story is an example of people's tendency to judge people negatively, when often it is just an imagination.

A man needing money was walking to the home of a wealthy person he knew to ask for help. As he walked, he told himself, "I know he won't give me the money. He'll send me out emptyhanded."

He then rebuked himself for thinking so negatively about his fellow man. He told himself, "Why do you think so negatively? I did him a lot of favors in the past, and he owes me *hakoras hatov*. He probably will do a favor and lend me the money."

Then he told himself, "No, he certainly won't lend me the money. He will come up with some excuse and get out of it. And it is such a *chutzpah*! What type of friend is he? After all I did for him, he throws me out without giving a penny."

He carried these thoughts in his mind as he walked to his friend's home, but they were just imaginations. He didn't know whether his friend would help him or not.

When the friend opened the door, he blurted out, "I don't want your favors or your loan. Don't lend me the money. I don't want to know you ever again. Goodbye!" and slammed the door shut, leaving his wealthy friend quite bewildered.

Similarly, many machlokos are based on misunderstandings and assumptions that aren't real. When you judge your fellow man favorably, many arguments will fall away.

The Greatness of Bnei Yisrael

It states (*Shemos* 12), החודש הזה לכם, "Rosh chodesh shall be for you..." It is up to the Jewish nation to decide when *Rosh chodesh* will be, which reveals the greatness of the Jewish nation.

The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 15:2) states, "The *malachim* ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'When will it be yom tov?'... Hashem replies, 'Me and you will agree with whatever the Jewish nation decides. It is up to them whether there will be a leap year or not... Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Yisrael, 'Before, I had the strength... but from now on, it's in your hands. When you say yes, it's yes; when you say no, it's no. No matter what, החודש הזה לכם, establishing *rosh chodesh* is up to you. If you want to establish a leap year, I will agree with you.'"⁶

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* was ecstatic with this Midrash, and he would say, "The power is in our hands! When we say yes, it is yes; when we say no, it is no. Everything is up to us! If we knew our powers, we wouldn't waste a moment!" If we understood how our decisions and actions affect the entire world, we wouldn't take away from the time we have to serve Hashem and daven to Him.

We can be compared to a king who runs a country but doesn't realize he is king. Everything was given over to us, and we

just have to take advantage of that knowledge and reality.

We say in *Ashrei* (*Tehillim* 145:12), להודיע לבני האדם גבורותינו. The Yesod v'Shoresh HaAvodah *zt'l* says גבורותינו refers to the strength and greatness of the Jewish nation. The pasuk is saying, להודיע לבני האדם גבורותינו, "reveal to people their greatness." Let them know what they can accomplish with their Torah, Tefillah, and Mitzvos. Let them know how powerful they are.

Never Too Late

One of our strengths is our ability to change. We often believe that we don't have this strength. We say, "This is the way I am. This is how I was born. I can't change it," but it isn't so.

The Torah tells us (*Devarim* 16:22), ולא תקים לך, מוצבה אשר שנה ה' אלקיך, "You shall not erect for yourselves a *matzeivah*, which Hashem, your G-d, hates."

The מוצבה represents a person fixed in his ways (like a *matzeivah* that is set and fixed). The Torah says, ולא תקים לך מוצבה אשר שנה ה' אלקיך, "Don't be set in your ways. Hashem loves those who are always ready to turn over a new leaf and improve their ways.

It states in this week's parashah (11:9) כל אשר לו סנפיר וקשקשת... אתם תאכלו, "Anything in the water that has fins and scales, those you may eat..."

The Yerushalmi (*Taanis* 4:5) states that if a fish can't swim against the current, it isn't a kosher species. This suggests that a "kosher" person is someone who can go against the current to change his ways and do what's right.

Before the parasha discusses rosh chodesh, the Torah emphasizes that Hashem told Moshe about this mitzvah in Mitzrayim,

6. The Beis Avraham *zt'l* writes, החודש הזה לכם ראש, means the month of Nisan is *mesugal* to correct one's ראש, thoughts."

as it states (Shemos 12:1) ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן בארץ מצרים לאמר החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים. This tells us that even the people who were living in the impure land of Mitzrayim, at the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, they had the opportunity of becoming new. It is never too late to improve.

There was a bachur who was thrown out of his yeshiva. The Klausenberger Rebbe *zt'l* spoke to the bachur, and he promised to improve his ways. The Klausenberger Rebbe immediately called for a meeting with the *yeshiva's mashgiach*. The Rebbe told the *mashgiach* that the bachur promised not to continue in his foolish ways anymore.

The *mashgiach* responded, "He has promised this to me thousands of times, and then he goes back to his old ways."

The Klausenberger Rebbe tugged his white beard and said, "I'm already old. During these years, I promised Hashem more than a thousand times that I would improve, and I haven't done so yet. According to what you're saying, should I give up? Absolutely not. As long as a Yid lives, he has the potential to improve his ways..."⁷

The Birkas Avraham *zt'l* once traveled to Italy with his uncle, Reb Zelig Lider, an esrog merchant. They stopped at a hotel in Trieste and found a small *sefer* there. The *sefer* discussed what we say in Shacharis, המחדש בטובו בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית, that Hashem creates the world anew each day. The *sefer* asks, why does Hashem create the world anew? Hashem could have created the world once, and it would stand forever.

He answers that the daily creation of the world is to remind man that just as the world becomes new, he can renew himself, too.

Friday night, in the *zemiros*, we say, מלך סומך נופלים, that Hashem gives support and encouragement to those who have fallen. How does Hashem encourage us? מלך עושה מעשה בראשית, each day, Hashem creates the world anew. And this is our reminder that we can also improve our ways and become new.

Reb Shimshon Pinkus *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A town was situated at the bottom of a mountain, and the supermarket was on top. The townspeople had to climb the hill to shop, which was very hard for them.

A *baal chesed* in town bought a van to help people get to and from the supermarket. He advertised that he would go up and down the mountain three times a day and take whoever came, free of charge.

The van filled up to capacity on each trip to the store. He drove them to the store and then back home again.

But after a while, wear and tear took its toll on the van. The seats were ripped in several places, the air conditioner no longer worked, and the engine was weak. It got to the point that some passengers had to get out and push the van to get the motor started.

The town leaders met with the *baal chesed* and told him, "You did a great mitzvah for our city, but it is time to get you a new van. Everyone in the town will chip in and buy it for you."

The *baal chesed* refused. He said he performed so many mitzvos with the van; how could he stop using it?

7. It states (*Brachos* 4:), "Whoever says *Ashrei* three times each day is a בן עולם הבא; he will certainly merit Olam HaBa. Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* explained that this is because we conclude *Ashrei* with the words, ונאמרו נברך, "We will praise Hashem from now..." The key word is מעתה, to begin from now. When one starts anew, three times daily — always seeking to serve Hashem better than before — he is a ben Olam HaBa.

Reb Zalman would say, מעתה, "I am starting now. I am a new Zalman."

The town leaders convened and decided that if he didn't want to change the van, at least they could change the interior of the van. The exterior will be the same, but it will have a new motor, air conditioner, etc.

They came up with an excuse and borrowed the car keys for the night. In the middle of the night, they redid his van.

In the morning, people filled the van, and the *baal chesed* said, "Some people have to go outside to push the van," for that's what they did every morning.

They told him, "No, we don't. Put the key in the ignition and try."

He tried, and the van worked! He said, "How did this happen? Yesterday, it was so different!"

He turned on the air-conditioner, and it was working too, and they told him what had happened during the night. He said, "Externally, the van seems the same. But internally, everything is different."

The *nimshal* is that we go to sleep every night, and in the morning, we wake up like a new person. We appear the same, but we aren't the same. If we believe that we have become a new person, we can serve Hashem with renewed energy, and we might discover that things are really different. Even if we couldn't daven with kavanah or learn well yesterday, things might have changed. Since we have become new people, new things can happen.

Purim has just passed, and we have become new people. We might appear to be the same externally, but we are new people internally. (Like the van that looked the same on the outside but was different inside.) If you don't make an effort to recognize the changes that occurred and continue to act as you had previously, you will not realize how much potential is in you and how much has changed.

Similarly, Nisan is a time for change. We must believe in our potential and try to discover our true selves.

Shabbos HaChodesh

The Midrash (*Shemos* 15:2) states:

Malachim ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam, when will You make *yom tov*...?"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, "Me and you will agree to whatever the Jewish nation decides..."

Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Bnei Yisrael, "In the past, it was in My hands... From now on it is in your hands. When you say yes, it is yes. When you say no, it is no. החודש הזה לכם, the new month is up to you. And even if you want to have a leap year, I accede to your judgment..."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* taught this Midrash and expressed, "Everything was given over to us! Everything is in our hands! If a person knows this and discovers who he is and what is his potential, he won't waste a moment."

לכם החודש הזה teaches us a fundamental concept. Hashem gave over *rosh chodesh*, leap years, and ultimately everything into our hands. Hashem and the *malachim* take counsel from and hearken to the decisions of Klal Yisrael.

This tells us that the Jewish nation is also empowered with the power of tefillah. This is implied in the words of the Midrash, "When you say yes, it is yes. When you say no, it is no." The Jewish nation was given immense power and influence.

Nisan

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

The *Mishnah Berurah* explains, "The twelve *nesi'im* brought *korbanos* [on the first twelve days of Nisan], and on the day that one brings a *korban*, it is his *yom tov*. Then

there's *erev Pesach*, and Pesach, and *isru chag* when we don't say *tachanun*. Since most of the month is holy we make the rest of the month holy [and we don't say *tachanun* the entire month of Nisan]."

The Shlah HaKodesh expresses another reason we don't say *tachanun* in the month of Nisan. It is because each day in Nisan is like *rosh chodesh*. This is alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 12:2), *החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים*, "This month is for you *rosh chodoshim*." The entire month is holy like *rosh chodesh*.⁸

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. א' ניסן represents Nisan, ב' ניסן represents Iyar, ג' ניסן represents Sivan, and so on.

The following story is renowned among the Chozeh's students (and is written in *Agra d'Kalah, Pekudei*):

The first twelve days of Nisan, which corresponds to the twelve months of the year, the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* would perceive what would happen that year, and he would always make a note of it. On א' ניסן he would write what would happen in Nisan. ב' ניסן he would write what would happen that year in Iyar, ג' ניסן he would write what would happen in Sivan, and so on. And obviously, his predictions were always correct.

In the final year of his life, he wrote what he perceived with his *ruach hakodesh* would happen that year until the month Av, but he didn't write down what would happen after that. His students wondered about that. But then he was *niftar* that year in Av, and it was understood why he didn't write that month.

We must know that Nisan is a very holy time, and we should strive to use these days well, and to fill them with Torah, tefillah, and good deeds.

The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* writes in a letter (see *Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim* 336):

"Shalom to my honored friend, the renowned *gaon* and genius, Reb Chaim, who was previously the Rav of Moscow:

"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. Nevertheless, since you expressed your strong desire that I answer you and you wrote that it would be your *simchas yom tov*, I devoted some time to writing this letter..."

In the Avnei Nezer's words, אם כי הקשה, לשאול כי ימים אלו יקרי הערך שעה ליום יחשב, "You asked me for something difficult because these days are extremely valuable. One hour is like a day."

The Avnei Nezer's son, the Shem MiShmuel *zt'l*, testified that in Nisan, "My father was, מסובב והולך בעולמות העליונים, walking about in the upper worlds." He was more in heaven than on earth (*Avir HaRo'im* 264).

The Shem MiShmuel once heard his father say that he doesn't need to sleep in Nisan due to the holiness of these days (*Avir HaRo'im* 299).

The entire month of Nisan is special, and *rosh chodesh* is especially important. Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* (*Pri Tzaddik, HaChodesh* 6) writes, "The holiness of the entire month lies...in *rosh chodesh*."

8. The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* writes, "Don't think that it is only in Nisan [that the entire month is like *rosh chodesh*]. The same is true for the other months. Because when someone observes *rosh chodesh* properly the entire month becomes like *rosh chodesh*. As [the saying goes], גופא בתר רישה אזיל, 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 properly on *rosh chodesh*, which will make the whole month good. Even if just one hour on *rosh chodesh* is kept correctly, the entire month will be imbued with the holiness of *rosh chodesh*."

In the year 5747, on the night of *rosh chodesh Nisan*, I attended a family *chasunah*, and I expressed to a relative that I was surprised that the wedding was scheduled so close to Pesach. "It is a difficult time. People are so busy now."

My relative replied, "The *mechutanim* asked [your grandfather] Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov to suggest a date for the *chasunah*, and he said 'Rosh chodesh Nisan is the most beautiful day of the year.'"

Kashrus

The Chasam Sofer asked two members of his community to meet with the mayor of Pressburg. He told them to meet immediately because the issue was urgent.

The delegates spoke to the mayor's secretary and told him that they must talk to the mayor immediately. "All slots are filled for today," the secretary said. "If you want, we can schedule it for next week..."

The delegates explained to the secretary that the matter was urgent and couldn't be postponed.

Their determination and efforts paid off, and the secretary brought them to the mayor.

The mayor offered them a cup of coffee. "No, thank you," they replied, since the milk wasn't *chalav Yisrael*.

"Why don't you drink it?" the mayor asked angrily. "Is it because it isn't kosher?"

That indeed was the reason.

The mayor said, "If I offer you a drink, you should accept it!" and went on and on.

Just then, the secretary opened the door. "Mayor! Did you have coffee?"

"No," the mayor shouted. "I was about to, but these fellows disappointed me. I offered them a coffee, but they declined because of kashrus."

"Good," the secretary replied. "I'm glad you didn't have the coffee because the milk

is contaminated. Many people drank from the milk and became sick. The doctor checked the milk and said it was filled with unhealthy germs."

The mayor immediately lowered his tone and spoke to the two delegates respectfully. He told them, "I always admired the rabbis of the Jewish nation; they are so wise. I forgot about that, of late, and I was considering banishing all Jews from Pressburg. But now that you reminded me of the wisdom of the Jewish sages, I will cancel the decree."

The two delegates told the Chasam Sofer what happened at the meeting. The Chasam Sofer replied that there was a *kitrug* in heaven on the Jewish community because they weren't careful with kashrus and with םהלג עכו"ם. In the merit of the delegate's *mesirus nefesh* to keep the laws of kashrus, the decree was abolished. (Heard from Reb Elchanan Halperin *zt'l* of Radumishla, in the name of his father-in-law, Reb Shmuel Unsdorfer *zt'l*, a descendant of the Chasam Sofer.)

The halachos of kashrus are discussed this week. It is important to be cautious with kashrus, for two reasons. One is that we don't want to eat non-kosher food, not even accidentally. As the Or HaChaim (*Vayikra* 11:43) writes, "Klal Yisrael should be careful, and not eat non-kosher foods, not even by accident, because by accident and on purpose are the same in regards with this matter, for even by accident, one becomes impure..."

The second problem applies even when he guessed correctly and the food was kosher. Nevertheless, his lax attitude causes him to lose his protection. Because those who are cautious about using the best *hechsherim* and don't take any chances, receive *siyata dishmaya*, and Hashem always helps them eat kosher. But if one is lax, he loses his divine protection.

The Or HaChaim says that this is indicated in the words (11:44), והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים. As the Or HaChaim writes, תעשו גדרים וסייגים לכל, "Put תטמאו ובוזה אני מבטיחכם שתהוי קדושים" "Put

safeguards and precautions that you shouldn't become impure [with non-kosher food] and I guarantee you that you will be holy [and protected from eating non-kosher]."⁹

Similarly, Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "Regarding food, one can transgress many *aveiros*. There are the forbidden fats (חלב), blood, and insects; there are also *כלאים* and *טבל* and other prohibitions. But if a person is always careful, to the best of his ability, and always checks food before he eats it, Hashem will help him that the food he eats will be kosher, and he will not sin, even accidentally..."

The Be'er Mayim Chayim (*Chayei Sarah* ויאמר אברהם) bemoans how people aren't careful with kashrus. He writes, "In our generation... if someone claims he's a *shochet*, people trust him. They don't check him out to find out whether he is reliable... And if someone brings wine, milk, fish, or foods that need to be checked for worms, or any other food that may have a kashrus issue...people say, 'The person who brought it is a religious Yid. Why should we suspect that it isn't kosher? ... But if someone asks them for a loan, they suddenly speak differently. They don't trust anyone before verifying that he is trustworthy...because they fear he might not get paid back. This is because money is the most important thing in the world for them. Mitzvos are less important to them, and therefore they assume that even if it isn't perfect, it's also o.k..."

The Be'er Mayim Chaim describes how Avraham Avinu was the exact opposite. When it came to money matters, he trusted Eliezer wholly. But when it came to mitzvos, such as finding a shidduch for Yitzchak, he didn't trust Eliezer until Eliezer swore to him that he would do as he directed. The

Be'er Mayim Chaim writes, "The Torah testifies about Avraham Avinu, אברהם אהובי, 'Avraham who loves me.' Avraham didn't love anything, only Hashem's *mitzvos*. Everything else paled in comparison. He permitted Eliezer to be in charge of his wealth, but when it came to *mitzvos* he didn't trust him..."

This week's *parashah* also discusses the prohibition against eating worms and bugs. As it states (11:43), אל תשקצו את נפשתיכם בכל השרץ, "You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping creature that creeps, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, that you should become unclean through them."

The Or HaChaim elaborates, "A person must be extremely careful not to eat anything that might be infested with worms. Especially in recent generations, because the atmosphere and the earth have become polluted (in a spiritual sense), and everything that grows has worms and bugs. Therefore, the cautious should be aware."

Many chassidim have the custom of eating *shalosh seudos* in the dark. This custom began in the past when there wasn't electricity yet. There were candles and lamps on Friday night, but by *shalosh seudos* time, the candles were extinguished, so they sat in the dark. But whatever the origin of this custom, there is certainly something extraordinary about singing inspirational songs in the dark. My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, spoke longingly for this custom. He said he would do the same but was concerned that he wouldn't see what he was eating in the darkness. There might be an insect in his food, and he won't know about it.

9. Being careful with kashrus is also *mesugal* to be protected from the gentile nations. Therefore, the *pasuk* concludes, ולא תטמאו... בכל השרץ, "You will not become impure... by the insects..." and the Or HaChaim writes, "The *pasuk* is hinting that by keeping this mitzvah, the Jewish nation will not be ruled by the nations of the world, which are called שרצים ושקצים הרומשים על הארץ."

More on Kashrus

חזיר means to return, and there is a Midrash that states, עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא להחזירו לנו, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu will return it to us." Many understand this to mean that there will be a time when a חזיר will be kosher.

This arouses a question because it is known that the Torah won't ever change. How can it be that a chazir will become permitted in the future? The Or HaChaim HaKadosh (11:7) says that the Torah won't change; it is the חזיר that will change. There are two simanim needed for animals to be kosher. They have to chew their cud and have split hooves. Although the chazir has split hooves, it doesn't chew its cud. In the future, it will chew its cud, so it will have two simanim and be kosher. This is implied in the words of the pasuk והוא גרה לא יגר טמא הוא, "If it does not regurgitate its cud, it is tamei for you." The pasuk is stating a condition. It is only לא יגור, when it doesn't chew its cud. In the future, it will chew its cud, and then it will become kosher..." So, it isn't the Torah that changes, but rather the situation.

The Torah teaches two simanim for animals to be kosher: split hooves and chewing the cud. The Torah (11:4-7) lists four animals with only one siman and are, therefore, not kosher. The animals listed are camel, hyrax, hare, and chazir.

Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes that these four animals represent the four galuyos: Bavel (the camel/גמל), Yavan (the hyrax/שפן), Madai (hare/ארנבת), and the chazir is galus Edom.

In this week's parashah, there are four pasukim, each pasuk designated to discuss one of these four animals. In parashas Re'eh (Devarim 14:7-8), three animals are mentioned in one pasuk, while chazir, representing Edom, is written alone. This indicates that the galus of Edom will be long and equivalent to all the other three galuyos.

In Tehillim (136), it states four times הודו לה' to thank Hashem for the salvations that Hashem will give us in these four galuyos. The first three הודו are written at the beginning of the chapter (הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו...), to thank Hashem for the salvations Hashem will perform for us in the three galus of Bavel (who destroyed the first Beis HaMikdash), Yavan (the miracle of Chanukah) and Madai (the miracle of Purim). The final pasuk of the chapter is הודו לא"ל השמים כי לעולם חסדו. This alludes to the final galus, praising Hashem that He will save us from this galus. It is listed alone, the same as in parashas Re'eh, the chazir is listed alone, to represent the hardships and the length of this bitter galus.

חזיר means return. Why is the animal called חזיר?

Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes three versions of a Midrash that explains why this animal is called חזיר. One is because שעתידי הקדוש ברוך הוא להחזיר עליהן מדת הדין, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu will return onto the [Edomites] Hashem's judgment."

A second version in the Midrash states, שעתידי להחזיר עטרה לראשה, "She will return the crown onto its head." This means that the Edomite nation will build the third Beis HaMikdash. The first two Batei Mikdash were built by Yidden, and Edom, who destroyed the Beis HaMikdash will come and build it.

A third version of the Midrash is: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא להחזירו לנו, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu will return it to us."

Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes, "Many understand this to mean that the chazir will one day be kosher for the Jewish nation." Rabbeinu b'Chayei disagrees. "Rather, it is referring to Edom's strength, which used its strength to cause tzaros for Yisrael. In the future, Edom will come with all its strength to support Yisrael..."

Ahavas Yisrael

We quoted above from the Or HaChaim HaKodesh that גרה לא יגור means that the chazir is only unkosher when it doesn't chew its cud. In the future, it will chew its cud and become kosher.

Today, the chazir has solely one siman. The Bas Ayin explains that this hints to people who show that they love their fellow man but are full of hatred in their hearts. This means that they have only one siman, the siman of showing that they love their fellow man, but they lack the other siman, the siman of when their love is for real. In the future, the chazir will have two simanim. This means that in the future, ahavas Yisrael will be genuine and real. People will show that they love their fellow man, and it will be true. The Bas Ayin says that when it is so, Moshiach will come.

On the topic of ahavas Yisrael, we share the following story:

A chassid of the Pnei Menachem zt'l was very worried about an operation in the hospital that was scheduled for immediately after Pesach. The Pnei Menachem asked him for the name of his doctor, and then the Pnei Menachem said, "You don't have to do the operation. Call the doctor tomorrow and cancel the appointment. You will be healed without the operation."

The man was overjoyed because he didn't want to undergo the surgery. The entire yom tov he was relieved and happy, and he enjoyed the yom tov together with his family.

Motzei Pesach, the Pnei Menachem summoned for this chasid and he asked him about the upcoming operation. The chasid replied, "There won't be an operation. The Rebbe told me to cancel the appointment."

"No," the rebbe replied. "You need the operation. Call up the doctor tonight and reschedule the operation for tomorrow."

"How is that possible?" the chasid asked. "It is impossible to make an appointment from one day to the next. There is always a waiting time."

The Pnei Menachem replied, "Even so, try. Perhaps someone canceled. Perhaps you can have your operation tomorrow!"

The chasid called his doctor, and the operation was performed the next day.

Sometime later, the chasid discovered what occurred. After the Pnei Menachem advised his chasid to cancel the operation, the Pnei Menachem immediately called the doctor and said, "My chasid will call you shortly to cancel his appointment. Tell him that you are canceling it, but don't do so. Keep the appointment for him, and he will come on time to his appointment."

The rebbe did this because when he saw how worried his chasid was about the operation, he wanted to give him some solace. The chasid trusted the rebbe, so he prepared for the yom tov Pesach and celebrated the yom tov without worry. After yom tov passed, it was time to get the chasid to go to the appointment for the surgery he needed.