

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Shemos



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Shemos

Everything is for the Good

It states in the Torah (1:14) וימררו את חייהם, "And they embittered their lives," referring to the Mitzriyim making the lives of the Jewish people so miserable. We would assume that these words would be chanted in a bitter, sad tune, but the trop on these words is קדמא ואזלא, which is a relatively happy tune. Rebbe Yitzchak Vorke zt'l explains that this is because the bitter work freed Bnei Yisroel from galus. They were supposed to be in Mitzrayim for 400 hundred years, but because of the hard labor, they were freed from Mitzrayim after 210 years. This was something to rejoice about, a happy matter. קדמא ואזלא can be translated as "they left early."

The same is true with all hardships in life. There is always a silver lining; there is always a reason to see that whatever is happening is for our good.

At the end of the parashah, Moshe asks Hashem (5:22) למה הרעתה לעם הזה למה זה שלחתיני, "Why have You harmed this nation? Why have You sent me?"

Hashem replied (6:1) עתה תראה אשר אעשה, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a mighty hand he will send them out..."

The key word here is ועתה, "**now** you will see." You asked why I harmed the nation, but it was so I could redeem them "now." Otherwise, we would have to wait another 110 years.

ולכהן מדין שבע בנות ותבאנה ותדלגנה ותמלאנה (2:16-17) את הרהטים להשקות צאן אביהן ויבאו הרועים ויגרשום, "And to the kohen of Midian was seven daughters, and they came and drew [water], and they filled the troughs to water their father's flocks. But the shepherds came and drove them away." It seems that things were

bad for Yisro. His daughters were the only people working for him, and they constantly struggled with the shepherds.

This is the story:

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:32) says, "Yisro was a komer, a priest for avodah zarah, and he recognized that avodah zarah was all foolishness. So he chose to do teshuvah. He came to this realization before Moshe arrived. He called together the people of his city and said, 'Until now, I served you, but now I am old. Choose another priest.' They put Yisro in cherem [because they understood that he no longer believed in their avodah zarah]. They decreed that no one take care of his sheep or work for him. He sought shepherds to tend to his sheep, but he couldn't find any. Therefore, his daughters had to take out the sheep. They would go out early because they were afraid of the shepherds.

"[We can verify that Yisro was in cherem from the words ויבאו הרועים ויגרשום, 'The shepherds came and drove them away.' Could it be that Yisro was the head priest, and the shepherds were chasing away his daughters? It must be that they put him in cherem. This is the reason they would chase away his daughters."

Yisro might have wondered, "Is this what I deserve for recognizing the truth and returning to Hashem? Why must I suffer so much?"

But in time, it was discovered that it was for Yisro's benefit. His daughter, Tzipora, married Moshe. He earned the great honor and privilege of being Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law. This came about when Moshe helped Yisro's daughters, gave water to the sheep, and saved them from the shepherds. If it weren't for Yisro's problems, likely,

Yisro wouldn't have heard of Moshe Rabbeinu.

This is a lesson for all people who are going through hard times. We must believe that very good things will come from our challenges and hardships.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:26) tells that when Moshe was a young child, growing up in Pharaoh's home, "Pharaoh would kiss him and hug him. Moshe would take Pharaoh's crown off Pharaoh's head and put it on his own." Pharaoh's sorcerers and advisors said, "We fear that this is the child that will take away your kingdom in the future." Some of his advisors told Pharaoh to kill or burn Moshe, r'l.

Yisro was one of Pharaoh's advisors, and he said, "He is just a child. He doesn't know what he is doing. Test him by putting a tray with gold and hot coals before Moshe. If he takes the gold, that's a sign that he has intelligence and knows what he is doing. But if he takes the coals, that proves he is acting childish."

The Midrash writes, "Moshe immediately put out his hand to take the gold, and Malach Gavriel pushed his hand to grab the coals. He put his hand to his mouth and burned his tongue. This caused his speech to become impaired.

When this story occurred, it looked like a tragedy for the child. His hand hurt, his mouth hurt, and he was maimed for life. This was, in fact, a great chesed and an incredible miracle. It saved Moshe from death. This reminds us that when something seems bad for us, we only see half of the picture. If we knew more details, we would understand that it is good for us.

Moshe complained to Hashem (5:22-23) למה הרעת לעם הזה למה זה שלחתיני, ומאז באתי אל פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה והצל לא הצלת את עמך, "Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this nation, and You have not saved Your people."

Hashem replied (6:1), עתה תראה אשר אעשה, לפרעה כי ביד חזקה ישלחם וביד חזקה יגרשם מארצו, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a mighty hand he will send them out, and with a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land." Rashi writes, "You have questioned My ways [of running the world]... Therefore, עתה תראה, now you will see. You will see what will be done to Pharaoh, but you won't see..." the miracles I will perform for the Jewish nation to conquer the seven kings living in Eretz Canaan.

Moshe complained to Hashem, and he was punished. He was not granted permission to enter Eretz Yisrael. The Ohev Yisrael zt'l (beginning of Va'are) explains that this, too, was for Moshe's benefit. Moshe understood that it was good that he couldn't go to Eretz Yisrael.

The Ohev Yisrael explains:

If Moshe had come to Eretz Yisrael, the seven nations would have fallen before the Jewish people without saying a word. Moshe would immediately build a Beis HaMikdash. But a Beis Hamikdash built by Moshe would never be destroyed (see Sotah 9.). The destruction of the Beis HaMikdash was for the benefit of Bnei Yisrael because שפך חמתו על עצים ואבנים, Hashem poured out his wrath on the wood and stones of the Beis HaMikdash, and the Jewish nation survived. But what would happen to the Jewish nation when they sin before Hashem if Moshe would build the Beis HaMikdash, which could never be destroyed?

Moshe knew all of this, and he was at peace with the decree forbidding him entry to Eretz Yisrael.

The Ohev Yisrael concludes, "This is according to pshat, and there are other concealed reasons, as discussed in the holy sefarim."

So, once again, what seemed to be a tragedy was for the good, and it is always that way.

Salvation will Certainly Come

It states (2:4) ותתצב אחותו מרחוק, "His sister (Miriam) stood from afar, to know what would be done to him." The Chofetz Chaim (al HaTorah) explains, "Miriam knew that Moshe would be saved from the water, but she didn't know how he would be saved until he was taken by Pharaoh's daughter. From here, we learn that there is a salvation for every trouble. Although we don't know what the yeshuah will be, we should trust Hashem, Who is always renewing the world, and is always seeking to save us and redeem us from our tzaros."

It states (3:16, 18) לך ואספת את זקני ישראל ואמרת (3:16, 18) אליהם ה' אלקי אבותיכם נראה אלי אלקי אברהם יצחק ויעקב, "Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The G-d of your forefathers has appeared to me, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, saying, ... פקד פקדתי אתכם...'" "I have surely remembered you and what is being done to you in Egypt, and they will hearken to your voice." Rashi explains that the Jewish nation had a mesorah from Yosef HaTzaddik that the redeemer will use the words פקד פקדתי, and therefore when Moshe says these words, the nation will certainly believe.

The Shlah Hakodesh (22) explains that צ"ה are the letters that appear before פק"ד. This hints that (Megillah 13:) "Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepares the refuah before the tzarah. Hashem will undoubtedly save us, for the salvation is already in place. When we believe it, we will merit seeing the salvation occur.

There is a rule of nature that when something feels that it is about to be destroyed and banished, it fights back and becomes stronger to try to prevent it from occurring. The Kli Yakar gives some examples. One is that the darkest part of the night is moments before alos hashachar (daybreak). The sefarim tell us that the night becomes darker moments before dawn because the night senses that it is about to be banished by daylight, so it fights back and becomes even darker.

Also, he writes that the end of the winter is the coldest part of the winter. This is because the winter feels that it will soon be driven away by spring heat, so it fights back and becomes even colder.

Also, the ill, before their death, generally become stronger. They might not have spoken for a long time, but now they speak and ask for food. They become stronger, trying to fight off their approaching death.

The Kli Yakar explains that when Pharaoh increased the labor load in Mitzrayim, that was a good sign. That was a sign that Pharaoh felt he would soon be removed, so he fought back with greater strength. Unfortunately, matters worsened for Yidden in Mitzrayim; the workload increased, but just for a short time, and then salvation came.

The Kli Yakar explains with this Hashem's words עתה תראה, "Now you will see."

He writes, "עתה is answering the question of למה הרעתה, 'Why have You harmed...!' It is because it is now the time for Pharaoh to send out the Jewish people from Mitzrayim; therefore, he is trying to overcome them with a mighty hand. But this is a sign that salvation is about to come."

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei (5:22) says that the future redemption will be similar to what occurred in Yetzias Mitzrayim, as it states (Michah 7:15) כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים אראנו נפלאות, "As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders." Just as in Mitzrayim, the workload became harder, and then they were redeemed; the same will occur in the future. "When the geulah is near, there will be many tzaros, and that is a sign that the salvation of Yisrael is about to occur."

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei says that this is alluded to in the pasuk (Tehillim 130:6) נפשי לה' משומרים לבוקר שומרים לבוקר, "My soul is to Hashem among those who await the morning, those who await the morning."

Morning is written twice because we are waiting for two mornings. First, the redemption will begin, that is, the first morning. But then it will become dark again (with the galus trying, with all its might, to keep us in it), and then the second morning of the redemption will arrive.

This also applies to the redemption of each individual. Sometimes, you see the light at the end of the tunnel, and then suddenly, it becomes dark again. The darkness is a sign of imminent salvation.

Tefillah is the Key

The Rayatz of Lubavitch zt'l says, "People think that all they need to do is wait for Moshiach, but they forget that in Mitzrayim, they needed tefillah, too, and only then they were saved."

This is perhaps surprising. Hashem promised Avraham that he would take the Jewish nation out of Mitzrayim. The time had arrived, but they required tefillos. Without tefilla, the Yidden wouldn't leave Mitzrayim. Everything is attained through tefillah.

It states (2:23-24) ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויצעקו ויהי קול השירה מן העבודה, "And Bnei Yisrael sighed from the labor, they cried out, and their cry ascended to Hashem from the labor." וישמע אלקים את ברייתו, "And Hashem heard their cry, and Hashem remembered His covenant," and Hashem remembered his promise to the Avos that he will take the Yidden out of Mitzrayim.

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes, "The time for redemption had arrived, but they didn't deserve to be saved. They davened a lot to Hashem, and Hashem accepted their tefillos. This teaches us that the future redemption depends on teshuvah and tefillah. To be redeemed from Mitzrayim, they needed teshuvah and tefillah", and also, to be

redeemed from our present galus, we need tefillos.

Hashem performed many miracles by Yetzias Mitzrayim, but one miracle didn't occur, the healing of Moshe Rabbeinu's speech impediment. Moshe said to Hashem (4:10) כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי, "I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." The Ramban writes, "Moshe said, 'Don't command me to go to Pharaoh because it isn't proper that the Master of all should send a messenger with a speech impediment to speak to a king of a country.'"

The solution was that Hashem heals Moshe. The Ramban writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't heal Moshe because Moshe didn't daven for it." Nothing happens without tefillah.¹

Think about a person who has permission to take whatever he wants from the king's treasury. He arrives at the treasury but doesn't have the key! He can't get inside! He can't take anything! This is what happens to a person who doesn't daven. Hashem wants to give us so much, but we must open His treasury. We open it with tefillah.

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l gives a mashal of a wealthy person who says to a poor man, "Come to my office, and I will give you money." The poor man never came, so he never received. Hashem wants to give us wealth, shidduchim, health, and more, but sometimes, the only way to get it is with tefillah. If you don't ask, you don't get it.

Rebbe Dovid'l, the Tolna Rebbe zt'l arrived at the inn of a Jewish couple, and he asked them to give him a lot of money. The amount he asked for was their entire savings. The couple debated it among themselves until they decided to give what the Rebbe requested.

1. Moshe didn't daven because he didn't want to be the shaliach. Moreover, he was concerned that his older brother Aharon would be jealous of him if he became the leader of Bnei Yisrael.

The Rebbe went outside the inn, pointed to the left, and said to his gabbai, "It would be good if a large inn is built over there." Then, he pointed to the right and said, "and a large stable over there," and he spoke about other renovations that would benefit the grounds.

There was a *misnaged* in the inn at the same time, and he was upset that the Rebbe asked the innkeepers to give away all their savings to him. Moreover, he found it strange that the Rebbe spoke about an imaginary, large inn and a stable.

But years later, he returned to the inn and saw that everything Rebbe Dovid'l said occurred. There was a large inn where the Rebbe had suggested and a large barn. Everything was exactly as the Rebbe had said. The couple who owned the inn was now very wealthy.

He immediately traveled to Tolna and said to the Rebbe, "Everything you said occurred. Now I know that you are a holy man. But please explain to me why you took away from the couple their savings?"

The Rebbe replied that it was destined from heaven that this couple becomes rich, but without tefillah, it wouldn't happen. They weren't davening because they never felt the need to daven for their parnassah. So I took away their financial security, they poured out their hearts to Hashem, and they received the financial blessings that were due to them."

We don't know what Hashem has in store for us. Perhaps wealth, children talmidei chachamim, or other beautiful blessings. But Tefillah is the key to attaining it.

Tefillah Amidst Hardships

It states (2:23) ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויזעקו ויתעל שועתם אל האלקים מן העבודה, "Bnei Yisrael sighed from the labor, and they cried out, and their cry ascended to Hashem from the labor."

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei notes that it states twice in this pasuk that they prayed מן העבודה amidst their slavery work. This tells us that the best, most powerful tefillos come forth when one is suffering.

The Or HaChaim teaches this lesson from the pasuk (Tehillim 118:5) מן המצר קראתי י"ה ענני במרחב י"ה, "From amidst the suffering I call out to Hashem. Hashem answered me..." When one davens from a tzarah, Hashem answers him. Also, it states (Yonah 2:3) קראתי י"ה מוצרה לי לה' ויענני, "I called out from my distress to Hashem, and He answered me."

The explanation is that during challenging times, one prays from the depths of his heart, and such a prayer goes straight up before Hashem.

It states (2:25) וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע, "Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael and Hashem knew."

What did Hashem know? The Siforno writes, "Hashem knew that they davened and shouted to Hashem with all their heart..." and that aroused Hashem's compassion.

Many Yidden had to fight in the war of World War One. Sometimes, their wives didn't know whether their husbands were alive or dead for years. (Communication was difficult during the war.) Women came to the Chofetz Chaim zt'l, and they cried and pleaded that he pray for them. The Chofetz Chaim cried with them, blessed them, and told them they should also daven. He said, "Go to the beis medresh, open the aron kodesh, and pour out your heart before Hashem. Hashem wants that you should daven, as it states (Yeshayah 62:6-7) אל דמי לכם, "Be not silent. Give Him no rest..."

The women asked the Chofetz Chaim, "What should we say?" These women were accustomed to saying the tefillos printed in Yiddish in siddurim, such as the techinos for after lighting the Shabbos lecht and the techinos for motzei Shabbos. They didn't know how to create their own tefillah. The

Chofetz Chaim told them, "Tell Hashem what is lying on your heart. When a child is hungry, he doesn't look for techinos. He cries in his own words. Do the same. Pour out your heart before your compassionate Father" (Sichos Chofetz Chaim vol.2, p.21).

The women's tefillos were certainly special tefillos because the Rabbeinu b'Chayei tells us that when one davens from amidst his tzaros, there is a greater likelihood that his tefillos will be answered.

Sometimes people think, "I am going through such hardships, I don't have yishuv hadaas. This isn't a good time for tefillah." But it is exactly the opposite. If you are going through hardships, this can be the best time for tefillah because you can say a tefillah from the depths of your heart.

Sometimes, when one is going through great troubles, he can't open his mouth to pray before Hashem. He is wrapped in bitterness and can't bring himself to daven. All he can do is shout, "Oy vay!" from the depths of his heart. The Yismach Yisrael (Shemos 2, quoting his father Rebbe Yechiel of Alexander zt'l) writes that this tefillah and moan is also sufficient.

He teaches his lesson from the pasuk (3:9) וגם ראיתי את הלהץ אשר מצרים לוחצים אותם "I have also seen the oppression that the Egyptians are oppressing them."

The Yismach Yisrael writes, "This gives chizuk for every Yid when he knows that Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees his troubles and sufferings, and he knows that Hashem recognizes how hard it is for him to pray before Hashem. Due to his many tzaros and aveiros, he almost can't open his mouth in prayer before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Nevertheless, he shouldn't give up. He should shout to Hashem with all his strength. Even if all he accomplishes with his tefillah is a single krechtz before Hashem from the depths of his heart, Hashem will consider his suffering, low level, and confusion. With Hashem's immense compassion and

kindness, He will listen to this moan and save him."

Circumventing the Mikatrigim

There are malachim mikatrigim (prosecuting angels) that prevent tefillos from going up. They claim that the person doesn't deserve to receive what he is asking for. He might be davening for parnassah, shidduchim, hatzlachah, but those malachim say before Hashem's throne, "But why should You give him parnassah (or hatzlachah, etc.)? He committed this and that sin! He doesn't deserve to receive Your kindness."

This is only a problem if the malachim bring those tefillos before Hashem. However, there are ways to send the tefillos directly to Hashem without the assistance of the malachim. When that occurs, the malachim aren't aware of the tefillah, they don't try to stop the tefillah from ascending, and Hashem will grant the person his desires.

How does one bring his tefillah to Hashem without the malachim?

It states (2:23) ותעל שועתם אל האלקים מן העבודה, "Their cry ascended to Hashem from the labor." The Or HaChaim writes, "Perhaps מן העבודה, 'from the labor' teaches us that their shouts didn't go up before Hashem through a messenger (malachim). Rather, their tefillah went directly up, מן העבודה אל האלקים, from the labor to Hashem, without needing malachim."

Perhaps this is because their prayer was a shout without words. Malachim understand words, but they don't understand tefillah through a cry or a thought.

There are different ways to daven. Either one can say words before Hashem, pleading as a child pleads to his father, or there is also a tefillah that resembles a cry of agony and distress. And there is still another tefillah that is totally silent. No one besides Hashem knows what those thoughts are. No one knows that within this shout and these thoughts lies a passionate plea to Hashem. The malachim don't bring this tefillah to

Hashem because they don't understand it. They don't even recognize it. These tefillos go up directly from the person's shout or thoughts to Hashem, and Hashem compassionately grants him his wishes.

The Maor v'Shemesh (ד"ה ויהי בימים הרבים ההם) ויזעקו ותעל ויזעקו, "They shouted and their cries ascended..." but it doesn't state ויתפללו, that they davened. The Maor v'Shemesh writes, "The midrash and the Zohar discuss the greatness of tefillah, which [in our time] is instead of the korbanos. However, there are times that the tefillah can't go up because the mikatrigim create an iron wall, as it states (Yeshayah 59:2) כי עוונותיכם מבדילים 'Your sins separate...' The Zohar says that the solution is to shout from the depths of the heart, with all one's kavanah - a shout, without words. This is called זעקה, שוועה, The malachim, the mikatrigim, don't know about this tefillah; only Hashem Himself knows. Hashem listens to this shout because it was emitted with truth and from the depths of the heart, and Hashem answers this tefillah. It is a more significant tefillah than a tefillah said with letters and words, which the malachim understand and can *mikatrek* and prevent. This, however, doesn't occur with a shout, without words, which only Hashem, Who knows the thoughts of man, understands, and therefore, Hashem will fulfill the desires of his heart."²

The Maor v'Shemesh explains that Hashem knows our thoughts, so, technically, it should be sufficient to daven with thinking alone. However, he writes in the name of the Arizal that we daven with words so other people will learn from us to daven as well. If a tzaddik would only daven with his thoughts, no one would know, and they couldn't learn to do the same.

The Maor v'Shemesh writes, "It is written in the name of the Arizal on the words, שומע שומע תפילה עדיך כל בשר יבואו that why does a person have to daven out-loud, with words? Why does his tefillah need to be heard? Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows your thoughts and your requests. So it should be enough to think your prayers in your thoughts. But the pasuk answers [שומע תפילה, the reason the tzaddik's prayer must be heard] כל בשר יבואו, so other people will learn from him to daven as well."

Certainly, there are more reasons why our primary tefillah is with words. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to know this counsel. You can daven with your thoughts. No one knows what you are thinking. You seem to be going about your day like everyone else, but in your heart, you are pleading before Hashem. Sometimes, you don't have strength to open your mouth in tefillah due to tzaros. All you can do is plead in your heart. This is also sufficient, and it has the added benefit that the mikatrigim won't prevent the tefillah from going up before Hashem.

We begin Shemonah Esrei with the words אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב. Saying these words is a segulah for our tefillos to be answered. It states (3:15) ה' אלוקי אבותיכם אלוקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלוקי יעקב... וזה זכרי לדור דור "Hashem the G-d of your fathers: the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov... This is how I should be mentioned in every generation." The Ramban writes that this means, "In all generations, when one says אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב Hashem will answer his tefillos." Hashem loves the Avos, and in their merit, Hashem will listen to our tefillos.

When saying these words in Shemonah Esrei, one should think about our unique privilege to be descendants of the holy Avos.

2. The Jewish nation said such a prayer when they stood before the Yam Suf. It states there (14:14) ה' ילחם לכם ותאתם תחישון "Hashem shall fight for you, but you shall remain silent." At this time, they prayed in their thoughts, which saved them.

A grandson of a chassidic Rebbe was waiting for his turn to speak with the Beis Yisrael of Gur zt'l. As he waited, he said to the gabbai, Reb Chaninah Shif, z'l, "When you bring me to the Gerrer rebbe, tell him who my grandfather is."

The gabbai replied, "It isn't our custom to do that."

But the bachur, the grandson, insisted, so when Reb Chanina Shif brought him before the Beis Yisrael, he said, "He wants you to know that he is a grandson of the this-and-this tzaddik."

The Beis Yisrael replied, "I should know? He should know!"

The same is regarding the Avos. We should know our yichus. We should know that we are descendants of the holy Avos. This awareness should fill our hearts with pride and joy, and in their merits, our tefillos will be answered.³

Shovavim

The Rambam writes in a letter to his son, Reb Avraham, "You shall know, my son, and it is the truth: Pharaoh, the king of

Mitzrayim, represents the yetzer hara. Bnei Yisrael is the human mind, where all one's desires and thoughts emerge. Moshe Rabbeinu a'h is the holy mind – the neshamah of Bnei Yisrael. Eretz Mitzrayim is the body, and the heart is Goshen."

Pharaoh enslaved the Jewish people, and Moshe saved them, and from the Rambam's lesson, we understand that this occurs in every generation. The yetzer hara enslaves the mind to desire what it shouldn't, and we are redeemed with our neshamah, our holy mind, that fights and battles against the yetzer hara.

It states (1:1) ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה, "These are the names of Bnei Yisrael coming to Mitzrayim." It is written in the present tense as if we are coming to Mitzrayim right now.⁴ This is because, in every generation, the Jewish nation falls under the influence of the yetzer hara. Pharaoh was vanquished by Moshe Rabbeinu. Similarly, the yetzer hara has no power when the holy neshamah combats it with holy logic and reasoning.

There was a bachur who was off the derech for ten years, r'l, and then he did teshuvah sheleimah. Someone I know met

3. Every morning, before the korbanos, we say, כי רוב מעשהו, מה אננו מזה חיינו... הלא כל הגבורים כאין לפניך ואנשי השם כלא היו... כי רוב מעשהו, "Who are we? What is our life...? Behold, all the mighty are like nothing before You, the famous are like non-existent...because most of their deeds are foolishness, and there is no benefit of man over an animal. Everything is vain."

"But we are Your nation, the children of Your covenant, the children of Avraham whom You loved... We are fortunate! How good is our portion! How sweet is our lot! How beautiful is our inheritance!" Reb Noach Chofetz z"l was a close student of Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l. There was a time that they learned together b'chavrusah, as well. A couple of years ago, he was ill, and I visited him. He told me that as a bachur, he began to go to a certain chassidic rebbe for Shabbosim, and Reb Yechezkel Levenstein asked him, "What do you get there that you don't have by us?"

Reb Noach replied, "The lessons מה אננו מזה חיינו, "Who are we? What is life?" I learned very well by you. You taught me that the gashmiyos of this world is nothing. But the אבל אנחנו, that we are Hashem's beloved nation, that I learn by this Rebbe."

Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l praised this answer and said he should continue going to this Rebbe. And then, to himself, Reb Yechezkel repeated many times ... אבל אנחנו... אבל אנחנו!

4. It doesn't state מצרימה, אשר באו מצרימה, who came to Mitzrayim. Instead, it states הבאים, present tense, as if they are coming to Mitzrayim right now.

him at the kever of the Bnei Yissaschar in Poland, and he was shocked to see this bachur davening with kavanah, like a real *Yerei Shamayim*. They spoke, and the bachur told him why he did teshuvah.

Once, someone told him, "Every night, your parents leave the door of their home unlocked because they want it to be open for you, in case you come home in the middle of the night. If you find the doors locked, you might leave."

"I said, if my parents want me so much to come to return to them, I will not disappoint them."

Hashem also leaves the door of teshuvah open for us. The Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (Rabba 31) writes, "I testify heaven and earth that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is sitting and waiting for Yisrael to return to Him more than a father waits for his son to return." Hashem is waiting for us; let us not disappoint Him.

And Shovavim is an opportune time to make this happen. The Zohar (vol.3 p.126.) says, "Every day, a bas kol calls forth (Yirmiyahu 3:22) שׁוּבוּ בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים, "Return backsliding children." The Baal Shem Tov zt'l asks: What is the purpose of the bas kol if no one hears it? The Baal Shem Tov answers that we do hear it. When we have a sudden thought of teshuvah, it comes from the echo of the bas kol.

This occurs every day. Suddenly, we get an urge to improve our ways. This is the bas kol. We can be certain that during Shovavim, the bas kol is heard in our hearts louder and clearer. The bas kol is calling to us, begging us to return to Hashem, and it is up to us to listen to its message.

The Pri Megadim (Sefer Hamagid vol.3 p.160) writes that שׁוֹבֵב has three translations: (a) rebellion, (b) breaking, and (c) banishing.

This tells us that even if (a) one rebelled against Hashem, (b) broke himself and made himself blemished (in a spiritual sense), and (c) he became banished from Hashem's presence, the bas kol calls out even to him and says שׁוּבוּ בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים, that he should return because Hashem is waiting for his teshuvah.

The Pri Megadim adds that it states שׁוֹבְבִים in the plural. This refers to a person who has a history of rebelling and then returning to Hashem and then rebelling again and then returning again. This happens several times. Even so, Hashem doesn't lose hope in him. Hashem awaits his teshuvah.⁵

The Process of Teshuvah in *Shovavim*

Shulchan Aruch (571:2) states, "A talmid chacham isn't permitted to fast because this will lessen his success in avodas Hashem. However, if the entire community is fasting, he should also fast because he shouldn't separate from the community. Teachers of [cheder] children have the same halachah as talmidei chachamim." They aren't allowed to accept on themselves extra fasts (other than the fasts that are obligatory for all Yidden) because it will negatively affect their avodas Hashem.

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l said to a person who fasted many days during Shovavim, "I don't understand why you fast. You know how to learn Torah. You can reach even greater purity by studying Torah."

In our day and age, tzaddikim tell us that all people shouldn't fast (other than the fasts that are obligatory or that many Yidden fast)

5. Chazal (Chagigah 15.) tell that a bas kol once announced, שׁוּבוּ בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים חוּץ מֵאֲחֵר, "All sinners can do teshuvah, except for Achar." The Gemara refers to a scholar who became an apikores, and the bas kol told him that he could never do teshuvah. The Rebbe of Velednick zt'l (Shaaris Yisrael, Shovavim, drush 1) explains that the Gemara alludes to someone who sinned so much until he is called אֲחֵר, someone else. He is also חוּץ, outside the realm of kedushah. The bas kol calls to him and says שׁוּבוּ בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים, that he should do teshuvah. חוּץ מֵאֲחֵר, even if you are outside kedushah and you resemble another person, you can do teshuvah.

because we are weak, and it isn't healthy and worthwhile to fast excessively.

What should he do instead?

If he can learn Torah, he should do so. That will purify him from all his sins. The Mishnah Berurah writes, "The Midrash says: If a person sinned...what should he do for his atonement? If he usually studies one chapter a day, now he should study two chapters daily. If he used to study one page a day, now he should study two pages daily...."

Another counsel is to take time to be alone with Hashem and pour out your heart before Him. The Biur Halachah, quoting the Arizal, writes, "Once a week, he should leave from among the people, and he should be alone with Hashem. He should attach his mind to Hashem and imagine that he is already in the judgment. He should speak with Hashem as a slave speaks to his master, like a son speaks to his father."

A third counsel is written in the Chayei Adam: "He shouldn't fast much, but he should eat only the amount that he needs to keep his body alive... He shouldn't eat at parties...and he should keep Shabbos with all its details."

In other words, we don't fast, but that doesn't mean we should overeat or eat the most delicious foods in the world. You can be very healthy while being cautious with what you eat. This is a siguf, an affliction because you aren't used to it. It will be

counted as a fast, and it is without weakening the body.⁶

The Nesivos Shalom zt'l would say (quoting Reb Avraham Brozovsky zt'l hy'd) that every person is born with a *davar achar* (chazir) in him. When you feed it, it grows. The *avodah* is not to feed it.

This means to eat what one must, but not extra. That will destroy the *davar achar* that's in us. That will purify us, and we will have a heart solely for Hashem.⁷

Everyone can Do Teshuvah

The Navi (Yeshayah 33:13) discusses Yidden who are close and Yidden who are far, as it states, *שמעו רחוקים אשר עשיתי ודעו קרובים גברתי*, "Hearken, you distant ones, what I did, and know, you near ones, My might."

Who is near, and who is far?

Rashi writes that the distant ones are "Those who believe in Me and do My will from the time of their youth." The "near ones" are "the *baalei teshuvah* who recently came close to Me."

The *baalei teshuvah* are closer to Hashem than those who were *tzaddikim* from their youth, is an awesome concept. This means that regardless of the past, if you are prepared to return to Hashem, Hashem loves you, and you become even closer than the *tzaddikim* who were always close to Hashem.

6. It states in this week's parashah (1:10) *ועלה מן הארץ*, "go up from the earth." The Yismach Yisrael (Shemos 5-6) says that *ארץ* alludes to a person immersed in this world's pleasures. The Torah tells him *ועלה מן הארץ*; he can raise himself from there. He doesn't need to remain immersed in an *olam hazeh*-focused life forever.

7. Generally, Reuven would eat very well at *simchos*, but his friend noticed that at this *chasunah* they were attending, Reuven hardly ate. He had two spoons of the first course, and two spoons of the second course, and he didn't touch the desert.

"Are you not feeling well?" his friend asked. "Why don't you eat?"

"I'm on a diet," he replied. He didn't have to explain any more. Everyone understands that when you are on a diet, you are careful with what you eat. During *Shovavim*, tell yourself that you are on a diet, and that will help you to control yourself.

It states (3:13-14) ואמרו לי מה שמו מה אומר אליהם "If they say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?' Hashem said to Moshe ['Tell them] I will be what I will be."

The Yid Hakadosh zt'l explains that the Jewish nation will ask Moshe, "We fell so low, we even forgot Hashem's name. How can we be redeemed?"

Hashem replies, "When a Yid says אהיה, that 'from now on I will be good,' אהיה, I will be with him."

It states (1:7) ויוסף היה במצרים "Yosef was in Mitzrayim," and it says (Bereishis 12:6) והנעני אזי בארץ, "the Canaanites were then in the land." So, we have the great tzaddik Yosef living in Mitzrayim and the Canaanites, the resha'im, living in Eretz Yisrael. Yosef was living in the most tamei land, but he succeeded in becoming holy. The segulah of living in Eretz Yisrael certainly helps people reach high levels, but most important is what the person himself wants and where he is headed.

Reb Naftali Amsterdam zt'l once came to his Rebbe, Reb Yisrael Salanter zt'l, on Purim after drinking wine, and he said, "Rebbe! If I had a head like the Shaagas Aryeh, a heart like the Yesod v'Shores HaAvodah, and the middos of the Rebbe, then [I would be able to serve Hashem properly]." Reb Yisrael Salanter corrected him. "No. With your head and with your heart, and with your middos."

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt'l of Mir told this story to the Chofetz Chaim zt'l. The Chofetz Chaim replied that it is written in the Torah (3:5) כי המקום אשר עומד עליו אדמת קודש הוא, "The place where you stand is holy land." A person doesn't need to change his place or the conditions. From wherever you are, you can serve Hashem.

This is also why the Torah was given in the desert and not on a specific date (just fifty days after the second day of Pesach). This is to say that every place and every day is good for Torah study. There is no place and no time in the world that one can't serve Hashem.

Lashon Hara

Shovavim is also a time to improve one's speech.

The Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim, end of 685) writes that the first word of the parashah is ואלה, and is roshei teivos for אבק לשון הרע. So, during these weeks of Shovavim, we should be cautious with lashon hara and avak lashon hara.

The Saraf of Strelisk zt'l would say that holding back from saying something you want to say is equivalent to 84 fasts. Reb Aharon Belzer zt'l added, "And I say it is much more than that."

So, we have another solution for Shovavim. We are weak and aren't allowed to fast, but we can be cautious with our speech. Holding back from saying something you shouldn't say is equivalent to having fasted many days.⁸

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:30) says, "Moshe wondered what sin Bnei Yisrael have done that they should be enslaved more than any other nation. But when he heard what Dasan v'Aviram said [that they threatened to speak slander on him], Moshe said, 'How will they ever merit to be redeemed? Now I understand why they are being enslaved.'"

Rashi (2:14) writes that Moshe said, "Now I know something I wondered about. What sin do the Jewish people have more than the seventy nations that they deserve to be punished with back-breaking labor? But now I know that they deserve it." When he

8. The Vilna Gaon writes in his letter to his wife that she shouldn't fast, but she should refrain from speaking unnecessary words, and that will be like a fast.

saw there was lashon hara amongst them, he understood that they deserved to be enslaved in galus.

In fact, when Hashem told Moshe to take the Jewish nation out of galus, Moshe asked, "What merit do they have to be redeemed?" (see Rashi 3:11).

Sfas Emes (5641) points out the contrast. At first, Moshe didn't understand why they were enslaved in galus, and then he couldn't understand why they should be freed. This is because when he recognized that there was lashon hara in the Jewish nation, he understood the enslavement, and he couldn't even fathom how they would be freed. It is so terrible when one speaks lashon hara.

If you recognized the greatness of a Yid, you certainly wouldn't speak lashon hara about him. That is the topic of our next subject:

The greatness of Klal Yisrael

The Sfas Emes (Va'era 5663) writes, "Just as we must believe in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, although we can't understand Hakadosh Baruch Hu's ways, so must we believe in Bnei Yisrael, even when they appear black and ugly [from their sins], as it states (Shir HaShirim 1:5) שחורה אני ונאווה, 'I am black but beautiful.'"

The Sfas Emes explains that we don't understand Hashem, and similarly, we don't understand a Yid. There is a lot that we don't see. There are many reasons to honor him, and therefore we should honor every Yid.⁹

The Reshab (Rebbe Sholom Ber of Lubavitz) zt'l was once discussing the praises of a certain Jewish community. One of his chassidim, a diamond dealer, said, "I don't understand why you praise them so highly. I know them, and they seem standard and regular to me."

The Rebbe asked this chasid to show him the diamonds he sells. So the chasid took out his most precious diamonds and showed them to the Rebbe.

"They look regular to me," the Rebbe said. "Why are they so expensive?"

The chasid replied, "Rebbe! To understand a diamond, you have to be a *meivoin*."

The Rebbe replied, "To understand a Yid, you also need to be a *meivoin*."

Pharaoh said (5:9) ואל ישעו בדברי שקר, "Let them not talk about false matters" (such as to bring korbanos in the dessert).

Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen zt'l asks: The Torah is Toras emes, a true Torah. How did Pharaoh's words ואל ישעו בדברי שקר come into the Torah?

I heard from a gadol of our generation (בדרד רמז) that Hashem tells us אל ישעו בדברי שקר, ignore the false thought, that your avodas Hashem isn't important to Hashem, because it isn't so. Hashem loves your service, no matter how it appears, as it states (Malachi 3:14) אמרתם שוא עבוד אלוקים ומה בצע כי שמרנו משמרתו, "You have said, 'It is futile to serve Hashem, and what profit do we get for keeping His mitzvos...?' But it isn't so. Every good deed

⁹ The parashah begins with listing and counting Bnei Yisrael, who came to Mitzrayim. Rashi (1:1) writes, "Although they were counted in their lifetime, together with their names, the Torah counts them again when they died. להודיע חבתן, this is to make known that they are loved, and compared to stars that are brought out and are returned by name and by number."

The Sfas Emes (Shemos 5632) asks, למי להודיע, to whom shall we make known that Hashem loves Bnei Yisrael? It is to tell Bnei Yisrael themselves. They should know their greatness and how much Hashem loves them. Regardless of how the Yid appears, whatever level he is on, Hashem counts him. He is precious in Hashem's eyes."

that Klal Yisrael do is special in Hashem's eyes.¹⁰

Yidden are so special to Hashem; they sing shirah first, and then the malachim sing shirah (see Chulin 91:).

The Midrash states, "When HaKadosh Baruch Hu created Adam HaRishon, ובקשו לומר לפניו שירה, the malachim wanted to sing shirah before him.

The simple meaning is that they thought Adam was a G-d and wanted to praise him.

The Midrash says, "Immediately, ויפל אלקים, Hashem put Adam HaRishon to sleep, תרדמה, and they recognized that he is a human being."

But the simple explanation of the Midrash is very difficult. Could it be that they thought Adam was a G-d and that they wanted to sing shirah to him?

The Ksav Sofer (ד"ה נעשה אדם Bereishis) asks this question. He says, "How can it be that the malachim thought to sing shirah to a human being?"

The Ksav Sofer answers that לומר שירה לפניו doesn't mean that they wanted to sing shirah before Adam. It means they wanted to sing shirah first before Adam sang shirah.¹¹

This is because, logically, the malachim should sing shirah first, for two reasons:

(a) They were created on the second day of creation, while man was created on the sixth day. The malachim were created first,

so they should sing first. (b) The malachim are more spiritual than human beings. Shouldn't they sing first?

But a human being sings before the malachim because the human being has something that malachim don't have, and that is the gashmiyos and the tests of this world. That makes our shirah much more precious before Hashem than the shirah of malachim.

However, when the malachim saw that Hashem created Adam with His own hands (יציר כפיו של הקב"ה), they thought a human being is very spiritual. And if so, the malachim are better than humans (because they were created first), and the malachim should sing first.

Hashem had Adam fall asleep. The malachim saw that Adam was a human being with worldly needs. Then, they agreed that Adam should sing shirah before them.

"The Midwives Feared Hashem"

The Divrei Moshe zt'l (Reb Moshe of Dalina, a student of the Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh zt'l) asks, why does the Torah tell us the story of Pharoah's decree to kill the newborn children and that Shifrah and Puah saved them? There were probably many other stories at that time of gezeiros against the children that the Torah doesn't mention. So, why is this story singled out?

He answers that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to bring down the holy neshamah of Moshe Rabbeinu to the world, but the

¹⁰. Rashi (1:1) writes, אף על פי שמנאן בחייהו בשמותן חזר ומנאן במיתתן להודיע חיבתו, "Although Hashem had counted them by their names when they were alive, he counted them again when they were dead, to tell us how much Hashem loves them..." The Yismach Yisrael explains that "dead" means when one falls from his level, as the Zohar (vol.3 p.135:) writes, "When one falls from his level, it is called misah, death." So the pasuk is counting the Jewish nation and showing that Hashem loves them even when they die, which means even when they fall from their level.

The pasuk says הבאים מצרומה, which means they have fallen to צר, narrowness, lowliness, even then Hashem continues to love them.

¹¹. The word לפניו doesn't mean that the malachim wanted to sing in front of Adam. It means they wanted to sing first, before Adam sings.

parents had to be worthy. Moshe's father, Amram, was worthy. Chazal (Shabbos 55:) say that he was from the four people who died without any aveirah at all.

But Yocheved also needed a great merit so that she could bear Moshe. He writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu with His endless compassion placed into Pharaoh's mind to command the midwives to kill the Jewish children. The rasha's plan was solely for the bad, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu planned it for the good. This is because no mitzvah purifies as much as the merit of mesirus nefesh for Hashem's honor. Yocheved passed this test because she knew whoever transgressed the king's decree would be killed. Nevertheless, ולא עשו, she didn't do Pharaoh's command, ותחיינה את הילדים, she helped the children live, and this is how she became worthy to bear Moshe Rabbeinu."

Pharaoh told Shifrah and Puah (who were Yocheved and Miriam) to kill the male newborn children of Bnei Yisrael, but they did the opposite. They gave the children food and helped them live. The Gemara (Sotah 11:) tells us that Yocheved and Miriam were *tzidkaniyos* and *neviyos*. However, we see that the Torah refers to them as Yirei Elokim only after they passed this test. As it states (1:21) ויהי כי יראו המילדת את האלקים, "And it was when the midwives feared Hashem..." The Shevet HaLevi (Rachmei HaRav, Gevurah) explains that this is because the title of Yirei Shamayim is used exclusively for someone who passes difficult tests.

The greatest merit is to have Yiras Shamayim.

Reb Meir of Amshinov zt'l proves this from Yocheved and Miriam. They saved thousands and thousands of Yidden because they didn't listen to Pharaoh's decree, but it wasn't for that that they received reward.

The Torah (1:21) tells us, ויהי כי יראו המילדת את האלקים, "It took place when the midwives feared Hashem that He made houses for them." Rashi explains that "houses" means houses of kingdom, kehunah, and levi'im. Their descendants received these benefits because Yocheved and Miriam feared Hashem.

Reb Meir of Amshinov zt'l points out that they weren't rewarded for saving the children and bringing millions of Yidden to the world. Instead, they were rewarded for having yiras Shamayim. This means that having yiras Shamayim is the most significant merit.

Reb Meir of Amshinov demonstrated this point. Imagine that for someone who saved thousands of Yidden during the holocaust, a dinner was arranged in his honor. One person stands up to speak and says, "He has so much yiras Shamayim. He never misses Shacharis with a minyan. He sets times for studying Torah..." People will tell him to be silent. "Why are you discussing his yiras Shamayim? That's from his smaller achievements. Don't you know that he saved thousands of lives?"

But we see from the Torah that the greatest merit and achievement is to have yiras Shamayim.