

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Bo



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Torah Wellsprings - Bo

Thinking Properly

Life is as you perceive it. Two people can go through the same situation. One is calm and happy, and the other is nervous and sad. The difference between them isn't the situations but rather how they react to them and how they perceive them. In this section, we will give various examples of how the way we think affects how we see life.

Reb Nochum Yassar zt'l was from the tzaddikim and talmidei chachamim who lived in Yerushalayim one hundred years ago. One morning, he came to the beis medresh and said to his friend, Reb Nota Zenwirth zt'l, "I received a bas kol today!"

Reb Nota looked at him in wonderment and said in feigned worry, "What are you saying, Reb Nochum? Are you hearing voices? How do you know that you received a bas kol?"

"Yes, it's true," Reb Nochum told him. "I awoke this morning, and I didn't find my shoes. I understood this to mean that Hashem wants me to search for my shoes. It was like I received a bas kol telling me that I must search for my shoes. After ten minutes, I found the shoes beneath a dresser. Then, I heard another bas kol. It said, "You can stop looking for your shoes because you found them."

Reb Nochum would go to the *kosel* every morning. Once, he was ill, and he had to daven at home. Someone came to visit him, and said, "*Im yirtzeh Hashem*, you will be well soon and then you can go back to the *kosel*..."

Reb Nochum Yassar told him that he wasn't speaking rationally. "Why are you speaking about going to the *kosel*? Today,

Hashem wants me to daven at home, so why should I be upset about that? I am doing what Hashem wants from me today."

We continue our discussion of "Thinking Properly" with another tzaddik of Yerushalayim, Reb Zalman Brizel zt'l.

Once, his son asked him how his day was. Reb Zalman responded, "Don't even ask. It was an extremely difficult day..."

"What happened?" the son asked, concerned.

"Don't even ask. I awoke at three, like every morning, but my shoelaces weren't in my shoes. It took me two hours until I found them. I had to search all over the house. Apparently, one of the grandchildren played with my shoelaces. Then I went to the mikvah, and someone came and stole my clothes! It took a long time before someone brought me another pair of clothing so I could leave the mikvah."

The son moaned for the difficulty time his elderly father endured.

Then, Reb Zalman Brizel zt'l explained, "Actually, I awoke, and my shoes had their shoelaces in them. I went to the mikvah, and no one stole my clothes..." Reb Zalman Brizel imagined difficult scenarios, which helped him be happy with Hashem's chesed that everything was fine in his life.

These stories help us think about life in a healthy, happy manner, and it is important to look at life correctly.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l writes that the Yidden in Mitzrayim didn't understand why they were enslaved in Mitzrayim. They thought it should be the opposite. The Mitzrim were descendants of Cham.¹ Noach

1. We say in Maariv, אאותות ומופתים באדמת בני חם, that Hashem performed miracles in the land of the descendants

cursed *Cham* that his descendants would be slaves for *Shem* (see Bereishis 9:25). So, why were Bnei Yisrael now slaves to Cham? But in the end, everything was understood. At yetzias Mitzrayim, all the money of Mitzrayim went to the Jewish nation, as it states (12:36) וינצלו את מצרים, "they emptied Mitzrayim." So, all these years, it wasn't that Bnei Yisrael was working for Mitzrayim; instead, Mitzrayim was working for Bnei Yisrael! They were preparing immense wealth for them to take at yetzias Mitzrayim.

This is the meaning of the pasuk (10:2) ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך את אשר התעללתי במצרים, "So that you tell over into the ears of your son and your son's son how I made a mockery of the Egyptians." Rashi writes that התעללתי means שחקתי, "I laughed." Hashem turned the Mitzrim into a joke. For years, it appeared that the Yidden were enslaved to Mitzrayim when really it was the opposite. Mitzrayim was gathering wealth for the Jewish people!

When they were enslaved, the Yidden didn't know that they were working for themselves. They discovered it at yetzias Mitzrayim. Let us remember when we go through hard times that one day we will see how it was all for our good.²

Someone complained to Rebbe Hershele Zidichover zt'l that someone was constantly fighting with him. Rebbe Hershele Zidichover told him that when two people pull at two ends of a rope (tug-of-war), and one lets go,

the other one falls. "So, stop thinking about the dispute; let go of the dispute from your end; your enemy will fall and have his downfall."

The Maharal of Prague says that a person can walk on a wooden beam when the beam is on the floor. Place the beam across a river, and those walking over it will fall into the river. This is because when it is over a river, he thinks about falling, and that causes him to fall.

Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l once came to a home to collect money, and when he came out, he said to his partner in the mitzvah, the Yid HaKadosh zt'l, that he had witnessed yiras Shamayim in the home, and it was hard for him to leave the house.

"Tell me about the yiras Shamayim you saw there," The Yid HaKadosh requested.

Reb Dovid Lelover replied, "In this home, a son works together with his elderly father. The father isn't very good at the job and makes mistakes. I heard the son say, 'If I didn't fear Hashem, I would kill you.' So, I heard the son say that he fears Hashem, and it was hard for me to leave him."

The son uttered terrible words. If another person heard the son talk like that, he would consider the son a terrible and chutzpadik child. But Rebbe Dovid focused on the yiras Shamayim that he said he had. That's all he wanted to hear, and he didn't hear anything else.

of Cham. This refers to the miracles in Mitzrayim because they were descendants of Cham, as it states (Bereishis 10:6) ובני חם כוש ומצרים ופוט וכנען, "The children of Cham were Kush, Mitzrayim, Put and Canaan."

2. The highest time of Yom Kippur is the end when we recite Neilah. We can assume that the end of the seder is also the peak of the seder. What do we do then? We sing Chad Gadya! Why?

The answer is that the message of Chad Gadya is that everything happens by hashgachah pratis; nothing happens by chance. Chad Gadya discusses a dog that was hit by a stick. It seems unfair. Why should the dog be hit? But the dog deserved it because it bit the cat. Then, the stick is consumed by fire. It seems unfair; why should the stick be burned? But the stick deserved it because it hit the dog. Similarly, we must know that everything that occurs in life is planned and not by chance. This lesson is the peak and the message of the seder.

Reward and Punishment

Reward and Punishment are also largely dependent on what one thinks. We will offer a couple of examples:

A spy hid his maps and papers in the pocket of a yeshiva bachur's suit from Yeshivas Radin. The bachur was caught with the documents and was charged with espionage. The Chofetz Chaim came to court to testify to his innocence. He said, "I can swear he didn't know about these papers. Someone placed the papers in his pocket."

The defense attorney explained to the judge the greatness of the Chofetz Chaim so he would appreciate the weight of his testimony. The lawyer told the judge the following story:

Once, while traveling, someone grabbed the Chofetz Chaim's suitcase and ran off with it. The Chofetz Chaim shouted after him, "I forgive you."

The judge asked the attorney, "Do you believe that story?"

The attorney replied, "Even if the story isn't true, such stories aren't told about me and you." He was implying that the Chofetz Chaim was a very righteous and trustworthy, and his testimony should be believed.

People asked the Chofetz Chaim, "We understand that you forgave the thief. You didn't want him to be punished in Olam HaBa. But why did you have to tell him that you are *mochel* him? You could have forgiven him in your heart!"

The Chofetz Chaim replied, "Chazal say, if a person thinks he performed an aveirah, he will be punished for his bad intentions, even if he actually didn't perform the aveirah. I also wanted him to be freed from the punishment of bad intentions, so I let him know that I forgive him, and he isn't committing an aveirah by holding on to the suitcase."

The Gemara (Kiddushin 39:) says that reward is given for keeping the *lo saasehs*, the

prohibitions of the Torah, only when one has the opportunity to perform an aveirah, and he refrains. For example, he saw an expensive item unattended, and no one was watching. He had the opportunity to steal, and he refrained, that is when he will be rewarded for keeping the *lo saaseh* of לא תגנוב. But if he didn't have the opportunity to take it, he isn't rewarded for not stealing. He didn't have a test.

And for *mitzvos aseis*, as well, he will only be rewarded for the mitzvos that he performs or tries to perform.

The Chofetz Chaim teaches that there is a way to be rewarded for all the mitzvos and all the *lo saasehs* with thought, alone. It states (12:28) וילכו ויעשו בני ישראל כאשר צוה ה' את משה (12:28) ויאמר, "And they went and did; as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did." This pasuk refers to making the korban Pesach. Rashi asks, "Did they already do [the korban pesach]? ... It was only Rosh Chodesh [and the korban pesach wasn't brought until two weeks later]! But since they accepted upon themselves [to make the korban pesach], the pasuk credits them for it as if they had done it."

So, by accepting the yoke of Torah, one receives reward and it is considered as if he kept the entire Torah, with all the *lo saasehs* and all the *aseis*. If he accepts the yoke of Torah in his thoughts, it is already considered as if he kept the entire Torah! He will be rewarded for desiring and thinking about keeping the entire Torah, even before he actually keeps it.

Changing One's Ways

It states (12:2) החדש הזה לכם, which the Beis Avraham zt'l explains that Hashem gave us the ability to renew ourselves and become new people. Just because we behaved or acted in a certain way until now doesn't obligate us to remain that way forever. We can change and improve our ways.

These words were told to the Jewish nation when they were in Mitzrayim, at the

49th gate of impurity. Even from that lowly place, Hashem told them, החודש הזה לכם, that they could start anew and become like new again.³

The Gemara (Brachos 29) says, "Don't believe in yourself until your final day. Think about what happened to Yochanan Kohen Gadol. He was Kohen Gadol for eighty years, and at the end of his life, he became a *tzeduki* (heretic)." The Rebbe of Kotzk zy"l said that just as a *tzaddik* can change and become a *rasha* (as this happened to Yochanan Kohen Gadol), a *rasha* can also change his ways and become a *tzaddik*. The opportunity for change is always in our hands.

It states in this week's parashah that the korban pesach in Mitzrayim should be eaten (12:11) נעליכם ברגליכם, "Your shoes in your feet." This is an unusual expression. Are shoes in the feet, or are feet in the shoes? It seems

that it should have been written as רגליכם בנעליכם, "Your feet in your shoes"!

Therefore, the Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l explains these words in the way of *remez*. He says that we should translate רגליכם as רגילות what you are accustomed to do, your habits, your routine. נעליכם can be understood as a lock. נעליכם ברגליכם means you should place a lock and refrain from returning to your bad customs and negative habits.

Change is always difficult. People asked a tightrope walker, "Which part of your stunt is the hardest to do?" He replied that reaching the end of the rope was the hardest because he had to turn around. Turning around is always difficult.

The Kotzker zt'l said that the greatest *siguf*, affliction, is to keep the Torah. This is because to keep the Torah, you must change your ways. Change is so hard. The Torah says, נעליכם ברגליכם, put a lock on your bad habits, and train yourself with better habits.

3. Reb Aharon Gradya zy"l asked his rebbe, the Magid of Mezritz zy"l, "Under your influence, I have Baruch Hashem done teshuvah sheleimah. But the yetzer hara comes back to me and tells me to perform aveiros like I would do in the past. What can I do to silence the yetzer hara?"

The Magid replied with a *mashal*:

A man owned a tavern. The town's drunks frequented his establishment, and he earned a nice profit. The problem was that due to his clients' crass behaviors, fights and brawls were a nightly occurrence in the tavern, causing much damage to the tavern. So, one day, he closed the tavern and started a fabric business in the same place. People making suits or dresses would come to him, and he sold them the fabric.

But the drunks were used to coming to his store. They came howling and banging on his door in the middle of the night, requesting drinks.

He would holler from his upstairs window, "You came to the wrong address. The tavern isn't here anymore. This is now a fabric store."

The Magid concluded, "Tell the yetzer hara that you are no longer the Aharon of your youth. Tell the yetzer hara that he came to the wrong address and should go elsewhere."

A *bachur* from Sweden, raised in an irreligious home, became religious and studied in Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov in Eretz Yisrael. When he first arrived, he was the weakest *bachur* in the yeshiva, but within a short time, the *bachurim* in the yeshiva were surprised at the quick strides he was making. They asked the *rosh* yeshiva, "How does he do it? How does he grow so rapidly, while we slowly crawl along our spiritual path?"

The *rosh* yeshiva advised them to ask the *bachur* directly. They asked, and the *bachur* answered, "We are all in captivity. My prison was my non-religious home. Your captivity is *melumadah* (doing mitzvos by rote, without much thought). It seems that it is easier for me to leave my imprisonment than for you to leave yours."

We discussed last week that according to one opinion quoted in Rashi, the second plague, *tzefardeia*, was one giant frog. People hit it, and many frogs came out of it. They saw that hitting the frog didn't kill it, and it only increased the problem, so why did they continue hitting it? Why didn't they stop?

We answered, quoting the Steipler Gaon zt'l, that this is human nature. People have bad habits; they know that they only cause them trouble, and yet they keep returning to them. In response to this tendency, the Torah urges **נְעִלְכֶם** to change your ways.⁴

For the chassidim of the Yismach Yisrael of Alexander zy"a, the time they came together, to be with the chasidim and the rebbe, was on the first night of Pesach.

One year, before starting his Seder, the rebbe announced, "If one doesn't believe that he has the potential tonight to change from being a *rasha* to being a tzaddik, he is the *rasha* of the Hagadah."

An egg can change and become a chicken, or it can remain the same, and be cooked and eaten as an egg. Rebbe Leibele Eigar zy"a said that we place an egg on the *seder* plate to indicate that it is possible to remain the same after the night passes, but if we want to, we can change. It's up to us.

It states (Koheles 4:13) **טוֹב יֶלֶד מִסֶּכֶן וְחָכָם מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן** וְכֹסֵל, "Better a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king..." Rashi explains that the young child is the yetzer tov, and the old king is the yetzer hara. The Kotzker zt'l says

that the *yetzer tov* is called a child because children are ready to change their ways. The *yetzer hara* is called, "*melech zakein uksil*," a foolish, old king, representing someone who isn't prepared to change his ways.

People often think they can't change because they tried to change their ways years before, but they weren't successful, so they give up and don't try again. But now they are older, wiser, and more determined. It could be that this time they will succeed. However, since they remember their past failure, they don't try again.

An example of this attitude in the animal world is elephants. Elephant owners tie their elephants to a beam with a simple rope at night, so they shouldn't run away. The elephant can easily break free if it tries to. But when the elephant was young and small, it attempted to break free and couldn't. So it gave up, and since then, it hasn't tried again.

People are similar. Their past failures have convinced them that it isn't worth trying again. But if they would try, they can break free from their negative tendencies.⁵

Tefillah

Change is very difficult, but with tefillah, anything is possible. With tefillos, one can succeed in changing his ways and negative habits.

The Rebbe Rayatz of Lubavitz zt'l said that people think all we have to do is wait for Moshiach, and when the time comes for

4. The next words of the pasuk are **וּמְקַלְכֶם בְּיָדְכֶם**. Following the path of remez, the Sar Shalom explains that **מְקַלְכֶם** means "your leniencies." The Torah tells us, **וּמְקַלְכֶם בְּיָדְכֶם** take these leniencies into your hands. Take a grip on yourselves and on the situation, and stop being lenient in the areas that you should be stringent.

5. **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם** teaches us that the dates of the calendar are dependent on the decision of beis din. When beis din declares it rosh chodesh, it is rosh chodesh. When they announce a leap year, it becomes a leap year.

The Midrash comments on that, "Everything is in our hands! Everything is in our possession."

The Chidushei HaRim zy"a says, "If a person would know what this means, and what is in his hands, he wouldn't waste a minute." He can accomplish so much with his tefillos and mitzvos. If he knew what he accomplishes, he would be very active in avodas Hashem at all times.

our redemption, we will be redeemed. But waiting isn't enough. Tefillah is needed. In Mitzrayim, the time for redemption had arrived, but they also needed to daven. When they davened, the geulah happened.

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei (2:23-24) 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.

The same applies when we want to eliminate destructive behaviors and customs. Sometimes, a strong desire isn't enough. We need tefillos, and then Hashem will help us.

Many Yidden had to fight in World War One. Sometimes, their wives didn't know whether their husbands were alive or dead for many 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 you to daven, as it states (Yeshayah 62:6-7) אַל דְּמִי לָכֶם וְאַל תִּתְּנוּ דְּמִי לוֹ אֵל תַּחֲרִישׁוּ "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. This occurred in Mitzrayim, they shouted to Hashem from amidst their tzaros, and therefore, Hashem accepted their tefillos. As it states (Shemos 2:23) וַיִּאֲנְחוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֵל ה', "Bnei Yisrael sighed from the labor, and they cried out, and their cry ascended to Hashem from the labor." The Or HaChaim explains that because they shouted from amidst their sorrow and suffering, Hashem answered their tefillos.

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.

The Yismach Yisrael writes, "This gives chizuk to 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 *krechitz* before Hashem from the depths of his heart, Hashem will take into consideration his suffering, low level, and confusion. With Hashem's immense compassion and kindness, He will listen to this moan and save him."

The Maor v'Shemesh (ד"ה ויהי בימים הרבים ההם) writes, "There are times that the tefillah can't go up because the *mekatrigim* create an iron wall, as it states (Yeshayah 59:2) *כי עונותיכם 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* and *שוועה*. The *malachim*, the *mekatrigim*, 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 be *mekatreg* and prevent. This doesn't occur when one shouts out to Hashem without saying words. Only Hashem, Who knows man's thoughts, understands, and Hashem will fulfill the desires of his heart."

It states in this week's parashah (13:9) *כי ביד ה' מוצרים*, *חזקה הוציאך ה' ממצרים*, "for with a mighty hand Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim." What is the significance of *יד חזקה*, "Mighty hand."

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* explains that the Jewish nation wasn't worthy to be redeemed. But with a mighty hand, *יד חזקה*, Hashem saved the Jewish nation. The Sfas Emes writes, "This is a lesson for all generations. Even if they aren't worthy, Hashem will help them." This refers to the future redemption, and it also relates to each person being redeemed from his personal *tzaros*, and it is for each person to succeed in improving his ways, and to be redeemed from his negative habits. Even if he isn't worthy, Hashem can put forth His mighty hand and save us.

Kabbalos

Another solution to improve one's ways is to take on good *Kabbalos*. Choose the area you want to improve in and make a *kabbalah*. It can even be a small step towards improving yourself in that area. With time, you will see that you are becoming the person you wish you were. You will find yourself changing your life-patterns and living as a *Yid* should.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:9) says, "Three people were in that counsel [to enslave the Jewish nation]: Bilaam, Iyov, and Yisro. Bilaam gave the advice, and he was killed. Iyov was silent, and he was punished with afflictions. Yisro ran away, and for this, he merited that his descendants sat in the Sanhedrin."⁶

Why did Yisro deserve this great reward? What did he do already? He didn't protest Pharaoh's plan to enslave the *Yidden*. He ran away. For that, he deserved for his children to be in the Sanhedrin?

But the answer is that Yisro did the most he could under the circumstances. He knew he couldn't protest against Pharaoh, because Pharaoh would kill him. He couldn't save the nation, but at least, he wouldn't be present when the decree was established. And this teaches us a significant lesson: It tells us that if we do as much as possible, we will be rewarded immensely.

The rule is that Hashem doesn't want from us what we can't do. Hashem wants from us the maximum of what we can do. It might be a little, but that is all that is needed when it is the most we can do.

6. Why was Iyov punished with *yesurim*? What could he do? He couldn't protest Pharaoh's decision to enslave the Jews because that would be suicidal. Even Yisro didn't try to persuade Pharaoh. Instead, he ran away. So why was Iyov punished with *yesurim* for being silent?

A popular answer is that when Iyov had *yesurim*, he shouted from pain. We say to Iyov, "Why do you shout? How are your shouts helping you? The obvious answer is that when something hurts you, you shout. So, how come it didn't hurt you when you stood before Pharaoh, and he decreed to enslave the Jewish nation? If it truly bothered you, you would have shouted."

Kabbalos towards improving one's ways don't necessarily need to be large. Often, it is better when it is a small *kabbalah*, and that will be sufficient. If it is all we can take on, it is enough.

Rashi (12:4) writes, "The time came to redeem the Jewish nation, but they didn't have mitzvos to merit to be saved... Hashem gave them two mitzvos: the blood of pesach and the blood of milah, because they circumcised themselves that night...They were attached to avodah zarah, so Hashem told them *משכו ידיכם מאלילים וקחו צאן של מצוה*, "Leave the avodah zarah and take a sheep for the mitzvah."

It would seem that just two mitzvos wouldn't be enough, but it was enough in Hashem's eyes. We do the maximum we can, which is all Hashem asks of us.

The Sfas Emes explains that Hashem takes the few good deeds that we have, He magnifies them, and that saves us.

It states (12:23) *ופסח ה' על הפתח*, and the Targum explains that Hashem considered the doorway as though it was very large. The relatively small deed became very large in Hashem's eyes, sufficient to save them. The Sfas Emes quotes this Targum (although I searched for it and didn't find it) and the Sfas Emes writes, "This teaches us for future generation, if a person opens a small opening, it becomes like a large wall [in Hashem's eyes], and you will merit your redemption."

An example of a relatively small *kabbalah* is to learn for three minutes without interruption. You think it is small, but it is a great deed in Hashem's eyes. There are *yeshivos* during Shovavim that learn for hours without interruption. In Slonim, there are two sedarim daily, five hours each, without interruption. (The Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim discusses the great purity that comes from studying five hours straight, without interruption.) Fortunate are they. However, if at the moment, the most one can do is to study for five minutes without interruption, be aware that it is incredibly precious to Hashem.

Don't think it is a small deed, because, as the Chovas HaLevovos writes, "What is small to you, is great in Hashem's eyes."

It states (12:2) *החדש הזה לכם*. The Gemara (Shabbos 147:) tells that Reb Elazar ben Arach forgot his learning, and when he read these words, he read them *החרש היה לכם*, "Their hearts were deaf." The chachamim davened for him, and he remembered his learning again.

The Kotzker mentions that the difference between *החדש הזה לכם* and *החרש היה לכם* are three small dots of ink. This indicates that all it takes is a few small, good deeds, and you can turn *החרש היה לכם*, a deaf heart, to *החדש הזה לכם*, *hizchazkus* in avodas Hashem. Also, in contrast, when a person is good and becomes lenient in a few places here and there, this might result in his downfall. It can change a *החדש הזה לכם* to *החרש היה לכם*, from small, minor deeds.

Rebbe Dovid'l Tolna zt'l saw a person who was about to jump off a building to end his life. The Tolna Rebbe told him, "It isn't hard to jump off a building. Let's see if you can stand on the earth and jump up!"

The man immediately went down. With his wise words, the Tolna Rebbe saved his life.

We learn a lesson from this story: Falling from one's level isn't hard. The trick is to be on the ground and to get up and reach high levels. That is the challenge that we should take on. And as we explained, this can be achieved through taking on a few minor steps and good *Kabbalos*.

Doubts

Another way to encourage and improve ourselves in changing our ways is to cast away the doubt that prevents us from following through with our resolutions. When one is sure of himself and knows this is what he must do, he finds the strength and the willpower to do it. When one isn't

sure, it is harder to overcome the great challenge of "change."

In parashas Shemos, Pharaoh said פן ירבה, and Hashem said כן ירבה (see 1:12). The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l said that פן means doubts, perhaps. כן means you are definite. Pharaoh said פן ירבה, let there be many doubts among the Jewish nation. Let them not have clarity on what they should do. Hashem replies, כן ירבה, that there should be certainty among the Jewish people.

Also, in parashas Shemos, Pharaoh said (5:7) לא תאספון לתת תבן לעם, "You shall not continue to give stubble to the people to make the bricks."

There is an extra אל"ף in תאספון. Rebbe Dovid'l Lelover zt'l explains that לא תאספון means that Pharaoh forbade them from gathering together. The Midrashim tell that the Jewish nation would gather every Shabbos to strengthen their emunah and their belief that Hashem would redeem them. Probably, at these gatherings, they also reminded themselves that they are a holy nation, descendants of the holy Avos and Imahos. And they probably spoke about and set guidelines, so they don't become like the goyim by emulating their language, clothes, names, etc.

Pharaoh was frightened by these gatherings, so he said לא תאספון, "No more gatherings!" He preferred that the nation shouldn't have clarity on who they are, what will be in the future, and what they should do.

Action occurs when there is certainty. When there is confusion and uncertainty, people often become placid and inactive.

For example, why do people eat unhealthy foods? It is often because when they eat it, they think it won't harm them *this time* and that it won't affect their avodas Hashem *this time*. If they knew for certain that it would harm them, they would refrain.

During times in history when there was forced conversion, r'l, which Yidden were moser nefesh? Those who were steadfast with their emunah.⁷

This also occurred to the Egyptians in Mitzrayim. They witnessed many makos, yet they didn't believe it was from Hashem! By makas barad, Hashem instructed them how to save themselves, and yet not everyone took the warning seriously (see 9:20). This is because they weren't sure. And when there are doubts, people are less likely to act.

The Mesilas Yesharim (ch.1) writes, יסוד החסידות ושרש העבודה התמימה הוא שיתברר ויתאמת אצל האדם מה חובתו בעולמו, "The foundation and the root of the true service is that it should be clarified and true to the person what is his obligation in the world."

It must be clear to the person. He should know clearly what he must do in Hashem's service, and then he will do it. As long as there are doubts, he will likely not take the plunge and make decisions. Likely, he won't take action.

Making Decisions

Baruch Hashem, as a rule, most of us don't have doubts. We believe in Hashem with all our heart and soul, and we believe in the Torah with all the halachos and lessons. However, moments of doubt do arise in life. Not everything is clearly stated in Shulchan Aruch, and not every question

7. A heretic asked Reb Chaim of Brisk zt'l, "One of the principles of the Torah is to follow the majority, as it states אחר רבים להטות. So, why do you tenaciously hold on to Yiddishkeit? You should follow the majority, and most people in the world don't follow Judaism."

Reb Chaim replied, "The halachah that we follow the majority is when we are in doubt. Since we have no doubts about our Judaism, the rule of following the majority does not apply."

can be asked to one's Rav. There are situations in life in which one has to figure out what to do and how to proceed. How does one make a decision? How does one choose between two or more options? As we wrote above, if he were certain about what he needed to do, he would do it no matter how hard it was. But when there are doubts, how does one choose from all the options? How does one know that he chose wisely?

We will bring some tips:

The Beis Aharon teaches, חפצוּךְ אסורים, "What you desire is forbidden." If you have a burning desire to eat something or do something, you should think it through well because chances are, it is not the right thing

to do. Your passionate desire is likely the yetzer hara.⁸

In Kedushah of Keser, it states איה מקום כבודו... לעומתם ברוך יאמר. This is a hint to when you want to know איה מקום כבודו, what is the right way to go, and what should you do, the answer is לעומתם, see where you have obstacles and difficulties. That is a sign that this is the path that you should take.

Another counsel is to write down both options and review them for three days.

There is also a concept that when you are unsure about what you should do, the first thought that comes to your mind is the yetzer tov. The second thought is the yetzer hara.⁹

8. The Bnei Yissaschar uses this counsel as a tool to determine whether one's plan to engage in a machlokes l'shem shamayim is actually a mitzvah or perhaps an aveirah. The Bnei Yissaschar zt'l says that if his desire to make a machlokes is greater than his desire to perform other mitzvos, such as wearing talis and tefillin, that is a sign that his fiery frenzy to explode and to knock down all people who are going against Hashem comes from his yetzer hara, not from his yetzer tov.

Reb Yohonasan Eibshitz, zy'a, (*Yaaras Dvash, drush 8*) offers another test to determine whether a machlokes is l'shem shamayim or not. He writes, "With every *machlokes*, the *yetzer hara* assures us that our intentions are purely *leshem shamayim*, and *chas veshalom* to even suggest otherwise! So, how can we recognize whether a *machlokes* is really *leshem shamayim*? This is the test: If both parties love each other with all their heart and soul aside from the issue they are arguing about, that is a sign that their argument is *leshem shamayim*. However, if they harbor hatred towards one another, that *machlokes* isn't *leshem shamayim*. The Mishnah hints to this when it states, איזו היא מחלקת שהיא לשם שמים, which can mean, how do we know that a *machlokes* is *leshem shamayim*? The answer is, זו מחלקת הלל ושמואי, if it is similar to the *machlokes* of Shamai and Hillel, for Shamai and Hillel loved and honored each other. This proves that their *machlokes* were *leshem shamayim*. But Korach and his followers harbored animosity towards Moshe. They almost stoned him. This proves that their dispute wasn't *leshem shamayim*. With this test, one can know whether his intentions are *leshem shamayim* or not."

Another solution for machlokes is to push it off by a day. By then, you may see things differently.

When Korach and his followers argued with Moshe, Moshe replied, (בקר וידע ד' את אשר לו 16:5). Rashi writes that Moshe pushed off the *machlokes* for the next day because "maybe [by then] they will change their minds."

9. A widow came to the Rebbe Aharon HaGadol zt'l before her daughter's chasunah. Rebbe Aharon had already helped this widow with the wedding expenses, so he wondered why she returned. She said, "My daughter has a crazy idea in her mind. I tried to speak sense to her, but she won't listen. She says that she wants a shtern tichel!"

(A shtern tichel is an expensive tichel that covers the forehead and is decorated with jewelry.) The mother was a poor widow, and kind people helped her pay for the chasunah, but how could she fill her daughter's desire to have a shtern tichel?

Rebbe Aharon had money in his house. He was saving it for the needs of his own family. He decided to

Another counsel is asking yourself what you would advise another person to do. Sometimes, people know better what others should do than what they themselves should. Removing yourself and your biases from the picture will help you make a better decision.

There's another counsel to know whether your thoughts are from the yetzer hara or the yetzer tov. If the thought keeps returning to your mind, that is a sign that the yetzer hara is talking. An indication of this concept from the Torah is the story of the wife of Potiphar. *Aishes Potifar* told Yosef that she saw in the stars that she was destined to bear a child from Yosef. Her intentions were *l'shem shamayim* (as Rashi tells us). But Yosef perceived that it would be an aveirah. How did Yosef know that? The pasuk (Bereishis 39:10) states, *ויהי כדברה אל יוסף יום יום ולא שמע אליה, לשכב אצלה להיות עמה*, "It came about when she spoke to Yosef day in and day out, that he did not obey her..."

She spoke to Yosef every day about it. The persistence was a sign of the yetzer hara. This indicated to Yosef that it was wrong.

There's a counsel from the Alshich HaKadosh of what one should do when he doesn't know whether the urge in him is the yetzer hara or the yetzer tov. He should do just a bit and see how he feels after that.

For example, if he is motivated to give a million dollars to tzedakah but isn't sure

that this is what Hashem wants from him, he should begin by giving a hundred thousand dollars to tzedakah and see how he feels after that. That will help him know whether this deed is Hashem's will or not.

The Alshich and the Malbim say that Dovid HaMelech used this technique when he found Shaul sleeping in the cave. He wasn't certain whether he should kill Shaul or not, so he cut off a corner of Shaul's clothing. The Navi says (Shmuel 1, 24:6) *ויהי אחרי כן ויד לב דוד אתו על אשר כרת את כנף אשר לשאול, ויאמר לאנשיו חלילה לי מזה אם אעשה את הדבר הזה לאדני למשיח הוא, ה' לשלח ידי בו כי משיח ה' הוא*, "And it was afterwards, that Dovid's heart smote him, for he had severed the corner of Shaul's clothes. [Dovid] said to his men, "Hashem forbid it for me, that I should do this thing to my master...to stretch forth my hand upon him, for he is Hashem's anointed."

The Malbim writes, "Dovid was...unsure whether Hashem wants Shaul to be killed by the person he was pursuing. So, he tested it by cutting off the edge of his coat. This action was a drop of the deed to rebel against him and desecrate the king's clothes. And behold, Dovid immediately felt *ויד לב דוד אותו* because the heart of the perfect people feels regret when they do something wrong. This is how Dovid knew that Shaul's kingship wasn't completed yet. He was afraid of the king and realized he sinned by cutting off the edge of his clothes. And all the more so, if he were to smite Shaul himself."

give the widow that money so she could buy her daughter a shtern tichel.

As he climbed up a ladder to get the money from above the sefarim shafer (bookcase), he thought, "Why should I give all this money to one family? Wouldn't it be better to divide the money among twenty families?" But then he thought, "Until now, I planned to keep the money for myself, and I never considered dividing it among twenty poor people. Why did this idea come to my mind specifically when I was about to perform a mitzvah of help an almanah? This is a sign that the thought is the yetzer hara," and he gave the money to the widow.

When his wife came home and found out that he gave the money to the widow, she asked him, "Wouldn't it be better to distribute the money among twenty poor people? Why did you give it all to one widow?"

He replied, "I had the same thought when I climbed the ladder to get the money, but then I realized that I didn't consider giving the money to tzedakah until then, and I realized that this thought was from the yetzer hara, so I gave her the money."

Similarly, the Alshich writes, "Dovid said, 'If my heart beats from regret for cutting off the corner of his cloak, certainly it will be bad in Hashem's eyes if I will smite Shaul, himself.'"

The Mesilas Yesarim (ch.20) discusses the thoughts one should have when he wants to do a good deed, but he isn't sure whether it is Hashem's will. He recommends that he should think through all angles of the issue. "He should turn to all sides of the matter that he can see, until he can judge whether he should do it or refrain.... Because there are times that the deed seems good, but since the outcome of this deed is bad, he shouldn't do it..."

We quote some more from the Mesilas Yesarim: "We now have to discuss משקל החסידות, weighing chassidus. This is a very important subject and a primary aspect of becoming a chasid. This is truly the hardest part of chassidus because it is a very thin line, and the yetzer hara has a large opening here. He is in great danger because there are many good deeds that the yetzer hara can push away, claiming that they are bad, and there are many aveiros that the yetzer hara will say are terrific mitzvos. The only way to succeed in weighing these matters is with the following three contemplations:

1] His heart must be straight. His sole intention should be to make a nachas ruach for Hashem without any other considerations.

2] He should study his deeds and seek to improve them for this purpose [of doing Hashem's will. He should think about the outcome of this deed and determine whether ultimately good will come from it or the opposite.]

3] And after all the above, he should place his trust in Hashem.... But if one of these details is lacking...it is more likely that he will make a mistake and fall."

Compassion for your Fellow Man

During the plague *Choshech*, it says (10:23) לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלשת ימים ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבתם "They did not see each other, and no one rose from his place for three days, but for all of Bnei Yisrael, there was light in their dwellings."

B'derech remez, we explain this pasuk in two ways. One is that if people don't look at each other and don't care to help their fellow man, that is darkness, מכת חושך.

Or we can explain the pasuk that if people don't look with jealousy at their fellow man, ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבתם, there is light and happiness among the Jewish nation.

Reb Zelig Weinberg (son of the Beis Avraham zt'l) lived in Teveria with his wife and children, and they needed a larger home, but he couldn't afford it. Once, he saw many people outside a house. He heard that the owner of this home couldn't pay the mortgage, so the bank put up the home to be sold to the highest bidder. The highest bidder, so far, was an Arab, who offered to pay two hundred thousand for the home, which was half its actual value.

"This is my opportunity," Reb Zelig told himself. "I offer to pay 220,000, he said to the auctioneer, and he earned the right to buy the house.

He came home and told his wife the good news. She replied, "I will not live there. The previous owner is certainly distraught that he lost his home, and I don't want to gain at the expense of another person's suffering."

He said, "But would it be better if the Arab bought it?"

"I don't care. I am not moving there!"

"I will ask Reb Moshe Klirs," he told his wife. "He will certainly agree that I did the right thing by buying the house."

Reb Moshe Klirs zt'l was the Rav of Teveria and the leader of the Slonimer chasidim, at the time. Surprisingly, he said

that his wife was correct. "I will tell you a story," he said:

"Your uncle, Reb Noach Wienberg, was a close follower of the tzaddik Reb Hersh Michel zt'l. He knew that Reb Hersh Michel needed thick towels, and when Reb Noach saw a widow selling thick towels near her home, he bought one and gave it to Reb Hersh Michel before he went to mikvah.

When Reb Hersh Michel returned from the tevilah, he thanked Reb Noach for the wonderful towel and asked him where he got it. Reb Noach told him that he bought it from a widow selling some odds and ends from her house.

"Give it right back to her," Reb Hersh Michel demanded. "She certainly needs the towel for herself; only she is poor, and she has to sell it to buy food or other necessities. I don't want to use a towel a widow was forced to sell!"

Reb Moshe Klirs concluded, "So, according to halachah, you did nothing wrong. You have a right to buy the home. However, Reb Hersh Michel wouldn't want to live in such a home. He wouldn't want to benefit when your gain is another Yid's sorrow."

Reb Zelig didn't move into the home, and caring community members pitched in and

repurchased the house for the original owners.

The Chinuch (Mitzvah 505) teaches, "The entire *shevet Levi* may not take a portion from the spoils of war that Yisrael will take when they enter the land, and what they will take away from their enemies afterwards..."

"The reason for this obligation is because the Levites are Hashem's servants. It isn't proper to use utensils that were stolen from others. In their homes, there should only be utensils taken in peace and honesty, not utensils that caused the hearts of men and women to be upset about their losses."

The Chinuch teaches us this sensitivity. One should not want to gain from another's loss.

At the end of Pesachim, the gemara discusses that when one does the mitzvah of *Pidyon Haben*, he says the *bracha* of *Shehechyanu*. But the Gemara doesn't say that the kohen says *Shehechyanu*. Why doesn't he say *Shehechyanu*?

The Meiri replies that the kohen doesn't say *shehechyanu* because there are other kohanim who didn't get the money. He shouldn't be totally happy with the money he received, knowing that others are upset that they didn't receive it.