

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Ki Sisa



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Ki Sisa

Shabbos Parah

Some *poskim* rule that reading *parashas Parah* is a Torah obligation. The Avodas Yisrael says it is alluded to in the words (*Bamidbar* 19:1-2). זאת חקת התורה, אשר צוה ה' לאמר "this is the rule of the Torah that Hashem commanded to say." This indicates that there is an obligation to say this *parashah*.

The Avodas Yisrael writes, "The Torah is hinting (with לאמר) that even when we don't have a Beis HaMikdash and can't prepare a physical *parah adumah*, we must read the *parashah*, and ונשלמה our saying the *parashah* will be considered as though we brought the *parah adumah*."

The Torah (*Bamidbar* 19:21) calls *parah adumah* חקת עולם, "an eternal law." How is *parah adumah* eternal? The

ashes of the *parah adumah* were available in the times of the Amoraim, and they would use them to purify themselves. But what about our generation? How is it possible to keep *parah adumah* in our generation? The Aruch HaShulchan (685:7) answers that the Torah hints that when we can't make a *parah adumah*, we have a mitzvah to read *parashas Parah*.

The Yerushalmi writes, "*Parashas Parah* is טהרתן של ישראל, the purity of the Jewish nation." When we read about the *parashah* of *parah adumah*, we become pure.

The Beis Aharon writes, "One must believe that just as the ashes of the *parah adumah* purify...today, everyone becomes purified when *Parashas Parah* is read – each person according to his level."

The Sfas Emes (*Parashas Parah* end 5641) clarifies, "The purity discussed here is purity from sin."

Similarly, Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* teaches that when we read this *parashah*, we become pure from sin. He proves this from the *haftorah*. The *haftorah* is usually based on the weekly Torah reading. This Shabbos, the *haftorah* says (*Yechezkel* 36:25), וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל טמאתיכם ומכל גלוליכם ואתהר אתכם, "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, that you may become cleansed; I will cleanse you from all your contamination and idols." This indicates that the Torah portion also refers to being *tahor* from *aveiros*.

Torah Purifies

Parashas Parah begins with (*Bamidbar* 19:2) זאת חקת התורה, "This is the statute of the Torah..." Why doesn't it state זאת חקת הפרה? Why is Torah mentioned? The *Rokeiach* answers that this

teaches us that Torah study purifies like the *parah adumah*.

The *Shlah HaKadosh* writes, "Even when there isn't a *parah adumah*, by studying Torah with *hasmadah*, one becomes pure."

A non-kosher cooking utensil is *kashered* by immersing it in boiling water (*הגעלה*). An even more powerful method of kashering is to scald the cooking utensil in fire (*ליבון*) until the utensil becomes red-hot. The *Or HaChaim zt'l* (*Rishon L'Tzion*) teaches that these two methods of *kashering* represent the paths people take to attain purity from their *aveiros*. One way is through afflictions, such as fasting and the like. This method is compared to boiling water, which cleanses and purifies the utensils from their impure, non-kosher status. Learning Torah, however, is a greater purifier because Torah is compared to fire. As it states (*Yirmiyahu* 23:19), הלא כה דברי כאש,

“Behold My words are like fire.” Just as fire is a more potent form of cleansing and kashering, so too is learning Torah a preferred way to attain purity from aveiros.

It states (*Bamidbar* 21:28), להבה, מקרית סיחון “a flame from the city of Sichon.” Targum Yonason translates סיחון as שייחון, speech, and it refers to speaking divrei Torah. The pasuk says that a blazing flame comes forth from Torah study, purifying us.

The passuk says (*Bamidbar* 19:19) והזה הטהר על הטמא ביום השלישי וביום השביעי... וטהר "The pure person shall sprinkle upon the tamei person on the third day and the seventh day...and he will become tahor..."

Tzaddikim said that the third and seventh days represent Torah. The third day represents Torah, as the Gemara (*Shabbos* 88.) says, “Baruch Hashem Who gave us a Torah of three (Torah, *Neviim*, *Kesuvim*) to a nation of three (*kohanim*, *Leviim*, *Yisraelim*)

by the third (Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the third child to his parents) on the third day (of *shloshes yemei hagbalah*), in the third month (Sivan).”

The seventh day also represents Torah, as Chazal say, “All opinions agree that the Torah was given on Shabbos.” The ashes of the parah adumah were sprinkled onto the person who was tamei on the third and seventh day, teaching us that Torah study purifies.

Studying Gemara, in particular, purifies.

Rebbe Shlomo Karliner zy”a said that Gemara comes from the word *gumri* [coals] because Gemara is like burning coals that burn away all impurities.

Rebbe Shmuel Kaminka zy”a once spoke with his students about the importance of studying a “blatt Gemara.” He said, “With a blatt Gemara, one comes out of the *blotta* (the mud, the yetzer hara).”

One of the students became inspired and quickly went into the next room to find a Gemara. He couldn't find a Gemara, but he found a mishnayos. So he studied a chapter of mishnayos and then returned to hear more Torah from Reb Shmuel Kaminka. As he returned, Rebbe Shmuel commented, "He thinks he can cleanse himself with a chapter Mishnayos with the same purity that comes from a daf Gemara..."

The word טמא, when the three letters are spelled out in full like this: טית מם אלף is gematriya 610. תורה is one more because תורה is gematriya 611. This is hinted in the yotzros of Shabbos Parah, מי יתן טהור מטמא הלא אחד, that purity comes from the one more, which is Torah.

Torah for Everyone

The Sefer Chassidim (945) writes, "The scholars of the later generations are less clever in Torah than those of earlier generations.

Nevertheless, in Hakadosh Baruch Hu's eyes, the less wise scholars in the present are equal to the genius scholars of the past because, otherwise, every generation can claim, 'Why didn't you create me in an earlier generation, and I would know much more Torah?' But the answer is that the amount you know isn't the point. You can know a little or a lot; the main thing is that your intention is [to study Torah] for Hashem's sake. Don't waste time; study Torah whenever you can, even if you aren't as sharp and wise [as the scholars of the past]."

Dovid HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 119:54), זמירות היו לי חקיד, "Your statutes were to me like songs." The Gemara (*Sotah* 35.) says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was upset that Dovid said this. Torah shouldn't be called זמירות.

The Brisker Rav *zt'l* explains that some people don't know how to carry a tune. So if Torah is called

zemiros, there's an implication that it isn't for everyone.

Dovid HaMelech was punished that he forgot the halachah (*Bamidbar* 7:9), בכתף ישאו that the *aron* must be carried by the *levi'im*, on their shoulders (see *Shmuel* 1, 6:19).

The Brisker Rav explains that the punishment reminded Dovid that when it comes to Torah, all one needs is בכתף ישאו to place the yoke of Torah on his shoulders and try his best. Success isn't your obligation; just to do the best you can.

Even if you work most of the day and don't have much time for Torah study, if you are determined, you can generally find much time for Torah. The Kotzker *zt'l* and other *tzaddikim* taught that the word קבעת could mean to steal (see *Mishlei* 22). Thus, קבעת עתים לתורה means one should "steal" time from his busy schedule to devote to Torah study.

Torah and Happiness

Pirkei Avos (6) states that one of the 48 traits needed to acquire Torah is שמחה, joy. The Maharal (*Derech Chaim Avos* 6) explains, "Simchah is a great level. When one is happy, he has perfection (*sheleimus*). And when he has perfection, he can receive the Torah, which is the perfection of man."

The Ibn Ezra (in his *Igeres HaShabbos*) writes, "Every day the gates of comprehension open, but on Shabbos one hundred gates open." Therefore, it is much easier to understand Torah on Shabbos than on a weekday. Likewise, the Chazon Ish *zt'l* writes that on Shabbos, one can understand the sections of Torah that he failed to understand during the week. Perhaps this is because people are happier on Shabbos, as Shabbos is called שמוחתכם, "Your day of joy." And joy is one of the 48 keys necessary for acquiring the Torah.

Torah is acquired with simchah, and Torah study itself makes us happy, as it states (*Tehillim* 19:9), פקודי ה' ישרים, משמחי לב, "Hashem's mitzvos are upright; they gladden the heart." Nothing is more joyous than studying the Torah and the performance of the mitzvos.

Ohev Yisrael (*Vayikra, Likutim Chadashim*) writes:

"We see many *chassidim* who become *meshugah, chas veshalom*, or depressed. How did this happen? If you say it is from the Torah, we know the opposite is true; Torah makes people happy. (This is why it is forbidden for mourners to study Torah, as well as why it is forbidden to study Torah on Tisha b'Av.) If you say they became insane or depressed due to their caution in performing mitzvos, once again, we know that this isn't so because (*Tehillim* 19:9), פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב, 'The mitzvos of Hashem are upright, causing the heart to rejoice.'"

The Ohev Yisrael answers that depression and insanity come when one strives to reach levels that are far beyond him. But Torah and mitzvos themselves bring only happiness.

A father asked one of the roshei yeshivah of Tchebin, Reb Avraham Ganichovsky zt"l, to speak with his son and to encourage him to study Torah diligently.

Reb Avraham told the bachur the following *meshal*:

A king, his aide, and three advisors strolled through a forest near the king's palace. The king became thirsty and sent his aide to the palace to get him water. The aide filled a large crystal cup with water and placed it on a diamond-studded wooden tray.

Rushing through the forest, the aide tripped, the water spilled, and the tray fell into a pit. The aide returned to the palace and brought another cup of water.

The king quenched his thirst and thanked his aide, but now the king asked his advisors to help him retrieve the tray from the pit. The pit was narrow, and it was impossible to climb inside.

One advisor said, "We can widen the pit. That way, we can get inside and retrieve the tray."

Another advisor spoke up, "That isn't a good idea. The tray might break while we dig. It is also possible that the tray will fall even deeper into this ditch. Instead, I suggest that we dig another hole next to the original pit. Then we can connect the two pits and retrieve the tray."

The third advisor said, "That is a very costly and time-consuming venture. So instead, I recommend that we fill the pit with water. Then, the wooden tray will float, and we can easily take it out."

Reb Avraham Ganichovsky explained to

the *bachur* that everyone suffers; it is impossible to go through this world without hardship. There are methods that help overcome distress, but often, these approaches cause more harm than good.

(In the *mashal*, this was expressed by widening the pit, which might cause them to lose the tray forever). And even when the attempts to attain happiness are helpful, the effort is enormous, and it is doubtful whether it is worth the time and effort. (In the *mashal*, this was represented with the counsel to dig another pit and then to connect them). But there is one foolproof way to acquire joy and tranquility in this world: to study Torah. Torah is compared to water (and in the *mashal*, it is compared to pouring water into the pit until the tray comes up). When one is immersed in Torah, nothing will disturb him. His life will always be good.

Torah on Shabbos

Towards the end of his life, Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* traveled to Vienna for

medical purposes. His son, Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zt'l*, accompanied him. They stayed in Vienna for a few weeks.

Reb Yissacher Dov was impressed by a certain bachur in Vienna who was studying Torah with *hasmadah* throughout Shabbos. Rebbe Yissachar Dov spoke with this bachur, and the bachur told him his story:

“I was drafted into the army and had to work on Shabbos. So I asked my commander to let me take off on Shabbos, and in exchange, I would work extra during the weekdays. Miraculously, he agreed! I realized this was a miracle, so I made a *kabbalah* to dedicate Shabbos to studying Torah.”

Reb Yissacher Dov quipped, “Who knows whether this bachur isn’t holding up the coming of Moshiach. Hashem has so much *nachas ruach* from his *mesirus nefesh* for Torah, and this *nachas ruach* won’t be there when Moshiach comes...”

In the *Aseres HaDibros*, keeping Shabbos is written next to the mitzvah of honoring parents. The Chida explains that the two mitzvos are juxtaposed because a primary time for *kibud av v'em* is Shabbos. The *Zohar* states that the *chidushei Torah* one creates on Shabbos become a crown for one’s parents in Gan Eden, so with Shabbos, one can honor his parents.¹

The Ben Ish Chai writes, “One accomplishes a thousand times more with

1. The Yesod v’Shoresch HaOvadah writes that for those who can’t create a *chiddush* in Torah, a *kabbalah tovah* is also sufficient.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* says that understanding Torah better and clearer is also considered *chidushei Torah*.

his studies on Shabbos than on a weekday.”

Reb Elyah Roth *zt'l* said, “A *daf* Gemara on Shabbos is equivalent to five hundred pages of Gemara on a weekday. One chapter of *Tehillim* on Shabbos is equivalent to five hundred chapters of *Tehillim* on a weekday.”

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said that if a non-Jew knew the pleasure Yidden have when they study a *daf* Gemara Shabbos morning before *Shacharis*, they would convert just for that pleasure.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (p.144) says, “Studying a page of Gemara before daybreak on a weekday is *גן עדן התחתון* (the lower Gan Eden) and to study a page of Gemara before daybreak on Shabbos is *גן עדן העליון* (the upper Gan Eden). The Beis Aharon concluded, “If you learn a *daf* Gemara with *iyun* (in-

depth) before *Shacharis*, you will say *ושמתי כל היום* differently.”

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky *zt'l* would say *Tehillim* chapter קי”ט on Shabbos morning² before *Shacharis* and would translate many of the *pesukim* into Yiddish. For example, he would repeat many times, *חסדך ה' מלאה הארץ חוקך למדני*, “Hashem, Your kindness fills the world, teach me Your Torah.” And in Yiddish, he would say, “Hashem, the world is filled with Your *chesed*. There are so many pleasures in the world. But I do not ask for any of them. All I ask is that You teach me Torah.”

It states (*Tehillim* קי”ט) *מה אהבתי תורתך כל היום היא שיחתי*, “How I love Your Torah! All day it is my conversation.” The Chida says that *היום* means Shabbos. Dovid HaMelech is saying *כל היום היא שיחתי*, that he would study Torah the entire Shabbos.

2. The *roshei teivos* of *חמדת ימים אותו קראת* are *gematriya* 119. This hints to the ideal of saying chapter (119, קי”ט) on Shabbos.

Hasmadah

The Ponovitcher Rav zt"l, HaRav Kahanaman, learned in the Kollel Kodshim³ that the Chofetz Chaim initiated, and his chavrusa was Reb Elchanan Wasserman zt"l, hy"d. They would study every day for six hours straight, from eight to two. One day, the Ponovitcher Rav received a telegram requesting him to go home because his wife was in labor. He showed the telegram to the Chofetz Chaim, but the Chofetz Chaim told him to continue studying Torah.

Soon, he received another telegram that his wife had given birth to a boy. He put on his *datchekel* cap, said the *brachah* of 'HaTov VeHameitiv,' and continued learning until two o'clock, as he did every day. Then

he showed the Chofetz Chaim the second telegram and told him he wanted to go to the bris. "Are you the mohel?" the Chofetz Chaim asked, and the Ponovitcher Rav remained in the yeshiva.

The Ponovitcher Rav told this story to the Beis Yisrael of Gur zy"a. He was very impressed and commented, "This story is fitting for chassidim."

Chinuch for Torah

Torah is beloved by Klal Yisrael, and when a gadol emerges, it is often due to the mesirus nefesh of the child's parents.

Pirkei Avos (2:8) says, ר' יהושע בן חנניה אשרי יולדתו, "Reb Yehoshua ben Chananyah, fortunate is his mother!" The Ra'v Bartenura explains, "Some explain that when his mother was pregnant, she

3. This kollel was for kohanim to study the laws of the Beis HaMikdash, so the kohanim would know how to perform the service in the Beis HaMikdash when the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, speedily in our days.

went to the *batei midrashim* of her city and asked the Torah scholars to daven for the child in her womb to become a *talmid chacham*. And from the day her son, Reb Yehoshua was born, she didn't take his crib out of the *beis medresh*, so his ears will hear nothing other than *divrei Torah*.⁴

Reb Noson Gestetner *zt'l* writes (בן עמרם vol.1 310) that when his mother was in labor with him, his father, Reb Amram *zt'l*, requested from the midwife that she shouldn't speak for the first few minutes after the child is born because he wanted the first sounds the child hears to be the sound of Torah study. When the child was born, Reb Amram was in the next room studying Gemara out loud; these were

the first sounds Reb Noson Gestetner heard as an infant.

Shulchan Aruch (*Yorah Deiah* 245:5) states, "When does one begin teaching Torah to his son? When the child begins to speak, teach him to say תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב, and the first pasuk of *Shema*. Continue teaching him gradually until he reaches six or seven years old, and then bring him to a *melamed*."

Because we want the child's first words that he hears and speaks to be words of Torah.

Reb Yitzchak Hutner *zt'l* attributed his growth in Torah to his mother, who showed him her love for Torah. Once, her husband bought her a new dress. They were poor, so the dress meant a lot to her, but she saved it to put on for the

4. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 96: and *Yevamos* 79:) relates that Reb Yehoshua said, "I heard [the following halachah], but I don't know what it means." Reb Chaim Kanievsky *zt'l* (*Derech Sichah Vayeilach*) says that perhaps Reb Yehoshua heard this halachah as a young child when his mother brought him to the *beis medresh*.

first time when her son made a siyum. This showed her son how much she loves Torah, encouraging him to put all his efforts into knowing Torah.

Learning Torah is the Greatest Mitzvah

It states (*Mishlei* 8:11), כי טובה, חכמה מפנינים וכל חפצים לא ישוו בה, "For wisdom is better than pearls; all desirable things cannot compare to it." The Gemara (*Moed Katan* 8:) adds, אפילו חפצי שמים לא ישוו בה, "Even mitzvos don't compare to Torah." Because the greatest mitzvah a person can perform is to study Torah.

This is not the way people generally see things. If you ask unlearned people, "What is the greatest deed a person can do?" many will respond that saving a life is the greatest mitzvah. Indeed,

saving a life is a great mitzvah, but Chazal (*Megillah* 16:) say, גדול תלמוד תורה יותר מהצלת, ונפשות "Studying Torah is greater than saving lives."⁵

The Gemara adds, "Studying Torah is greater than building the Beis HaMikdash... Studying Torah is greater than *kibud av ve'eim*."

Pirkei Avos (6:5) states, "Torah is greater than *kehunah* and *meluchah* (kingship)."

The Chofetz Chaim (*Toras HaBayis* ch.5) writes, "My friend, think about the precious value of each moment of Torah so you won't waste your time. For example, imagine that you once had the merit to save someone's life. Someone was drowning in the river, and you jumped in and

5. The Taz (*Yorah Deiah* 251:6) writes, "Saving a life always comes first. [If a person has a choice whether to save a life or to study Torah, obviously, saving a life takes precedence.] Nothing stands in the way of *pikuach nefesh*. The Gemara is saying that the merit of learning Torah is greater than the merit of saving lives."

saved him. How proud you would be! You will never forget that moment. For the rest of your life, you will talk about it. And, indeed, it is an incredibly great mitzvah to save a life. As Chazal say, 'Whoever saves a Yid's life, it is like he saved the entire world.'

"If you saved many lives, your joy would be boundless. Now, *chas veshalom*, think about the opposite: Someone drowned in a lake or was consumed by a fire because the person who knew about it, and had the potential to save him, was lazy and didn't respond immediately. How would he feel? He would feel terrible. He will always remember this error."

The Chofetz Chaim continues, "One person saved lives, and another learned Torah. Each acted correctly, according to the situation they were in. If the question is raised, 'Who performed a greater mitzvah?' Everyone will say the person who saved lives performed a greater mitzvah!

However, Chazal reveal that studying Torah is greater than saving lives. Now understand, my brother, that according to this, for every moment you had the opportunity to study Torah and you didn't, it is like you had the opportunity to save a life and didn't take advantage of it. Although our eyes are covered, and we don't recognize things this way, Chazal revealed this secret. The merit of studying Torah is extremely great. Nothing in the world compares to it. This is why Dovid HaMelech prayed so much for success in Torah (in *Tehillim* 119)".

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 5) says, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu cries for three groups of people each day." One of them is "Someone who has the ability to study Torah and doesn't."

Why does Hashem cry for him?

The Chofetz Chaim explains that it is because Hashem is our father.

Wouldn't a father cry when he sees his son throwing away opportunities for attaining extreme wealth? Hashem also cries when He sees us wasting precious time that could have been used for amassing something more precious than gold and diamonds.

Emunah Peshutah

There were times in history when the gentiles would require Jewish scholars to participate in religious debates. Each participant was to prove his religion's validity and disprove the other belief. The gentile's evil intention was to prove their religion's veracity and thereby demand the Jews to convert, *chalilah*.

One bishop was involved in this practice for a long time but never succeeded. Finally, frustrated, he said, "I want to conduct one more debate. If I win, all the Jews must either convert or be

burnt. If the Jews win, I will be thrown into the furnace."

The Jewish community was frightened and realized that only Hashem could help them. So they gathered in the shul and prayed for salvation.

No one had the courage to represent the Jewish community in the debate. Only one very simple Yid said, "I will debate the bishop, and Hashem will help."

He was very simple and could hardly read and write, but he was the only person willing to take on the challenge, so he was sent to the debate.

A large crowd gathered to witness the great and final debate. The Jews were told to present the first question. The simple Yid asked, "What does איני יודע mean?"

"I don't know," answered the bishop.

The panel of judges heard the bishop say he didn't know, so they immediately picked him up and threw him into the furnace, and ליהודים היתה אורה ושמוחה, the Yidden rejoiced and celebrated their salvation.

Later they asked the simple Yid, "How did you think of this clever plan?"

The Yid answered, "I have a *chumash* with a Yiddish translation. When Rashi writes, איני יודע, the Yiddish translation is, "I don't know." So I figured that if even the translator of Rashi didn't know the meaning of these words, the bishop certainly wouldn't."

The Chozeh of Lublin zy"א used to tell this story to illustrate that we don't need immense wisdom to prove our emunah. With emunah peshutah, all questions fall away.

Raise Your Head

The parashah begins with (30:12) כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ, and literally, this means to raise the heads of Bnei Yisrael. The Midrash writes that Hashem promised Moshe Rabbeinu that every year, when we read parashas Shekalim, Moshe will be there, and he will raise the heads of the Jewish nation. People generally quote this Midrash before Shabbos Shekalim to remind ourselves of our good fortune, that Moshe Rabbeinu comes and raises our heads every year. However, the Lev Simchah zt'l notes that the Midrash doesn't say this will occur solely on Shabbos Shekalim. The Midrash says that Moshe Rabbeinu comes and raises our heads *every time* we read this portion of the Torah. So, it seems it will occur on this Shabbos as well. The parashah discusses the shekalim, and Moshe Rabbeinu will be there to raise our heads.

What does it mean to have a raised head? The Beis Yisrael zt'l explains, "With everything you do, keep your head above it."

For example, when it comes to hishtadlus for parnassah, do what you need to, but keep your mind out of it.

Reb Chaim of Krasna zt'l (a student of the Baal Shem Tov zt'l) once watched a tightrope walker walking on a rope stretched over a lake and expressed what he learned from it: "This tightrope walker does this stunt for parnassah. Nevertheless, when he is up there, on the rope, his focus is on his balance. He doesn't think about his parnassah now. If he thinks about the money he will earn, he will fall. People should do this when they are involved in their hishtadlus for parnassah. They should do what they must, but their minds shouldn't be on the parnassah.

Many women were brought to Achashveirosh, and they all made hishtadlus because they hoped Achashveirosh would choose them as his queen (see Megillas Esther 2:13). Rashi writes that they would ask for כל שחוק ומיני זמר, comedy and musical instruments to make a better impression on Achashveirosh. But Esther didn't make any extra hishtadlus at all. The pasuk states (2:15) ובהגיע תר אסתר בת אביחיל דד מרדכי אשר לקח לו לבת לבוא אל המלך לא בקשה דבר, "When the turn of Esther, the daughter of Avigail, Mordecai's uncle, who had taken for a daughter, came to go to the king, she requested nothing..."

The trop on these words expresses Esther's calmness at that time because the trop is מוּנָה, מוּנָה, מוּנָה, מוּנָה. Four times מוּנָה, which means resting, tranquility. With this attitude, she went to Achashveirosh, not trying extra hard to impress him, and she was the one who was chosen! This teaches us

that extra hishtadlus doesn't bring success, but Hashem's plan and decision will. If it is destined for one to be Achashveirosh's wife, it will be, regardless of what one does.⁶

Never Too Late to Do Teshuvah

The Chozeh of Lublin said that the primary aveirah of the egel was (33:4) וַיִּתְאָבְלוּ, that the nation became sad because of their sin and didn't believe they could do

teshuvah and correct their aveirah.

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz zt'l would call the egel an "*untergevorfene maaseh*," meaning they weren't guilty of this aveirah. They were set up to fail this test. Chazal (Avodah Zarah 4:) states, לֹא יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ רְאוּיִים לְאוֹתוֹ מַעֲשֵׂה, which means that Bnei Yisrael wouldn't have committed this aveirah of the egel. It only happened to teach that we can do teshuvah. Rashi explains,

6. Hashem told Moshe (32:8) סָרוּ מִהַר מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶם עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסִּכָּה, "They have quickly turned away from the path that I have commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf!" How did they fall so quickly? Chazal say, "Today the yetzer hara tells you to do this, and the next day he tells you to do that until he tells you to go worship avodah zarah." It is a process. Spiritual descent can take months and years. But this time it was סָרוּ מִהַר, a rapid decline. How did that happen?

The answer is that the nation became confused, and when there is confusion, r'l, spiritual descent happens quickly. Rashi (32:1) writes, "On the sixteenth [of Tammuz], the Satan came and brought confusion into the world and showed a semblance of darkness, even pitch darkness, and confusion, as if indicating that Moshe had surely passed away, and therefore, confusion had come upon the world... The Satan showed them something resembling Moshe, carried in the air, high above in the sky." Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that they had a quick descent, r'l.

"They were great people and had control over their yetzer hara. It shouldn't have occurred that their yetzer hara should rule over them. But the King decreed [that this time] their yetzer hara should rule over them, to give hope for baalei teshuvah. If a person commits aveiros and says, 'I will not do teshuvah because my teshuvah will not be accepted,' we tell him, 'Remember what happened by the egel. They had a kaparah, and their teshuvah was accepted.'"

The machatzis hashekel atoned for the Jewish nation, as it states (30:15) *לכפר על נפשותיכם*, "to atone for your souls."

Moshe Rabbeinu didn't understand what the shekel looked like until Hashem showed him one. Rashi (30:13) writes, "[Hashem] showed him a coin of fire that weighed a half-shekel, and said, 'This is what they should give.'"

Moshe knew the entire Torah, with all its laws and details. So why was the *machtzis hashekel* particularly difficult for Moshe to understand?

The answer is that the *machtzis hashekel* was for atonement, and it was hard for Moshe Rabbeinu to imagine that such a small amount of money could bring atonement.

The Midrash Tanchumah (11) says, "When Moshe heard that the nation must give money for their atonement, he became afraid. [He feared that it would cost them a lot of money]. Hashem knew what Moshe was thinking, so Hashem told him, "I promise, a *kikar* of silver isn't needed [for atonement], and not a hundred, fifty, or thirty silver coins either. All I ask is a half-shekel."

Another *Midrash* states that *Klal Yisrael* was afraid when they heard they must give money for their atonement. So they said,

"All the money that we gathered in Mitzrayim and afterward from the Yam Suf was for nothing because we will need to give it all away for our atonement."

"Hashem knew what they were thinking.... He took a fiery half-shekel from under the *Kisei HaKovod* (Hashem's throne) and showed it to Moshe. "This is what they should give."

So, when our deeds seem small and insignificant, be aware that for Hashem, even a half-shekel is a lot and can atone for great sins.

The first sefer that a sofer writes is generally megillas Esther. A bachur was learning to be a sofer, and he wrote a megillas Esther, but it didn't look too good. The letters were slanty and of different sizes; some of the words entered into the margin, and so on. No one wanted to buy it, not even for a low price, so his father bought it, hoping that this would encourage his son to continue practicing and

trying. After he bought it, the father gave the megillah to a safrus merchant.

"What do you want me to do with this?" the merchant asked. He couldn't imagine that anyone would want to buy it.

"See what you can get for it," the father said. "Any price is better than nothing at all."

One day, a wealthy person asked the safrus merchant to bring several megillos to his home because he wanted to choose one. The rich person added, "Since I am troubling you to come to me, I will pay you \$2,500 for the megillah, even if the price is lower."

The merchant brought along every megillah he had in stock. The wealthy man turned down one after the other. "This isn't what I have in mind," he said simply, although the merchant didn't understand why he wasn't satisfied with his beautiful megillos. Finally,

having turned down all the megillos, the merchant began packing up his megillos to leave. The wealthy man said, "One minute. I see you have one more megillah in your box that you didn't show me yet."

"No. It isn't for you," the merchant said. It was the beginner's megillah, and the merchant figured that if he didn't want all the beautiful megillos, he certainly wouldn't want this one. He was embarrassed to show it.

"Please show it to me," the wealthy man said.

The merchant opened the megillah, and the wealthy man loved it. "This is exactly what I wanted," he said, and he paid 2.5 thousand dollars. (This was several years ago when the prices weren't as high as they are currently).

Afterward, the merchant asked him why he preferred this megillah over all the others. The wealthy man

replied, "The other megillos were written perfectly; all letters are uniform, the same height and style. They appear printed. But this megillah is different. It is evident that this megillah was hand-written by a sofer. Each letter is different. This is the type of megillah I like. I see in it the workmanship!"

The father repeated this story to me, and he said that we learn from this that it isn't hishtadlus that brings us parnassah, instead it is Hashem's brachah. This time, the hishtadlus wasn't as good, but Hashem placed his brachah, and he earned a lot of money.

I took another lesson from this episode. This story is a reminder that Hashem enjoys the work of human beings. It is our imperfection that makes our deeds special. Hashem has enough malachim. If Hashem wanted perfection, He wouldn't have created us. Hashem wants us, with our faults and human imperfections. Our deeds

seem slanted and incomplete, and sometimes we step out of line, but it is precisely due to our human nature that Hashem desires our service.

Machlokes is Worse than Avodah Zarah

The Midrash (46:1) writes: "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe (Shmos 32:7) to descend from the mountain because the nation sinned, Moshe was holding the luchos in his hands, but he didn't believe that the Yidden sinned. He said, 'If I don't see it, I don't believe it.' The proof is (Shmos 32:19) ויהי כאשר קרב משה אל המחנה... וישלך מידו את הלחת 'It happened as he drew near the camp... He threw down the luchos.' He wouldn't break the luchos before he saw it with his own eyes. Could it be that Moshe didn't believe Hakadosh Baruch Hu when Hashem told him that they sinned? Moshe was teaching us derech erez: Even if someone you trust tells you something, don't accept his

testimony and act upon it until you see it on your own."

The Brisker Rav zt'l was very inspired by this Midrash. Indeed, it is excellent counsel, and if followed, would prevent many machlokes and hardship. Hashem told Moshe what had occurred, but Moshe refused to believe it until he saw it. Therefore, we must also be cautious not to jump to conclusions and think that someone has sinned or harmed us until we are sure it is.

The Shevet Mussar says that the mann fell every day, even on the day they made the egel, but the mann didn't fall when Korach made a machlokes. This teaches us that machlokes is worse than avodah zarah.

Shimon was a beautiful chazan, but he was a baal aveirah. The community wanted to hire him to be chazan, but the rav of the city was very against it. The rav wrote a letter to Reb

Yosef Posner (son-in-law of Noda b'Yehudah) expressing Shimon's great sins⁷ and the machlokes that broke out in his community as a result.

Reb Yosef Posner replied, "It is better that there be a tzelem (cross) in the heichel (Beis HaMikdash) than a machlokes in Yisrael." It is hard to imagine, but this is what he told him. Obviously, the ideal situation is that Shimon shouldn't be chazan, but one must be cautious that it doesn't result in machlokes.

The Chasam Sofer says that Aharon made the egel because he realized if he refused, it would result in machlokes. He chose Avodah zarah over machlokes.

When Aharon came to the mizbeach to offer korbanos, he saw an egel

made of fire on the mizbeach and feared that this meant he wasn't worthy of being kohen gadol. Moshe told him, לִכְךָ נִבְחַרְתָּ, "This is the reason you were chosen. You think you aren't worthy to be kohen gadol because you made the egel. The egel that you made proves you are the right person for this position. Your mesirus nefesh for klal Yisrael to protect them from machlokes is your merit."

The Kedushah of a Yid

Every year, on the seventh of Adar, the members of the *chevrah kadishah* fast, and at nighttime, they conduct a seudah. The purpose of this fast is to atone for their sins, in case they didn't treat a *niftar* with appropriate respect. At the *seudah*, speeches are delivered to

7. He wrote, דרש שמעון כל אתין שבתורה, את החזיר, את הנזיר, כיון שהגיע לאת ה' אלקיך, תירא פירש, a play on words from the Gemara (Pesachim 22:). It implies that Shimon ate chazir, committed all other aveiros, and didn't have yiras Shamayim.

encourage the *chevrah kadishah* to be careful with *kavod hameis* (the honor of the deceased).

At one such dinner in Yerushalayim, a speaker related the following story:

A dying person had an unusual final request. He asked that those present at his *levayah* sing *Bar Yochai* near his freshly dug grave.

He was *niftar* on a Friday. There was no time to bury him on Friday, and over *Shabbos*, a *gadol* was *niftar*. Thousands of people attended the *gadol's levayah*, and the *levayah* of this simple man was pushed off until after the *gadol's levayah*. The *chevrah kadishah* began the *taharah* late motzei *Shabbos* and were ready for the *levayah* at 1:00 a.m., but by that time, only nine people were around to attend the *levayah*. This *niftar* didn't have children nor much family, and now there wasn't even a *minyán* to escort him.

A member of the *chevrah kadishah* went to a *beis medresh* where people study all night long to seek someone willing to join them for the *levayah*. A *magid shiur* was there to prepare a class for his students the next day. He went with the *chevrah kadisha* to the *levayah*.

The *levayah* was completed by two o'clock a.m., and then the secretary of the *chevrah kadishah* remembered the *niftar's* final request. "Does anyone have a *siddur* with *Bar Yochai* in it? The *niftar* asked that we sing *Bar Yochai* over his fresh grave."

No one had a *siddur*.

But then the *magid shiur* remembered that he had the *Bar Yochai* with him. He took out a piece of paper from his pocket, and they sang together with *hislahavus*.

On the way back, the *magid shiur* told the *chevrah kadishah* about the amazing *hashgachah pratis* that

occurred. This past Shabbos, he had walked on a street where he generally doesn't go, and he found a piece of sheimos on the ground. It was from a siddur, and the page had the song Bar Yochai on it. "I put it in my pocket so that I could put the paper in sheimos, but I never got around to doing so. It was hashgachah pratis so that we could fulfill this Yid's request."

One member of the *chevrah kadishah* remarked, "If such a story had happened to a chassidic rebbe, people would speak about it for generations."

"Perhaps he was a tzaddik *nistar*?" said another.

"I'll check into the matter tomorrow," the secretary said.

After some inquiries, he discovered that this man was a plain simple Jew. On *erev* Rosh Chodesh, he would go to Reb Shimon Bar Yochai's kever in Miron, and every Friday night, he sang Bar Yochai before his Shabbos seudah."

The speaker concluded with the following thought: "We should treat every *niftar* with the utmost respect because we can never know how special they are to Hashem. Here is a story of an otherwise regular person, but Hashem performed miracles for him so that his last will should be fulfilled."

The next speaker stood up and said, "Thank you for this wonderful story, and it definitely teaches us to be careful with *kavod hameis*, but I say that we shouldn't wait for people to die to respect them. Instead, we should honor each person when they are alive because everyone has qualities that make them special. Even the seemingly small, good deeds that they do make them extremely precious to Hashem."

The specialness of a Yid is also learned from this week's *parashah*. It states (31:13), אך את שבתותי תשמרו... לדעת, "However, you must keep my Shabbos...to know that I am Hashem, Who makes you holy."

How does keeping Shabbos teach us that Hashem made us holy? The Chasam Sofer zt'l answers that the pasuk is telling us that it is forbidden to build the Mishkan on Shabbos. Rashi writes, "Although you are rushing and *zrizim* to build the *mishkan*, don't build it on Shabbos." In other words, Shabbos is holier than the Mishkan, so we can't desecrate the Shabbos to build the Mishkan. But we may desecrate the Shabbos to save a Yid's life. This means a Yid is holier than Shabbos, and Shabbos is holier than the Mishkan. The Torah says, אך את שבתותי תשמרו... לדעת כי אני ד' מקדשכם.

Shabbos is more kadosh than the Mishkan, and with this awareness, you will understand that the holiest of all is Bnei Yisrael, for they are even more kadosh than Shabbos!⁸

Don't Look Back

The Gemara (*Chulin* 139:) says that Haman is alluded to in the Torah when it states (Bereishis 3:11), המן העץ אשר צויתך, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (the first word is המן).

This *passuk* alludes to the ways of Haman and of resha'im, who constantly repeat their errors, drawing

8. Moshe Rabbeinu davened that Hashem should forgive the nation from the sin of the egel. He added, (32:32) ואם אין מחני נא מספרך, "If [you won't forgive them] erase me from Your sefer..." Rashi explains, "People shouldn't say I wasn't worthy of asking for compassion." The Beis Aharon explains that Moshe was ענו מכל אדם, the humblest person. So, it certainly wasn't his honor that he was concerned about. He feared that if Hashem didn't answer his tefillah, people would say that Hashem doesn't answer the tefillos of the low people (because Moshe considered himself to be the smallest Yid). Therefore, it was important for him that Hashem answer his tefillah, so people would know that Hashem answers the tefillos of every Yid.

themselves into depression. About this, Chazal say, רשעים מלאים חרטות, *resha'im* are full of regret. In contrast, *tzaddikim* forget about the past and move on.

The Gemara says that Mordechai's name is alluded to in the *passuk* (this week's parashah, 30:23) קח לך בשמים מר, דרור, "Take for yourself incenses, *mor dror*..." and Onkelus says *mor dror* is מריא דכיי (Mordechai). The *passuk* is

in the present tense, indicating that *tzaddikim* think about the present. They designate times for introspection and *teshuvah*, but most of the time, the focus is on improving the present and the future.

After the Holocaust, someone asked the Divrei Yoel of Satmar zy"l for his thoughts on the Holocaust. He replied, "A Yid doesn't think about what was."⁹

9. A father brought his depressed son to Reb Avraham Genichovsky zt'l, hoping that he would teach him how to be happy. Reb Avraham Genichovsky said, "We only eat *marrur* once a year. We don't need to constantly focus on the negative."

Reb Efraim Margolios zt"l, author of several renowned halachic *sefarim* (*Matteh Efraim*, *Yad Efraim*, and others), was also very wealthy (he owned a bank). Once, an expensive vase broke in his home. His wife was very upset about this, but he remained calm. So she asked him, "How can you be so calm? Do you realize how expensive it was?"

He said, "Ask me this question a year from now, and then I'll explain."

She remembered the date, and precisely a year later, she asked him for an explanation.

He asked her, "Are you still upset about the broken vase?"

She said that it didn't bother her anymore.

He replied, "Your father chose me to be his son-in-law because he said that I am an *iluy* (genius) and I grasp matters quickly. So when

Reb Avraham Mordechai was a special Yid who survived the second world war and afterwards, established several yeshivos. At the chanukas habayis of a yeshiva, Reb Avraham Mordechai repeated the pasuk in this week's haftorah (Yechezkel 11:19) והסרתי לב האבן מבשרם ונתתי להם לב בשר, "I shall remove the heart of stone from their flesh, and I shall give them a heart of flesh." The pasuk says that when Moshiach comes, we will have a heart of flesh; now, in galus, the heart is made of stone. Reb Avraham

Mordechai explained that a heart made of stone has no feelings. It is neither sad nor happy. Things happen to him, but he does not react. Reb Avraham Mordechai explained that this was a coping mechanism they needed to employ throughout the hard times of the Holocaust and through all hard times in galus. They couldn't think; it was just too painful. "But now that we are finally past those hard times, and we are building yeshivos, perhaps now we can acquire a heart of flesh."

the vase broke, I immediately grasped how I would feel today, a year later, and that's why I didn't let it bother me then."

Many of the customs we have at a wedding chuppah commemorate *Mattan* Torah. Some explain that we break a glass under the chuppah to remember the *luchos* that were broken after *Mattan* Torah.

The Gemara (*Eiruvin* 54.) teaches that people wouldn't forget Torah if the *luchos* hadn't been broken. The ability to forget came from the broken *luchos*.

The Divrei Yoel of Satmer zy"l explains that it is essential that the couple standing under the *chuppah* should be reminded of the broken *luchos*, so they will know that they can forget. This is essential because when one can forget a past wrong that their spouse did, there can be peace in the home.

It is written (33:23) וראית את אחורי ופני לא יראו, "You will see my back, but you can't see my face." The Chasam Sofer zt"l explained that this means we see Hashem's compassionate hand when we look back, but when as things are happening, we don't comprehend how it is all for the good.

That's why it is initially better to ignore bitter experiences, but after some time passes, one can look back and can often discern the silver lining and how everything that happened was for his benefit.

The Chasam Sofer says that when Achashveirosh took Esther as his queen, it aroused a great question in people's minds. Why should this *tzaddekes* be in such a terrible situation, married to the rasha Achashveirosh? But in retrospect, we understand that Hashem was setting the stage for Klal Yisrael's salvation. Similarly, there are aspects in our lives that we wonder why we must endure, but the day

will come when we will look back and understand.

Reb Boruch Shimshon Scheneerson zt"l (rosh yeshivas Tchiben) heard the following story from his grandmother, Rebbetzin Teitelbaum, to whom the story happened:

Rebbetzin Teitelbaum lived in a rented apartment with her husband, Reb Yosef Teitelbaum zt"l (a rav in Hungary). One day the owner of their apartment informed them, "You can either buy the apartment, or you must leave, but I will no longer rent it out."

This was a serious problem because they couldn't afford to buy their own apartment, and no other apartments were available to rent. This situation caused Rebbetzin Teitelbaum immense distress, and they didn't know what to do.

Another problem came up that very same day. Two women were in a bitter dispute, and one insulted the other woman in a very cruel and humiliating matter.

She added, "I am not the only one saying this. I heard the Rebbetzin say it, as well."

The woman who was insulted came to the Rebbetzin.

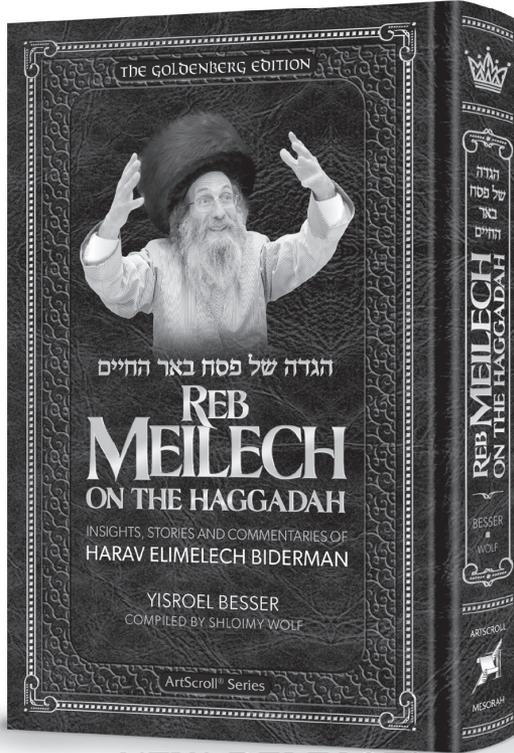
"Why did you say such terrible things about me?"

The Rebbetzin replied that she had never said it, and that was the truth, but the woman didn't believe her.

That night, the Rebbetzin fell asleep crying, and her father, the Divrei Yechezkel (the Klasner Rav zt'l), came to her in a dream. He said, "Why do you cry? Know that heaven decreed that you must die, so I davened that you should lose your apartment in

exchange for death. Heaven said that the apartment wasn't enough. You needed to suffer humiliation and embarrassment, which is

compared to death, and that would be instead of a actual death. That is the reason you were humiliated today. Why do you cry? These troubles saved your life!"



NEW RELEASE!

We usually don't have dreams like this one, but we must always know the message. When going through difficult times, be aware that it is for your good.