

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Overturning *Din* to *Rachamim*

There is a principle and a way to turn a harsh judgment into mercy - *rachamim*. When one remembers that whatever he is going through was handpicked and planned by Hashem, that, in itself, will turn Elokim (Hashem's attribute of strict judgment) into Havayah (Hashem's attribute of kindness).

This is hinted at in the first pasuk of the parashah (6:2): וידבר אלוקים אל משה ויאמר אליו אני ה' "Elokim spoke to Moshe and He said, 'I am Havayah.'" Hashem told Moshe that your awareness that everything comes from Hashem will turn Elokim into Havayah - trouble into kindness.¹

This is also hinted in the pasuk (Tehillim 91:15) עמו אנכי בצרה אחלצהו ואכבדהו "I am with him in distress; I shall rescue him, and I shall honor him." When you know that Hashem is with you when you are in distress, you will merit salvation.

It is known that Nachum Ish Gam Zu was called so because he would always say גם זו לטובה "This, too, is for the good." But there seems to be a word missing in his name! His name should have been נחום איש גם זו לטובה!

Reb Hershele Liska answers that גם זו implies that "This is also from Hashem." His awareness was גם זו, that the hardships he was enduring were from Hashem. With this

awareness, automatically, everything becomes good.

The Kaliver Rebbe Shlita from America (may he have a refuah sheleima b'karov) taught the following beautiful vort: It states (6:5-6) וגם אני שמעתי את נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם... "Also, I heard the moans of Bnei Yisrael that the Mitzrim are holding in bondage... Therefore, say to Bnei Yisrael, 'I am Hashem.'"

This can be translated as follows, "I heard that Bnei Yisrael say אשר מצרים מעבדים אותם, that the Mitzrim are enslaving them. They are not cognizant that the slavery comes from Me. Therefore, tell them אני ה', that everything is from Me, Hashem.

When Bnei Yisrael will have that awareness, the following words of the pasuk will transpire: והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים והצלתי אתכם מעבדתם וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים, "I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you from their labor, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments." This is because when we believe that everything comes from Hashem, it all becomes chesed.

The Nile turned to blood, and all the fish died. This seemed like a problem for the Egyptians and the Jewish nation alike because one of the main staples in Mitzrayim was fish, as it states (Bamidbar 11:5) זכרנו את הדגה

1. The second pasuk of the parashah states (6:3) וראה אל אברהם... "I appeared to Avraham..." The Ateres Tzvi (Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov zt'l) teaches that ואר"ם is the roshei teivos of (Yeshayah 44:6) אני ראשון ואני אחרון "I am first, and I am last."

The Tiferes Shlomo adds that the roshei teivos of (6:3) וראה אל אברהם, are the roshei teivos of the final words of the pasuk (Yeshayah 44:6) אני ראשון ואני אחרון ומבלעדי אין אלקים "I am first and I am last, and besides Me, there is no G-d."

אלקים is gematria 86, and אני ה' is gematria 87 (taught by Shach al HaTorah). Reb Hershele Liska zt'l explains that this hints that if you add the One, Hashem, into your life, and you know that even *din* comes from Hashem, everything will turn around and become chesed.

אשר נאכל מצרים חנם, "We remember the fish that we ate in Mitzrayim free of charge."

It seemed that this *makkah* took away the *parnassah*, the livelihood of the Jews. However, it was the opposite. The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 9:10) states, "The Jewish people became wealthy from the plague of blood. How? A Mitzri and a Yisrael were in the same house, with a barrel full of water. The Mitzri wanted to pour some of that water into his pitcher. However, it just filled with blood, while the Jew drank water. The Mitzri said, 'Give me a little bit of your water.' He gave, but it turned to blood.

The Mitzri said, 'Let's drink together from the same bowl.' The Yisrael drank water, and the Mitzri drank blood. Only when he paid the Yisrael for the water did he have water. This was how the Jewish nation became wealthy."

The Zera Shimshon discusses this to show that when we think we are losing, Hashem turns everything around and makes it good for the Jewish nation. The Jewish nation also thought they were losing when the Nile turned to blood because there would be no fish, but they became so wealthy that they had plenty of food to eat. This primarily occurs when we know that everything is from Hashem. This awareness causes everything to become chesed.

A wonderful *segulah* is written in Or HaTorah (written by the nephew of the Pri Megadim zt'l, who was a student of Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh zt'l), "I heard a tzaddik say to one

of his close students, 'If you have any trouble, be it with money or anything else, say: 'Ribono Shel Olam, You created Me, You give me life. I hold on to You alone, and therefore, no one can harm me.'"

He writes that it is proven that saying this will protect you from all dangers.

In the *zemiros* of *Kah Ribon* (Friday Night), it states, *לו יחיה גבר שנין אלפין*. Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorke zt'l says that *אלפין* can be translated as *alefs*, which represents Hashem. *לו יחיה גבר*, a person should live, *שנין אלפין*, years of recognizing that everything is from Hashem, *לא יעול גבורתך*, and then he won't suffer from *gevuros*, *dinim*, and hardships. His awareness that everything is from Hashem will protect him from all troubles and will turn all problems into goodness.

Beyond Nature

When one serves Hashem according to the rules of nature, Hashem will act with him within the laws of nature. But when one serves Hashem beyond the rules of nature, Hashem will perform miracles for him beyond nature.

The Bnei Yissachar (Igra d'Pirka 24) teaches, "Rebbe Yechiel Michel of Zlotchev zt'l said that when a person wants to accomplish something that is beyond nature, for example, if by nature he isn't able to bear children, he should do a great mitzvah beyond nature, and then he will be able to do things that are beyond nature."²

2. Another way to merit miracles beyond nature is to do mitzvos l'shem shamayim.

The Gemara Pesachim (50:) discusses the immense reward for keeping the mitzvos. One pasuk (Tehillim 108:5) states *כי גדול מעל שמים חסדך*, "For Your kindness is great above the heavens," and another pasuk states (Tehillim 57:11) *כי גדול עד שמים חסדך*, "For Your kindness is great up to the heavens."

So, is Hashem's kindness up to heaven or beyond it? The Gemara responds, "One pasuk refers to those who serve Hashem l'shmah, and the other pasuk refers to those who serve Hashem shelo l'shmah.

So, the reward for serving Hashem l'shmah is "above heaven" (*מעל שמים חסדך*). The Ran (on the Rif, p.17.) explains, "This means Hashem changes the rules of heaven for him." That is the reward for those who serve Hashem l'shmah.

Moshe said (6:12) הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה, "Behold, Bnei Yisrael did not hearken to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me?" The truth is, Bnei Yisrael had a reason why they didn't listen to Moshe when he told them he would take them out of Mitzrayim. It states (6:9) וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל קשה ולא שמעו אל משה מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה, "Moshe spoke thus to Bnei Yisrael, but they did not hearken to Moshe because of their shortness of breath and because of their hard labor."

Rashi writes that it is a *kal v'chomer*. If Bnei Yisrael didn't believe that Hashem would redeem them from Mitzrayim, how would Pharaoh believe it?

The *meforshim* ask that the pasuk says that the Jewish nation wasn't able to believe הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה, "shortness of breath and hard labor." Pharaoh didn't have shortness of breath and hard work like the Jewish nation had, so why is there a *kal v'chomer* that Pharaoh won't believe?

The Beer Mayim Chaim zt'l (Noach) answers that Moshe was saying that the Jewish nation didn't go beyond their nature to believe in Hashem. Moshe said to Hashem if they aren't going beyond their limits, then miracles beyond limits won't happen to them. How can we expect a miracle to occur and Pharaoh will listen to me and send the Jewish nation out of Mitzrayim?

A simchah hall in Bnei Brak was accidentally rented out to two unrelated families. Both were celebrating a *sheva brachos*, and when they met at the hall, they realized that the hall's secretary had made a mistake, double booking it for the same night. One of the parties was incensed, and he was shouting at everyone. He even yelled at the other couple for renting the hall, although they had rented it before him! Then he went to the manager to shout at him. "I will bring you to court. You will pay for this." He said many unpleasant words and threatened to cause the manager to lose his business.

Worried, the manager called the secretary and shouted at her for renting the hall to two families on the same night. "You are fired!" he said in uncontrolled anger and anguish.

The manager then took hold of himself and calmed down. He realized there was no purpose in speaking to the furious client, who threatened to drive him out of business, so instead, he talked to the other couple. They were also quite upset (especially since the other party had shouted at and upset them), but at least they were rational.

"I will upgrade your *simchah* if you use the smaller hall," the manager said. "I will put out more expensive utensils and decorations and serve better foods."

But the *mechutan* replied, "I'm sorry. We want the larger hall, and we should get it because we rented this hall first. He should take the smaller hall!"

"Do me a favor," the manager said. "I am stuck. I need your help."

The *mechutan* had compassion and said, "For my part, I agree to be *mevater* and move our *simchah* to the smaller hall. But my wife won't agree to it."

"Can I speak to your wife about it?" the manager asked.

"Of course," he replied, "but it won't help."

The manager explained to the wife that he will upgrade the *simchah*, and he explained to her his predicament, but she refused to be *mevater*. "We ordered the hall first. It is his problem, not ours."

The manager had one more tactic up his sleeves. He asked her, "Is there any particular *yeshuah* you need?"

She immediately cried. She said that her father, who lives in Belgium, was recently diagnosed with cancer r"l.

The manager said, "I advise you to be *mevater*. The merit of your vitur will go to

your father so that he can have a *refuah sheleimah*."

She said that she needed to think it over. It didn't take long, and she agreed to move her *simchah* to the smaller hall.

Additionally, she requested that the secretary not be fired, and in the merit that she is helping the secretary, this should also be a *zechus* towards her father's *refuah sheleimah*.

The manager promised that he would call up the secretary right away to apologize and to rehire her.

A couple of days afterward, her father went to the hospital for his first round of chemotherapy. The doctors performed one more routine test before beginning the treatment and discovered that there wasn't any cancer.

The doctors were shocked. They looked at the pictures of the first test, and there was no doubt that there was cancer seen then. How did the disease disappear?

The explanation is that his daughter was *mevater*, although it was hard for her. She went beyond her nature for the sake of helping others and for the sake of peace. And when one serves Hashem beyond nature, Hashem performs miracles for us beyond nature.

Here's another beautiful story.

A doctor came to a shivah and said, "I don't ever come to be *menachem avel*, but this time, I made an exception because I have *hakaras hatov* for the deceased person. The *nifteres*, Mrs. Moskovitz, taught me to believe in Hashem, so I figured I should come to her shivah."

This is what happened.

She came to the doctor four years earlier, and the doctor told her that she had four weeks to live. She replied, "That isn't correct. I will live longer. I have life insurance."

The doctor was confused. What life insurance can guarantee a person to live long?

She explained that she takes care of her elderly mother. Her mother can't manage without her. "I will live to take care of my mother."

Her mother was *niftar* four years later, and soon afterward, Mrs. Moskovitz was *niftarah*.

The doctor said, "I never come to the shivah of my patients, but this woman taught me to believe in Hashem, so I felt obliged to make an exception and come." She served Hashem beyond nature, and a miracle beyond nature occurred to her.

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* established a *beis medresh* in Tzefas and built a mikvah in the basement. Each morning, he was the first person to use the mikvah. One morning, he sensed that someone had used the mikvah before him and demanded to know who it was.

The person who used the mikvah before him was a man who didn't have children, although he was married for several years. He needed a salvation, and had hoped that the Shinover Rav would bless him, and now, it seemed, the Shinover Rav was upset with him.

Timidly, he admitted that he was the one to use the mikvah.

The Shinover Rav said, "You did? You shall have a son this year!" The Shinover Rav overcame his anger and blessed this person who went against his wishes. In this merit, the man had his *yeshuah*.

The Shinover Rav explained, "I had a great *nisayon* of anger, but I held back, and I gave this merit to the person who went to the mikvah before me, and that is what saved him."

The Imrei Chaim *zt'l* repeated this story. He heard it from the child who was born from this blessing. The Imrei Chaim said,

"This story makes a stronger impact on me than all the stories of *mosim* I've heard," because this is a story that we can potentially also do. When we go beyond our limits to do Hashem's will, miracles beyond nature can occur.

The Opportunity of Shovavim

The Magid Meisharim (a malach who would speak with the Beis Yosef) told the Beis Yosef, "Today you completed your fortieth fast of consecutive days, corresponding to the forty days of the creation of a child. Although on many of those fasts you had pleasure from this world [which made the fasts imperfect, in accordance to the Beis Yosef's very high level]...nevertheless, since they were forty days and since they were during the weeks of Shovavim, they were accepted. Now it is (Yechezkel 16:8) עת דודים, a time of love."

This means that Hashem loves us on these days of Shovavim, and our afflictions, fasts, and any other means we use to attain forgiveness and atonement during Shovavim are accepted, even when these means aren't perfect and wouldn't otherwise be accepted throughout the year.

We don't fast too much in this generation because we are weaker than in the past, and fasts would weaken us and prevent us from serving Hashem properly, but we have other ways of attaining purity during Shovavim. During Shovavim, more minor and less perfect attempts for atonement will be accepted, even if they aren't sufficient on other days of the year.

The Chayei Adam writes, "You shouldn't fast much. You should eat only the amount

that you need to be alive. Don't eat at parties and keep Shabbos with all its details."³

We don't fast, but we can eat properly by making brachos with kavanah, being cautious not to overeat, and avoiding harmful foods. If we aren't accustomed to eating this way the entire year, it is a *siguf*, an affliction that won't weaken us (it will only strengthen us) and will grant us purity in Shovavim.

Another example of *siguf* that we can do in our times is Taanis HaRaavad, which is to stop eating before ending the meal. This is a very difficult fast because the yetzer hara wants to continue eating. This purifies immensely.

Another counsel for Shovavim is to say Tehillim. The hint is that the last letters of (Shemos 1:1) ואלה שמות בני ישראל מצרימה spell Tehillim. (We read these words on the first Shabbos of Shovavim.)

Yet another area in which to improve is to study Torah without interruption.

These means will purify us immensely. During Shovavim, every small attempt towards *taharah* is significant and accomplishes so much.

The Atonement of Emunah

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt'l says that the primary tikkun, rectification, of our souls in shovavim comes from believing in Hashem. This is why the parshiyos we read during Shovavim discuss emunah, because that is how we attain atonement this time of year.

3. Generally, Reuven ate very well, but his friend noticed at a chasunah they were attending that Reuven hardly ate. He had two spoons of the first course and two of the second course and didn't touch the dessert.

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

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

This lesson is also taught by Reb Meir'l Apte, zt'l, the Or LaShamayim (Bo). "In the early generations, the tikkun [of Shovavim] was with *sigufim* (fasts and afflictions), which remove the *kelipos* that cover over the neshamah and separate us from Hashem. But now, in the generation before Moshiach, the tikkun is easy. We don't need *sigufim*. The tikkun is with emunah, to believe in the Creator..."

It states (Yirmiyahu 5:1) שוטמו בחוצות ירושלם וראו נא ודעו ובקשו ברחובותיה אם תמצאו איש אם יש עשה משפט מבקש אמונה ואסלה לה "Stroll in the streets of Yerushalayim and see now and know, and seek in its squares, whether you will find a man, whether there is one who performs justice and seeks emunah, and I will forgive her.

The Yesod HaAvadoh notes that it doesn't state that Hashem will forgive if He finds someone who has emunah. It is sufficient that He finds someone who is מבקש אמונה, seeking emunah.

Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen (Tzidkas HaTzaddik 146) discusses the aveirah for which the Zohar states there is no teshuvah. Reb Tzaddok HaKohen says that emunah will bring atonement even for that aveirah. He writes, "The correction of this aveirah is to believe that nothing happens by chance. Everything is directed by Hashem's will. This is truly the main thing that is needed. There are 613 mitzvos, and they are all called עינים, counsels, advice on how to attain emunah [that everything is by Hashem's hashgachah pratis."

Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen explains that the aveirah that the Zohar is referring to is called קרי, and it states the punishment (Vayikra 26:28) בחמת קרי, "with a fury of happenstance. This is atoned for when one knows that there is no מקרה, and everything is directed by Hashem.

The Arizal teaches that during Shovavim, one must be extra cautious to say brachos over food with kavanah. (This counsel is quoted in Yesod v'Shores HaAvodah 12:2). Why is saying

brachos over food an essential part of Shovavim?

One explanation, expressed by Reb Chaim Vital zt'l, is that the brachos remove the *kelipos* attached to the food, and then one can eat the food without getting attached to the *kelipos* that pull him down. But we can also explain that the brachos over the food help us remember Hashem, and that awareness is the *taharah* we attain during Shovavim.

Desire Purity

We discussed several ways to attain purity during Shovavim, but the first step is to desire purity.

The parashah (6:3) begins וראו אל אברהם אל יצחק ואל יעקב "And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and Yaakov."

Rashi shortens the pasuk and writes, וראו אל האבות, "I appeared to the forefathers."

The question is why Rashi did so. Why not quote the pasuk as it is written?

The Or l'Shamayim writes that the word *אל* represents desire (see Devarim 25:7 *לוא אבה יבמי*).

Rashi is hinting וראו, Hashem says that He appears to אל האבות, to those who desire to see Him. If you want a connection with Hashem, Hashem will appear to you. Similarly, the first step in Shovavim is to desire to be pure before Hashem and to desire a connection with Hashem. Afterwards, the steps you take for atonement have much more significance.

Someone wrote to the Avnei Nezer zt'l that he is upset and worried because he doesn't feel close to Hashem.

The Avnei Nezer replied, "I ask from you one thing. Don't tell anyone that you have this problem. Don't tell anyone that you feel distant from Hashem and that this bothers you. This is because it states (Mishlei 12:25) דאגה בלב איש ישחנה, and Chazal translate that if a person has a worry, ישיחנו לאחרים, he should tell other people about it. He should share

his worries with a good friend. Often, that helps the person to deal with the problem. The burden feels easier to bear after sharing it with others. I request that you don't share your worry with anyone. I want this problem that you feel distant from Hashem, to bother you your entire life."

It should bother us that we aren't closer to Hashem. That worry is the first step in Shovavim, and that will inspire us to take steps towards attaining *taharah*.

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l explains the pasuk (6:7) כי אני ה' אלקיכם המוציא אתכם ממצרים, "I am Hashem your G-d Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." סבלות can also mean tolerance. Hashem will help us that we shouldn't tolerate Mitzrayim any longer. We should be disgusted by their ways, which is the first step towards redemption.

The Sfas Emes writes, "The counsel is that one should hate the bad with all his heart, and that is the beginning of his redemption."

It states (Shemos 2:23) ותעל שועתם אל האלקים מן העבודה, "Their cry ascended to Hashem from the labor."

The Divrei Shmuel zt'l translates it, ותעל שועתם אל האלקים, "their shouts to Hashem that He should save them from the yetzer hara," מן העבודה, are more precious in Hashem's eyes than their avodas Hashem."

Yiras Shamayim

It states (9:20-21) הירא את דבר ה' מעבדי פרעה הניס את עבדיו ואת מקנהו אל הבתים, ואשר לא שם לבו אל דבר ה' "He who feared the word of Hashem of Pharaoh's servants drove his servants and his livestock into the houses. But he who did not pay attention to the word of Hashem left he who ignored the word of Hashem left his servants and his livestock in the field."

The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l writes to his grandson that this pasuk is the key to acquiring yiras Shamayim. The pasuk tells

us that those who don't fear Hashem are because לא שם לבו, they didn't think. They saw many plagues, everything that Moshe warned occurred, but some people still didn't fear Hashem because they weren't thinking.

Mesilas Yesharim (2) writes, "When a person goes through life without looking if he is doing good or bad, he is like a blind person walking on the shore. The danger is great, and there is a greater chance that he will be harmed than saved."

On another occasion, the Imrei Chaim quipped that the pasuk says that those who feared Hashem הניס... אל הבתים, came home. Because if you want to fear Hashem, you are better off not wandering the streets.

Chazal say that there was only one ירא את דבר ה' person in Mitzrayim who feared Hashem. This was Iyov. All the Mitzriyim saw the makos, but they didn't think and continued in their ways. Only Iyov paid attention to what was happening.

Balak said (Bamidbar 24:20) ראשית גוים עמלק, "Amalek was the head/first of the nations."

The problem with Amalek is that he has ideas ראשית, in his head, but he doesn't bring those ideas down to inspire his heart. He, too, won't fear Hashem.

Kedushah

This week, we discussed several paths toward attaining purity in Shovavim, but we shouldn't forget the primary tikkun, which is to improve our ways.

Shovavim is the time we atone for deficiencies in our kedushah; it is the time to improve how we guard our thoughts, our eyes, and all related matters.

Chazal (Megillah 16.) tell us that Haman came to meet Mordechai when Mordechai was teaching Torah to his students. Mordechai told his students to leave. Haman asked Mordechai, "What were you learning with them?"

Mordechai replied that they were learning הלכות קמיצה, the laws of *kemitzah* (when the kohen takes a handful of the meal-offering in his hand to place it on the *mizbeiach*). Haman said, "Your handful of flour pushed away my ten thousand *kikar* of silver," which Haman offered to Achashveirosh to destroy Klal Yisrael.

The *Yismach Yisrael* (מאורן של ישראל, פורים א) explains that the uniqueness of *kemitzah* is that it is done entirely within the hand, and nothing is seen from the outside.⁴ This *korban* reveals that Hashem loves the deeds that no one knows about, only Hashem alone.

Aspects of *kedushah* are often matters that no one sees. One closes his eyes and doesn't look at what he shouldn't, or when one turns his thoughts away from what he shouldn't be thinking about. These deeds are concealed from all mankind. No one knows or understands the test he had. No one knows the *mesirus nefesh* he had to do Hashem's will. And this is what makes these deeds so precious to Hashem.

In our generation, we are also tested at home, with the internet. One is being tested where no one sees; he is in the privacy of his

home, which makes passing this test so precious to Hashem. And those who don't have internet in their homes at all are passing the test with flying colors. They are fearing Hashem in a place where no one knows, only Hashem.⁵

On the *pasuk* (Shemos 2:25) וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים, "And Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael and Hashem knew." What did Hashem know?

Targum Yonason writes, "Hashem knew the *teshuvah* they do in concealment, that no person knows of his friend's [*teshuvah*]."

Hashem saw the *teshuvah* of Bnei Yisrael, the *teshuvah* they performed in concealment, that no one knew about but Hashem Himself.

Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* would say that this Targum Yonason is a *Shovavim* Targum. It is a lesson for *Shovavim* because, to a large extent, the *teshuvah* we do these days is concealed. People don't know what you think or look at, and certainly, people don't see what you do in the privacy of your home. This is the *teshuvah* that is so precious to Hashem.

It is important to know that even if you can't improve your ways, at least, try not to

4. The Gemara (Menachos 11) teaches that he scoops up the *minchah* with three fingers to his palm, and with his thumb and pinky, he scrapes off any parts of the *minchah* that protrude.

The Rebbe of Husiaten once called an upholsterer to cover a couch in his house. When the man finished, the Rebbe showed him that he hadn't yet upholstered the side of the sofa that faced the wall.

"Rebbe, no one looks there," the man replied.

The Rebbe responded, "We were taught that where no one looks, it needs to be the most beautiful."

5. If he sins in private, Hashem will reveal his sins before all to see, as it states (Avos 4:4) כל המחלל שם שמים בפרט, "Whoever desecrates Hashem's name in private, Hashem will punish him in public." Rashi writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu will reveal to all his shame."

A *mashgiach* of a yeshiva told me he was speaking to a *bachur* about the importance of staying away from improper technological devices, but he wasn't getting the message. The *bachur* kept saying that he was careful to avoid inappropriate sites. As they spoke, two people were walking down the street. One was wearing a hat; the other was wearing solely a *yarmulke*. A strong gust of wind lifted the hat off one of them and the *kappel* off the other; they scrambled to pick them up. The *mashgiach* said, "You see? The one who had two coverings remained with a covering on his head. The other one remained bareheaded. Because when one adds onto his *kedushah*, he is further away from sin."

regress. Each person has his level of Kedushah; try not to fall from that level.

The letter ז is a נו"ן with a יו"ד on its back. The two letters נו"ן and יו"ד have significance. When you internalize the message of these two letters, you can be called a צדי"ק. Sefer HaChaim (Sefer Zechiyos ch.6) explains that the nun stands for nefilah, falling. The yud on its back represents Yiddishkeit, kedushah. Who is a tzaddik? A person who, even when he falls from his level, continues to carry on his shoulders the yoke of Yiddishkeit and kedushah. He maintains his previous levels and stubbornly doesn't allow himself to fall lower. This is a tzaddik.

Rashi (6:9) writes חבל על דאבדין ולא משתכחין, 'Woe to those who are lost, and can no longer be found.'

משתכחין can also be translated as forgotten. According to this translation, the Meor Einayim translates על דאבדין to be referring to people who lost their level in avodas Hashem. Even then, ולא משתכחין, they don't forget Hashem.

This tells us that even if one falls from his level, he should remember Hashem. He shouldn't allow himself to fall more.

The Dubno Magid tells the following mashal:

A *melamed* went with his children through a forest with wild dogs. He told his students, "You shouldn't fear the dogs. Just say the pasuk (Shmos 11:7) ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשנו, 'To all Bnei Yisrael, not one dog will bark...' Say this pasuk, and nothing will happen to you."

Suddenly, a pack of barking dogs approached them, and the *melamed* was the first to run away. When things calmed down, and they reunited, the students asked their *melamed*, "Why did you run away? All you had to do is say the pasuk!"

The *melamed* replied, "When I heard the barking dogs, I became so afraid, I forgot the pasuk!"

This is what the Meor Einayim is teaching us. There should never be a time that we forget Hashem. Even when we are דאבדין, on a low level, we should be לא משתכחין, not forgetting Hashem.

Lessons of Kedushah from Tzefardeia

Kabbalah sefarim teach us that the ten makos represent the ten *sefiros*, starting from the tenth going backwards. The first *makah*, dam, represents the tenth *sefirah*, *malchus*. *Tzefardeia* represents the ninth *sefirah* called *yesod*, and so on.

The *sefirah* of Yesod is about kedushah, which refers to *tznius*, pure thoughts, holy eyes, and so on. Therefore, there are lessons in this plague, showing us how we can improve in these areas.

One unique aspect of the *tzefardeia* is that it was the only *makah* that went into fire. It states (7:28) ושרץ היאר צפרדעים ועלו ובאו בביתך ובעמך ובתנורך ובמשארותיך, משכבך ועל מטתך ובבית עבדיך ובעמך ובתנורך ובמשארותיך, "The Nile will swarm with frogs, and they will go up and come into your house and your bedroom and upon your bed and into the house of your servants and your people, and your ovens and into your kneading troughs." Even though the ovens were lit, the frogs went inside.

From here, we learn that when it comes to the *midah* of yesod (which this *makah* represents), one must be prepared to jump into the fire. Because of the importance of this *midah*, one should have *mesirus nefesh* to acquire perfection in *midas ha'yesod*.

It states (8:9) ויעש ה' כדבר משה וימתו הצפרדעים מן השדות, הבתים מן החצרות ומן השדות, "Hashem did according to Moshe's word, and the frogs died from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields."

The *Daas Zekainim* writes, "The frogs that went into the ovens didn't die because they trusted in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and they entered the hot ovens by Hashem's command." This tells us that when one is

moser nefesh for kedushah, miracles will happen to him.⁶

It states (8:10) ויצברו אתם המרים המרים ותבאש הארץ, "They gathered them into many heaps, and the land stank." This is the only *makah* where it states that the earth stank. (By blood, it says that the Nile stank, but the earth stank is only by this *makah*.)

The Chidushei Harim zt'l says that this *makah* represents *yesod*, and the stench of the sins related to *yesod* is foul and disgusting to Hashem.

Another significance of *tzefardeia* is that this is the only time that it states that Moshe davened with shouts, as it states (8:8) ויצעק משה אל ה' על דבר הצפרדעים, "Moshe shouted out to Hashem concerning the frogs."

This expression of prayer isn't used for any other *makah*. We find (8:26) ויעתר אל ה', and we find (9:23) ויפרש כפיו אל ה', but we don't find only by *tzefardeia*. This is because many sincere, intense, and desperate tefillos are needed to become pure in *yesod*.

Shame and Humiliation

It states (6:13) וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן ויצום אל בני ישראל ואל פרעה מלך מצרים, "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, and He commanded them concerning the Bnei Yisrael and concerning Pharaoh, the king of Egypt..."

What was the command?

In his first explanation, Rashi writes that the command concerning Bnei Yisrael was that he should lead them gently and be patient with them.

The command concerning Pharaoh is that they must honor Pharaoh when they speak to him.

Why was it necessary to honor Pharaoh, the great rasha, who bathed daily in Jewish blood?

The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that if they would disgrace Pharaoh, they wouldn't be able to smite Pharaoh with the ten plagues. The shame would atone for Pharaoh's sins, and then he couldn't be punished with the ten plagues. This shows us the great benefit that comes from humiliation.

Of course, Pharaoh wouldn't accept his humiliation with love and emunah. He would be angry and upset with the humiliation. And he was a terrible *rasha*, from the worst in history. Nevertheless, the shame would have cleansed him from his severe aveiros to the extent that he wouldn't deserve punishment anymore! Let this help us understand how much atonement and purity we earn when we suffer shame and humiliation.

People make a seudas hoda'ah when Hashem bestows His kindness on them. For example, if an ill person becomes well, he might make a seudas hoda'ah to celebrate his good fortune and Hashem's kindness.

Once, Rebbe Mendel of Premishlan zt'l made a seudas hoda'ah when someone insulted him in a very humiliating way.

At the meal, he explained:

"We have a kabbalah that if a person has merits, an illness can be exchanged for humiliation and shame. It was destined that I should be very sick, and when I recovered from the illness, I would make a seudas hoda'ah. Hashem performed greater chesed for me, and before the illness came, it was exchanged with humiliation. I would make a seudas hoda'ah when I'm cured from an illness. Certainly, I should make a seudas hoda'ah if I am saved from the entire ordeal, and I never even became ill."

Rashi (6:26) asks why Moshe's name is sometimes written before Aharon's name and why sometimes Aharon's name is

6. Sefer Chasidim (196) states, "If a person runs away from sin, Heaven performs a miracle for him."

written first. Rashi answers, "This teaches us that they were at the same level."

The Ksav Sofer *zt'l* writes that Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest *navi* and was certainly on a higher level than Aharon. But at this moment, Aharon reached Moshe's level. It was embarrassing for Aharon to appear before Pharaoh, serving as Moshe's spokesperson. Pharaoh knew Aharon. Until this time, Aharon had been the main leader of Bnei Yisrael, and he appeared before Pharaoh to speak to him about issues needed for the Jewish community. And now he came to Pharaoh as Moshe's aide. Aharon did this willingly, as stated in last week's parashah (4:14) וראך ושמח בלבו, "When he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart," and therefore, at this time, he rose *madreigos*, and became equal to Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh *zt'l* once traveled to Zitomer. As he approached the city's outskirts, the people of Zitomer came out to greet him. A simple man also came along with the throngs of Yidden to greet Rebbe Boruch'l. This simple person came from a non-prestigious family, and there had been *lashon hara* about him, so people didn't respect him much, even though he had become wealthy.

Rebbe Boruch'l sat in his wagon, greeting the people of Zitomer. When the simple man gave his hand in greeting, Rebbe Boruch'l invited him to join him in his wagon, and they traveled to Zitomer together. The people of Zitomer were shocked. Why did the Rebbe choose to honor this man whom they degraded? But they didn't dare say anything.

As they traveled, Rebbe Boruch'l asked the simple person whether he could stay in his home. The simple person was overjoyed with this merit. The people of Zitomer were upset about that too, because from all the prominent people of the city, why should he host the Rebbe? Of course, they didn't say anything out of respect for Rebbe Boruch'l.

Shabbos was very uplifting and inspirational for the entire city. On Sunday, people thronged to the Rebbe for a *brachah*. The simple host also came for a *brachah*. The Rebbe asked him, "Do you have children in *shidduchim*?"

The man replied, "Yes, I have a daughter of marriageable age, and that's why I came to the Rebbe, to ask for a *brachah*..."

The Rebbe said, "I have a son..." and the Rebbe asked whether he agreed to be *meshadech*. The simple man was overjoyed. The Rebbe shook his hand, "Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov!" A *shidduch* was finalized.

The news of the unusual *shidduch* spread like wildfire. The people of Zitomer were in turmoil. Why would Rebbe Boruch'l, a grandson of the Baal Shem Tov *zy'a*, take a simple *mechutan*? Their main concern was because of the man's reputation. Twenty years earlier, that man was accused of severe sins and was harassed and humiliated in public so that others wouldn't follow his example. Was it fitting for him to be the Rebbe's *mechutan*?

Until this moment, the people of Zitomer didn't think it was necessary to tell Rebbe Boruch'l about that man's history, but now, they felt they had to speak up for the Rebbe's honor, and for the honor of the Baal Shem Tov.

They told the Rebbe their concerns. "He committed grave sins twenty years ago, and who knows what's happening now..."

The Rebbe moaned, "When I first saw him at the outskirts of Zitomer, I felt a strong desire to be his *mechutan*. That's why I asked him if I could stay at his home. When he came to me on Sunday, I again desired immensely to be *mechutanim*. It seemed to me that it was destined from heaven. And now that I hear your concerns, I will think about it again..."

There used to be a great Rebbe in Zitomer, the Or HaMeir, and Rebbe Boruch'l went to visit his *almanah*. She said, "Yesterday, I

learned that you are a true tzaddik and a *gadol hador*." Pointing to a window, she said, "My husband and I stood near that window twenty years ago when they were pulling your *mechutan* through the streets of Zitomer to embarrass him. They were shouting, ככה יעשה לאיש אשר יעשה נבלה בישראל, 'This shall be the punishment for those who do disgraceful things in Yisrael.' My husband, zt'l said, 'Look how everyone is running after a person, a tzaddik, who's totally clean from sin. I hope I will be so clean from sins when I am brought to the court in heaven after my lifetime. In the merit of his humiliation, he will become a *mechutan* with one of the *tzaddikei hador*.' So when I heard that you made a *shidduch* with him, I knew you are a *tzaddik hador*..." The *almanah*'s words quickly spread through the Jewish community. Everyone rejoiced. They immediately went to the simple man's home and wrote the *tena'im* with joy and happiness.

This story exemplifies the immense benefits one earns by remaining silent when humiliated. The *Sefer Chassidim* (116) states, "If you see a wealthy, successful *rasha*, and because of his wealth, respected and scholarly people are being *meshadech* with him, don't be surprised. Know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the wealth, so tzaddikim should agree to marry their children with his. They wouldn't be *meshadech* with a *rasha* if it weren't for his wealth. Why did the *rasha* merit wealth and that tzaddikim should be *meshadech* with him? It's in his parents' merits, or because they embarrassed and humiliated him beforehand, and because of the shame he was blessed with wealth and to have sons-in-law *talmidei chachamim*."

Controlling Anger

Rebbe Moshe Leib Sassover zt'l said that controlling anger is better than one thousand

fasts. Accordingly, we have another solution for Shovavim. We don't fast anymore, but we can overcome anger, which is greater than one thousand fasts.

It states (8:2) ותעל הצפרדע up, "The frog came up."

Was there only one frog? Why is it written in singular tense?

Rashi writes, "It was one frog, and they were hitting it, and many frogs came out from it."

The obvious question we have is on the Egyptians. After hitting the frog and seeing that more frogs come out of it, why did they continue hitting it?

Someone asked this question to the Steipler Gaon zt'l. The Steipler replied, "It is for the same reason people answer back in a *machlokes*. They know that it doesn't help. They answer back, and the *machlokes* only gets greater. They know this from the many times they answered back, so why do they continue answering back? This is the nature of human beings. When they get angry about something, they shoot back. This is why they kept hitting the frog, although they saw that more frogs came forth each time they hit it."⁷

One of the primary *tikkunim* of Shovavim is to control our speech. And one example of controlling speech is by not responding to harsh words thrown at you.

Humility

Reishis Chachmah (Anavah 3) writes, "The Chacham Reb Avraham HaLevi said that we can learn [the importance of] humility from earth. There isn't much that one can do with a chunk of earth. He certainly can't make an earthenware utensil from it. But the more the earth is ground and broken into tiny,

7. People have bad habits; they know that some things aren't good for them, yet they keep returning to them. This is people's nature, and in this manner, they are like the people in Mitzrayim who continued to hit the frog, although they saw that it wasn't helping and only made matters worse for them.

separated particles, the more suitable it is for the person, who can use it for his needs. I say that this is alluded to in the words *ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה*, 'My soul shall be like earth before all.' The more humiliation, the higher his soul will elevate."

The Maharshal (Brachos 17.) explains *ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה*, "I heard that everyone treads on earth, but afterwards, the earth will tread on top of all those who trampled it. I do the same with all my enemies."

This means that people walk on earth, but in the end, the earth will cover them. I am like earth. I am silent when my enemies speak against me, but in the end, I will be the one who will be on top.

Tosfos (Brachos 17.) explains the words *ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה*, "Just as earth is never destroyed, so may it be Your will that my children shouldn't ever cease, as it states *והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ*, "Your children will be like the dust of the earth."

Tefillah

A wife told her husband, "Our wall isn't soundproof, and our neighbors hear our conversations. We don't have privacy. We need a new wall."

The husband replied, "There is nothing to worry about. The wall is soundproof. No one hears us from the outside. You are imagining things."

Just then, there was a knock at the door. It was the neighbor. He came in and said, "You don't need to construct a thicker wall. I don't hear anything."

The yetzer hara tells us, "Hashem doesn't hear anything. Your tefillos aren't heard." When the yetzer hara tells us that, we know that Hashem does hear.

In fact, why does the yetzer hara disturb us from davening? It is because he knows the power of our tefillos. His disturbances and his attempts to have us believe that Hashem doesn't answer our tefillos are our

greatest proof that Hashem hears all of our tefillos.

Hashem told Moshe (8:16) *השכם בבקר והתיצב לפני פרעה*, "Arise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh." The Midrash says that Hashem wanted Moshe to get to Pharaoh very early, before Pharaoh davens, because Hashem would listen to his tefillos and save him, and then Hashem wouldn't bring the makos.

So, we see that Hashem listens even to the tefillos of Pharaoh, and everyone can take from this awareness that Hashem will certainly listen to him when he turns to Him in prayer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The same is regarding the Avos. We should know our yichus. We should know that we are descendants of the holy Avos. This awareness should fill our hearts with pride and joy, and in their merits, our tefillos will be answered.⁸

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

אבל אנחנו עמך בני בריתך בני אברהם אהבך... אשרינו מה טוב חלקנו ומה נעים גורלנו ומה יפה ירושתנו of Your covenant, the children of Avraham whom You loved... We are fortunate! How good is our portion! How sweet is our lot! How beautiful is our inheritance!" Reb Noach Chofetz z"l was a close student of Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l. There was a time that they learned b'chavrusah, as well. A couple of years ago, he was ill, and I visited him. He told me that as a bachur, he began to go to a particular chassidic rebbe for Shabbosim, and Reb Yechezkel Levenstein asked him, "What do you get there that you don't have by us?"

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

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