

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 245

Bo | Shabbat: The Table That Connects Everything



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

...∞ PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL ∞...

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Parshat Bo

Defining a Tzaddik

It was 9:00 PM. Meir keenly felt the words recited in the bedtime *Shema*: "*He Who casts the bonds of sleep upon my eyes and slumber upon my eyelids.*" With the last of his strength, he dragged his body to bed...

By force of old habit, his hand reached out to the sefer he kept permanently at his bedside, and he opened it. This is what was written there:

Once, three friends sat together to discuss the definition of a *tzaddik* (righteous person). The first said: a *tzaddik* is someone who fulfills all the words of the *Shulchan Aruch* (the Code of Jewish Law).

The second said: a *tzaddik* is someone extremely, extremely careful about all matters concerning the honor of others.

But the third argued that they were mistaken in their definition

of a *tzaddik* since those are duties of every Jew. A *tzaddik* is someone who fasts, mortifies his body, and lives frugally...

They could not reach a conclusion, so they decided to go to Naftali, the elderly neighbor living nearby. "He's already 87; maybe he knows something on this matter."

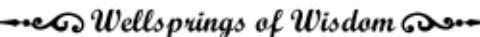
Naftali dragged his weary legs to the door and opened it wide, letting them all in. After hearing their question, he closed his eyes and pondered for a few moments, then said, "A *tzaddik* is a Jew who manages to withstand trials!¹ A *tzaddik* is someone who, despite all the trials he endures, remains steadfast in his faith and in his joy!"

Meir's eyes opened wide, his fatigue vanished, and thoughts flooded his mind... *What an interesting definition! But is it an accurate one?!*

Parshat Bo - Defining a Tzaddik

He got up from his bed and went to the living room, and there, beside the bookcase crammed with books, he paced back and forth... *Where do I begin to study about this matter ? !*

In the end, he decided: These past few weeks, we learn in the Torah about Moses,¹ so, let me begin my study of the Book of Exodus.

 *Wellsprings of Wisdom*

1. In *HaYom Yom* (entry for 2 Cheshvan), the words of the saintly Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi Zt"l are brought, that one must "live with the times."

His disciples explained that one must "live" with the weekly Torah portion — a Jew must know that it is not enough to read the weekly parashah, but one must *live* with the parashah and learn from it practical lessons that positively influence his life.

In a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l, he said the following:

We must know that the bounty that the Holy One, blessed be He, brings down to the world is transmitted and descends into the world via the weekly Torah portion — and, more precisely, via the section of the parashah that corresponds to that day.

Therefore, it is advisable (for women as well) to learn each and every day the verses corresponding to that day of the week. For example: on Sunday, *Rishon* (first section) of the parashah; on Monday, *Sheni* (second section) of the parashah; and so on.

By virtue of this consistent reading, a person will be able to draw down upon himself a bounty for the entirety of that day. However, in order for a person to "live" with the parashah — to derive from its directives and guidance for his life in general and for that day in particular — he must also study Rashi's commentary. It is a tradition that when Rashi wrote his commentary on the Chumash, he did not study from an ordinary Torah scroll or Chumash but from the Torah scroll of the *Metivta DeRakia* (the Heavenly Academy). Therefore, hidden within his commentary are supernal and mystical secrets.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi Zt"l said: "*Rashi's commentary on the Chumash is the wine of Torah — it opens the heart and reveals an innate love and awe of G-d*" (*HaYom Yom*, 29 Shevat).

In other words, a person's level of reverence for G-d is measured according to his investment in studying Rashi's commentary on the Torah.

This was also hinted by the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* in his ruling (*Orach Chayim* 285:2) that although the primary

Humiliating Egyptian Exile

The first chapter (and the end of the second chapter) of the Book of Exodus deals with the harsh and cruel enslavement that the Egyptians imposed on the people of Israel.

The supposedly “polite and civilized” Egyptians revealed, during those years of bondage, their true nature – it turned out that beneath all the “fine mats and tailored suits” lay mountains of wickedness: demonic spirits, fearsome and cruel agents of destruction...

Not only did the Egyptians show their naked depravity – the other nations of the world also revealed their baseness – the whole world knew about it. The whole world knew that for 116 years, they had been enslaving the people of Israel, and it didn’t bother them one bit.² “*What do we care about the Jews ? !*”

Indeed, at this point, the well-known question arises:

The holy Gemara says (Beitzah 25b): “It was taught in

∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

obligation is to read the weekly Torah portion “twice in the text and once in the Onkelos translation,” nevertheless whoever is *G-d-fearing* will also study Rashi’s commentary on the parashah — thus it turns out that a person’s fear of Heaven can be measured by his study of Rashi on the weekly portion.

2. When Shechem, the son of Chamor, sought to marry Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, Jacob’s sons told him: “*So long as you are uncircumcised, there’s no chance ! First of all, get circumcised, and then we’ll talk !*”

Shechem then persuaded all the men of his city to circumcise themselves along

with him... And on the third day after the circumcision — the day when the pain is at its peak — Simeon and Levi took their swords and killed 24,000 men ! At that moment, the Satan stood before the heavenly throne and clamored, “*I want to take vengeance on Simeon and Levi !*”

From Heaven, he was looked at with a smile and asked: “*Since when are you, the Satan, concerned for Jews ? ! After all, the people of Shechem have circumcised themselves — which means they are ‘Jews’ ! You better be silent !*” (Me’am Lo’ez, Parashat Vayishlach on Genesis 34:31).

Parshat Bo - Humiliating Egyptian Exile

the name of Rabbi Meir: Why was the Torah given to Israel ? Because they are brazen... If the Torah had not been given to Israel, no nation or tongue could stand up against them [due to their brazenness] !"

The boldness of the people of Israel is so great and strong that if not for the holy Torah, which refines them, they would conquer the entire world !

Yet, the enslavement in Egypt occurred before the giving of the Torah. So, how did the Egyptians succeed in enslaving the people of Israel ? How were they not met with fierce retaliation ?

Our holy Sages addressed this question and answered: the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to discipline the people of Israel, and he, therefore, took away all their strength and placed them under the fierce Egyptian boot !

To quote the Midrash (*Otzar Midrashim – Midrash Pesikta Chadta*):

"If the people of Israel are so beloved, why did He deliver them into the hand of their enemy ?

Rabbi Chanina said: Because all the Holy One's attributes operate measure for measure. In the beginning, before they went down to Egypt, the sons of the *imahot* (matriarchs Rachel and Leah) would belittle the sons of the maidservants (Bilhah and Zilpah) and did not treat them with brotherhood. This was very grievous in the eyes of the Holy One, and the Divine Spirit would shout and say: 'You are wholly beautiful, My beloved, and there is no blemish in you

(Song of Songs 4:7).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: What shall I do so that the sons of the maidservants will be accepted ? I will bring them down to Egypt where they will all be slaves, and at the time of their redemption, I will grant them the mitzvah of Pesach and that they will all engage in it — they and their children and their grandchildren — and all of them will say: 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt' (Deuteronomy 6:21), and thus they will all feel as equals.

Parshat Bo - Humiliating Egyptian Exile

All this indicates the greatness and praise of the Holy One to all inhabitants of the world, that they should know to make peace among themselves. It is for this reason that his name is called 'Shalom' — 'Peace,' as it is said: *'And he called it "G-d is Peace"* (Judges 6:24).

Long years passed in the Egyptian "school of re-education" (116 years of slavery), and the Holy One saw that the people of Israel had managed to cleanse away their lack of brotherhood and that

now they were capable of being truly united.

The Holy One now searched for a *tzaddik* with the ability to elevate the souls of Israel from the spiritual mud in which they were sunk and to strengthen their confidence — so that they would not fear or be terrified of the *kelipot* (forces of impurity) and powers of defilement.

A *tzaddik* with the capacity to illuminate the souls of Israel,³ removing and uplifting them from slavery to freedom, from darkness to a great light...

∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

3. The following story was published in *HaMevasser Toranni* (issue 111, p. 22):

Row upon row of young married men stood crowded together. In order to wedge into these rows, one had to hurry through the Friday night meal and rush to the study hall of the *Beit Yisrael* of Ger Zt"l.

By the time the Rebbe would appear for the Shabbat *tish*, the place was filled wall to wall, and anyone who wanted to witness the holy sight had to arrive early and secure a place long beforehand. More than once, those standing at the *tish* would emerge afterward with their *kapotes* (long

coats) torn and soaked in sweat from end to end; the regular Gur yeshiva boys would come equipped with special *kapotes* that had no lining and were pre-torn so that their good *kapotes* would not get ruined. All agreed that it was all worthwhile to be present at this exalted gathering.

When the Rebbe entered, in a moment, the entire space of the study hall would be filled with awe and dread. Many people felt their knees rubbing against one another. The Rebbe himself would walk among the masses by various routes as if strolling long and short paths, his hands

Parshat Bo - Humiliating Egyptian Exile

clasped and his holy eyes shooting glances that pierced each man's heart and kidneys, surveying everyone with a single sweep.

Upon his entrance, he sent an electric charge that was felt from one end of the hall to the other, and when he stood directly before the disciple and sent his penetrating gaze, many were seized by literal shuddering.

Each person felt that the Rebbe was peering at that moment into his very essence — into his innermost being, and everything was exposed before him: one's thoughts, one's deeds, one's open and hidden matters.

Whoever merited his penetrating gaze would never forget that moment. By inclining the lashes of his eyes in a certain direction, he would split and cleave through the sea of people, carving out a visible path all the way to that particular person whom he wished to see. It was like a "splitting of the Sea," with a wall of Chassidim to his right and to his left. Sometimes, he would toss toward someone a word or two, which sufficed to set that person's soul astir.

There were times when he called out to a group of young Chassidim and said, "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

It also happened that he would feign anger and call out sharply to someone, "Why have you come to me? And you..." Yet, surprisingly, in general, those Chassidim whom the Rebbe

rebuked were not offended at all. On the contrary, in that very moment, their awe and reverence toward their Rebbe intensified sevenfold — in the spirit of "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Still, the Rebbe himself wished to know and ascertain that this was indeed so — that no insult had been taken...

An incident along these lines is told by the following narrator:

It was a winter Shabbat in Jerusalem roughly fifty years ago. At the home of Chaim Simon, an honored guest had arrived — a distinguished relative who served as a rabbi of a community in New York and had come to the Holy Land to bask in the aura of Jerusalem's sanctity and beauty. Even before Shabbat, the guest inquired of his host what marvelous spectacles might be seen in Jerusalem on Friday night. In those days, the most spectacular sight of all was the Rebbe *Beit Yisrael* of Ger's Friday night *tish* — it was a gathering suffused with the splendor of old that, to this day, everyone who merited being present still longs for.

Chaim himself came from an old Hasidic family, but in the heat of the 1948 war and the events that had occurred before and after, he had been somewhat swept up by the spirit of the times.

Even so, he did not abandon his ancestral tradition and did not, G-d forbid, slacken in his observance of the Torah and mitzvot. However, his attire and lifestyle were what is called "modern."

Parshat Bo - Humiliating Egyptian Exile

He, too, yearned to witness at least once this much-talked-about tish. And so, he and his guest agreed already before Shabbat that on Friday night, they would end their meal early so they could walk afterward to the Gerrer Beit Midrash in the Geulah neighborhood and get a good spot at the tish. But on the eve of that Shabbat, a proclamation was issued throughout Jerusalem, the Holy City: "Be it known that the eruv enclosing the city was discovered to be invalid shortly before Shabbat. The breach was the result of severe damage to some eruv poles in a location that — given the conditions of those days — could not be reached to be fixed before Shabbat. Therefore, carrying in the public domain is forbidden this Shabbat in accordance with halachah."

In the Diaspora, this is commonplace — it is normally not possible to enclose the sprawling cities in an eruv, and the inability to carry in the public domain is part of the Shabbat routine for every Jew.

But not so in the Holy City of Jerusalem, which has been encompassed by a wall whose gates are closed at night from ancient times. Even after venturing outside the walls into the new city, every Jewish neighborhood had always been enclosed by an eruv from the beginning. It was no wonder that the Badatz's announcement immediately created an uproar in the city.

Everyone turned to empty their pockets of any remaining handkerchiefs or particles. The elders hurried to dispatch their grandchildren to the study hall

before the onset of Shabbat in order to stash their reading glasses there.

These unusual preparations made their mark in every household. Chaim and his guest did the same — not that it was any special task for the guest, who, after all, hailed from the exile of New York, where an eruv cannot encompass the city. After candle-lighting, they strolled gracefully to the shul for Friday night prayers. From there, they quickly turned home for the meal, after which, as planned, they set out together for the Beit Midrash of the *Beit Yisrael* in order to secure a decent spot at the tish.

Upon arriving at the Beit Midrash, they pushed their way among the masses and waited... Then, a hush fell in the study hall: the Rebbe entered and began walking to his place while, along the way he scrutinized all those present with a piercing scan. Then suddenly, he turned toward Chaim's direction and stopped near him, addressing him with a brief, sharp remark: *"Even if there is no eruv, a beard is permissible to carry..."* Chaim blushed to the roots of his hair, not knowing how the Rebbe knew of his Hasidic background and of the beard that had once adorned his cheeks in his youth. Even so, he did not feel any insult in his heart. The legendary love for fellow Jews that flowed from the Rebbe could be felt even when he had shot sharp words his way...

Seven years passed. The New York guest had long since safely returned home, and Chaim himself — although he had heard

The Empathy of the Righteous

When Moses was 79 years old, G-d revealed Himself to him and informed him: “*Know that you have the power to illuminate all the souls of Israel! I ask of you: Go forth and shine!*”

And so it was: Moses came to Egypt, gathered the elders of Israel, and said to them, “*G-d has declared: ‘I have surely remembered you and what is*

being done to you in Egypt’” (Exodus 3:16). When they heard from Moses the words “I have surely remembered (*pakod pakadti*),” an immense light was revealed in the hearts of the people of Israel — the great and exalted light of redemption; a light that instantly lifted their spirits to heights of greatness... They felt it, and they believed, and from

Wellsprings of Wisdom

the Rebbe's words, nonetheless, the influence of his surroundings and his habits prevailed, and his cheeks remained smoothly shaven as before.

But then, one Shabbat, he felt in his heart a burning nostalgia for the Rebbe, the *Beit Yisrael*, and he decided to go once again to visit his court and attend the tish. Again, he squeezed in among the hundreds present — a crowd which had only grown in the intervening years — but he nevertheless managed to find a decent spot. There he stood with the whole congregation, waiting for the Rebbe's entry. Once more, the study hall instantly fell silent, and the crowd tensed like a spring. The Rebbe, whose sharp eyes missed nothing, immediately noticed Chaim. He made his way directly over to him and asked him: “*Did I offend*

you?” — a follow-up to the question from seven years prior. So many people had passed before him since then — tens of thousands — yet the Rebbe remembered this man well and was concerned lest he had been hurt. He did not continue until he heard from a flustered, blushing Chaim that, no, he was not at all offended...

However, the *Beit Yisrael*'s pointed arrow had been firmly lodged in Chaim's heart; a few years later, he decided that he would no longer shave his beard. From then on, a whitish-brown beard began to adorn his ruddy cheeks until his last day — he sported the beard on Shabbat and on the weekdays when a proper *eruv* enclosed the city as well as those times it was down for repairs.”

Parshat Bo - The Empathy of the Righteous

that moment, the process of redemption began to actualize.

We may pause for a moment and ask ourselves: Why did Moses merit this level? How did he merit having the power to illuminate the souls of Israel?

The answer is written in a single verse describing Moses' deeds at an earlier time: "*It came to pass in those days that Moses grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens*" (Exodus 2:11). Rashi explains: "'*And saw their burdens*' – he set his eyes and heart to be distressed over them."

Moses succeeded in leaving his own inner world — the world that envelops and surrounds each person's entire existence — and sensing and feeling the inner world of the people of Israel.⁴

Because he attained this lofty, divine level — to feel the suffering of Israel — a sublime and lofty light was bestowed upon him from Heaven, lifting him to the highest heights of holiness until he merited and was chosen to be the redeemer!

The Midrash states so explicitly (Shemot Rabbah 1:27):

"It came to pass in those days that Moses grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens" (Exodus 2:11)... The Holy One, blessed be He, said: You left your own affairs and went to see the suffering of Israel, and you treated them like brothers; I too will leave the heavenly and earthly hosts and speak with you! Thus it is written: 'And G-d saw that he turned aside to see' (Exodus 3:4) — G-d saw that Moses turned

 ••• *Wellsprings of Wisdom* •••

4. This is also expressed in the war against Amalek, where it is stated: "Moses' hands grew heavy, so they took a stone and placed it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on each side; and his hands

remained steady until sunset" (Exodus 17:12). Rashi comments: "'They put a stone under him' — he did not sit on a cushion or pillow. [Moses said,] 'Since the people of Israel are in distress, I too will be with them in distress.'"

Parshat Bo - The Empathy of the Righteous

away from his own affairs to see their suffering; therefore: ‘G-d called to him from the midst of the bush’ (ibid.)!

Meir's heart leapt with joy. Here, it is explicitly spelled out in the words of the Midrash: the definition of a tzaddik is a Jew with a merciful and sensitive heart that is aware and feels the suffering of others !

To be sure, as with every spiritual level, there are endless degrees of love for others and sensitivity to fellow Jews of the righteous. To bring an example of this lofty character trait, let us relate the following story (*Nifla'ot HaTzaddikim*, p. 596, published by Rabbi Yaron Amit):

The holy Rabbi Mordechai of Neschiz was a disciple of the righteous Rabbi Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov. After his teacher's passing, he was appointed rabbi of the city of Neschiz, and his fame soon spread far and wide as a righteous miracle worker; he revived the dead and healed the sick, and he helped free

agunot (women unable to remarry due to missing husbands).

At that time, a large wedding took place in Slavita, and many tzaddikim and Torah greats were there. They spoke among themselves, “*From where does the Tzaddik of Neschiz have such miraculous powers ?*” Some even began to suspect that perhaps it was not from the side of holiness, and they decided to send two Torah scholars to investigate the source of his power. *If he refuses to tell them what they seek, his powers must surely be from the side of unholiness, and we will see to it that he is removed from his position and stature...*

The two Torah scholars arrived to see him and began to casually converse with him. He perceived their intentions immediately and opened the siddur to the *Ana BeKo'ach* prayer and showed them the 42-letter Name of G-d derived from the acrostic of that prayer.

He continued and detailed for them the secret of this Divine

Parshat Bo - The Empathy of the Righteous

Name, the names of the angels associated with it and ruled by it, the methods of using this Name and its related angels, the conditions required for it, and the dangers awaiting anyone unworthy who attempts it...

He provided them with a lengthy explanation with hidden mysteries and concealed secrets until the two scholars felt their souls uplifted and nearly left their bodies from the intense, awe-inspiring spiritual light...

At that point, he stopped and offered them a small glass of vodka. *“Quickly, drink! Drink! The truth is, we haven’t even begun to speak about the secret of this Name — the 42-letter Name — but it seems to me we’d better stop here.”*

The little glass of vodka worked wonders, and in an instant, they were fully present back in the physical world !

A relieved thought passed through their minds: *“Great! We’ve discovered the secret of*

his power — he uses the 42-letter Divine Name.”

Rabbi Mordechai of Neschiz, as if naturally continuing, said: *“Heaven forbid! I have never used holy names to perform miracles!”*

They could not hide the confusion they felt, and Rabbi Mordechai smiled and said: *“I know who sent you and why. In order to avoid any disputes and strife, I have no choice but to reveal to you the secret of my power.”*

Rabbi Mordechai began his tale:

“When I was a young married man, I used to seclude myself in the forests and pour out my heart before the Creator. One day, as I was walking as usual into the forest, I heard from among the trees a heart-rending sound of crying...

I immediately went toward the voice. When I arrived, I saw a young man afflicted with boils from head to foot, wallowing in the dirt and crying, pleading to the Blessed

Parshat Bo - The Redemption Process – Family Included

G-d: 'Please, merciful Father, I can no longer endure these sufferings. Please, I beg You, take my soul from me...'

Tears filled my eyes, but I did not know how to help him, for I had not learned the secret of drawing down salvations...

My heart filled with such compassion for the young man that I literally felt his pain — as if I myself had that very affliction! From the intensity of the anguish, my soul departed from me!

My soul left my body and ascended high to heaven. When they saw me in heaven, a tremendous commotion erupted. 'What are you doing here?!' they cried. 'Myriads of Jewish souls are depending on your leadership! You must go back down and continue your mission!'

I refused and said, 'I cannot bear the suffering of this young

man. I do not want to be in a world where I cannot help Jews!'

In Heaven, they agreed with me and said: 'You have already accomplished something with your supplications — this young man will be healed! From now on, we will make an agreement with you: every time you feel another's pain exactly as if you were the sufferer, you will bring about salvation for him!'

That is indeed the secret of my power," Rabbi Mordechai concluded his story. "When a Jew comes to me, and I feel his pain just as he does, I am thereby able to draw down deliverance for him!"

Rabbi Mordechai of Neschez used to say: "*To be worthy of being called by the name tzaddik, one must even feel the birth pangs of a woman in labor who is nearby and pray for her suffering to be lessened!*"

The Redemption Process – Family Included

Let us return to our discussion in the opening: The

people of Israel are the boldest of all nations; no nation or

tongue can stand against their boldness ! In other words, woe to the nation that dares to tangle with the people of Israel !

Nonetheless, because there was tension among the holy brothers, the sons of our father Jacob, the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed that they would suffer and be reduced and demeaned in Egypt...

Then, when the time of redemption arrived, G-d emphasized the importance of unity and commanded them concerning the Korban Pesach (Paschal sacrifice): “*Draw forth and take yourselves a lamb for your families, and slaughter the Passover offering*” (Exodus 12:21).

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains: “For your families” – from here

[we learn] that a person is obligated to draw his relatives close so that they rejoice with him on festivals. Likewise, in the days of redemption, G-d has promised us that each person will be brought near to his family, as it says: ‘*At that time—declares G-d—I will be G-d to all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people*’ (Jeremiah 30:25).’

From his holy words, it is clear that at the time of the exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people were required to eat the Passover sacrifice with their family members in unity and closeness of heart ! They were required to leave their inner world — the world that envelops and surrounds each person's existence — and to sense and feel the inner world of those around them.

A Gift Named Shabbat

The exodus from Egypt reached its completion when the people of Israel stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. There, the *project of unity* was completed, as our Sages expound (Mechilta, Yitro, ch. 1) on

the verse “*And Israel encamped there opposite the mountain*” (Exodus 19:2) — “*as one man with one heart*” (Rashi ad loc.).

The Sinai revelation soon concluded, and three months

later, Moses assembled the people of Israel and commanded them regarding Shabbat: “*And Moses assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel... ‘On the seventh day, it shall be holy for you—a Shabbat of complete rest to G-d’*” (Exodus 35:1–2).

Through these verses, Moses revealed to the people of Israel: You have the ability to attain that same wonderful unity that had shone at Mount Sinai⁵ – every Shabbat! On each and every Shabbat, the light of unity shines — a light with the power to raise you to the coveted level of “one man with one heart”!

We quote Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus Zt”l (*Nefesh Shimshon – Shabbat Kodesh*, p. 173):

“Every Friday afternoon, the sanctity and beauty of Shabbat

begin to permeate our world. Certainly, every Jew yearns and wants to merit drawing from it as much holiness as possible...

But when you want to benefit from something, you must first understand it properly. Many of us don't know how to derive greatness and beauty from Shabbat because we do not understand what Shabbat really is; consequently, we are unaware of the tremendous benefit we can gain from it.

Not long ago, an esteemed young Torah scholar who is a *baal teshuvah* came to me with the following claim: ‘When I was secular and people tried to bring me closer to Judaism and Torah observance, they described to me how wonderful it is to learn Torah, how wonderful it is to

••• Wellsprings of Wisdom •••

5. In *Avoteinu B'Sha'arei Yerushalayim* (p. 127), it is written in the name of Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah Leib Zt”l: “Shabbat is above time, above place, and above all the limits, constraints, and failings of space and time. If a person properly accepts upon himself the sanctity of

Shabbat, he tastes a taste of Genesis—a taste of the beginning before the sin, before impurity, before the mundane, before exile, and before all calamities—as if only now his dust was formed into a man and he was placed in the Garden of Eden...”

Parshat Bo - A Gift Named Shabbat

fulfill the commandments. Among other things, they told me with great enthusiasm how wonderful Shabbat is — the Shabbat table, the aura of Shabbat, etc. They painted such a beautiful picture of Shabbat.'

'And now,' he continued, 'thank G-d, I have become a yeshivah student, and I am happy and blessed. But the beauty and the light of Shabbat that I was promised I would see — I still haven't found or felt. Thank G-d, I have a wonderful family and a Shabbat table, but I cannot seem to find the special beauty and delight! How can I find the beauty of Shabbat?'

That was his question.

We can add to his question and ask: We all know that Shabbat is a very holy and very spiritual day, and yet, we are occupied for most of this holy day with physicality! We eat and drink, fulfilling the mitzvah of *oneg Shabbat* (delighting in Shabbat) by eating the three Shabbat meals.

This is in line with what our Sages have said (Beitzah 16a):

'The Holy One, blessed be He, gives an extra soul (neshama yeteirah) to a person on the eve of Shabbat, and at the conclusion of Shabbat He takes it back.' Rashi (ad loc.) explains: *'An extra soul — an expanded heart to rest and rejoice, that one might be at ease, to eat and drink and not be repulsed by it.'*

On a weekday, if a person were to sit and eat meals the way he eats on Shabbat, he would feel a sense of disgust. But on Shabbat, one eats and drinks and then eats again another meal, and yet the soul does not grow weary of eating.

These words are astonishing: can it be?! Is that the true depth of the concept of the *neshama yeteirah*?

Apparently, we are truly unaware of Shabbat's beauty and inner content. The uplifting Shabbat illumination that shone openly in past generations has now disappeared from us...

Thank G-d, we study Torah, we fulfill mitzvot, and we adhere to all of the halachic

Parshat Bo - A Prerequisite for Shabbat Meals

stringencies. But if we are missing the presence of G-d, it is a lifeless Judaism...

In earlier generations, they felt the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, within every step of life... and that is why they sensed and felt the sanctity of Shabbat in the Shabbat meals,

and the physical relaxation of Shabbat was permeated with holiness and sanctity...

Thus, the more we succeed in bringing the Creator into our lives, being constantly aware of Him, and praying to Him, the more we will merit to feel this sanctity of Shabbat..."

A Prerequisite for Shabbat Meals

As we mentioned earlier, on Shabbat, the light of unity shines — a light capable of elevating a person to the coveted level of "one man with one heart"!

We must yearn and long to merit that light of unity. But although aspirations, desires, and yearnings are commendable, one cannot suffice with that alone; one must also make efforts through concrete actions:

Although the light of unity shines throughout the entirety of Shabbat, the time for actively fostering family unity is specifically during the three meals of Shabbat: the Friday night meal, the Shabbat day meal, and the third meal (*Seudah Shlishit*).

At these times, there is special *siyata di-shmaya* (divine assistance) that enhances family unity and cohesion. When the Shabbat table is properly conducted, all of the hearts are connected and united, and abundance and blessing are drawn down upon the entire family...

We must clarify an important point relevant to our discussion:

We must recognize that a healthy, stable, and proper relationship can be created and maintained only by establishing pleasant, respectful, eye-level, heart-to-heart dialogue between parents and their children. The relationship between them should not be authoritarian, like

Parshat Bo - A Prerequisite for Shabbat Meals

a commander to a soldier, but rather authoritative—on the one hand, clarifying to the child what we demand and expect of them, and on the other hand, responding to the child's needs.

Being responsive means listening to the child's needs with a deep understanding of his soul and with a receptive ear, such that the child understands and feels that his parents truly understand him, feel what he feels, are aware of his needs, and genuinely want what is best for him. When this is the case, then even if the child asks for something and the answer is "no," he will be able to accept that "no" is a correct answer — for they want only his best.

Fostering such a connection can be achieved primarily on Shabbat when the divine light shines greatly, and everything is calm and serene, through heart-to-heart conversations. In this way, one merits connecting to others.

Therefore, it is forbidden at the Shabbat table to be critical of anyone, especially not of one's children; criticism is a dangerous weapon, and whoever does not know how to wield it can cause destruction in his home.

Our task as parents is to reach into our children's souls, to kindle their inner flame, to strengthen them, and to illuminate for them all the goodness in the world.

Unfortunately, today, much of the dialogue between parents and children consists of barking orders: "Do this," "Bring that item,"... and likewise constant criticisms: "Why... ?" "How come... ?" Even when a compliment is given, it ends with a caveat...

There are parents who go so far as to criticize and rebuke their children continuously! This defective trait leads to many great and terrible evils...⁶

Wellsprings of Wisdom

6. Before the door of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zt"l stood a Torah scholar, with tears on his cheek.

When the door opened, the man entered and began to pour out his bitter heart before him: "Holy Rabbi! Why did I not

Parshat Bo - A Prerequisite for Shabbat Meals

merit that my sons follow the path of Torah and tradition, the path of our forefathers ?

They disparage all that is precious and holy — despite the fact that I toil in Torah with all my might, and my home is built strictly on the foundations of halachah. At the same time, my neighbor, who lives opposite me — a simple Jew who works at the *Tnuva* factory — merited that all his children go on the straight and good path ? !”

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman said to him: “Know, all this happened to you because of your ‘*Shulchan Shabbat*’ — Shabbat table !” “*Shulchan Shabbat* ? ! Dear Rabbi, what’s the connection ?”

“Yes. The Shabbat table. I will explain to you: You have an unfortunate habit — ‘dishing out criticism.’ At the Shabbat table, when you sit with your family, you ‘critique’ Torah scholars and ‘hand out’ grades to different Jewish leaders...

You would say to your children: ‘Don’t think that everyone who learns Torah has something to offer. Only if he is from *our* group, our own circle, and learns Torah — then you should respect him...’

Your sons heard your words and understood that if they want to ‘save themselves’ from criticism, slander, and disgrace — the best thing is to leave the world of Torah... They understood from you that it’s possible to learn Torah yet still be a nobody — ending up with neither This World nor

the Next. So they decided: we might as well at least enjoy this world !

Because you sinned by denigrating Torah scholars, it was decreed upon you to suffer the most grievous pain in existence: the pain of raising wayward children !

As for your neighbor, it is true; he is a simple man. But at *his* Shabbat table, he shares words of Torah — each time from a different Torah scholar, each time from a different “camp” — and he speaks his words with humility and self-effacement, with boundless love for the Torah and those who learn it...

Moreover, whenever he meets or sees someone who looks like a *ben Torah*, he becomes excited and very happy. He will kiss that person’s hand if he gets a chance with true, fervent love !

His children, who see this love and who feel this esteem, who absorb this humility and self-effacement — understand that there is nothing more splendid than a person who learns Torah !

They see how great those who learn Torah are in their father’s eyes, and they themselves yearn for that greatness...

Since your neighbor always speaks in praise of rabbis and gedolei Torah and endears the Torah and those who study it to his household, therefore G-d granted him the greatest, most immense, and exalted gift that exists in this world and in the World to Come:

“A blessed upright generation” !

Parshat Bo - A Blessed Shabbat Table

A child needs to receive constant encouragement and positive feedback; parents who broadcast relentless criticism instead destroy him with their own hands.

We must explain to our children again and again that we are proud of them and always happy with them — and thus build up their character !

To achieve the overarching goal of gathering and uniting all of Israel together, one must first unite his closest circle (his own household: his wife, his children, his

parents); only thereafter is he granted from Heaven the power to broaden and enlarge those circles, until ultimately he will be privileged to unite the whole of the Jewish people.

As we said, one who wishes to successfully connect to his wife and children must look upon them with a good eye. Everyone has virtues and flaws; our duty is to find the virtues in others and magnify them...

Now let us turn to the discussion of the Shabbat table...

A Blessed Shabbat Table

Friday afternoon. The sanctity of Shabbat is already beginning to instill serenity and peace in people's hearts.

The world raises its last dust of weekdays... and Shabbat stands nearby, waiting for the weekday atmosphere to disappear...

Shabbat begins to stride between the houses... knocking on their doors and finding the children resplendent in their

Shabbat clothes, the women preparing to kindle the flame of the Shabbat candles and welcome in the Shabbat...

At this point in time, it is the parents' duty to be alert and ensure that their children also share this feeling and that there is nothing bothering them.

Experience has shown that if at Shabbat's onset the children are hungry or tired, they will be

Parshat Bo - A Blessed Shabbat Table

grouchy — now and especially at the Shabbat table. Therefore, some have the custom of giving the children a bag of treats before candle-lighting, so that they will be settled and happy.

It is Friday night. Every Jewish heart stirs and yearns for the sanctity of Shabbat. When we return from the synagogue and gather around a table set with a beautiful cloth, arranged with fine dishes and choice salads, the heart expands with pleasure...

The flames of the Shabbat candles, lit by the mother, radiate calm and tranquility and fill the air of the home with a yearning for something higher...

The family members stand around the table and together begin to sing "*Shalom Aleichem, mal'achei ha-shalom*," followed by "*Eshet Chayil*."

The head of the family — the leader of the home — rises in those holy moments to a higher spiritual stature and

receives the strength to conduct the Shabbat table...

The head of the family receives the power to influence each and every member of his household through his prayers, his blessings, and his good intent. If he knows how to make use of these powers and pleads with G-d from the depths of his heart on behalf of his wife and children, he can indeed achieve whatever he desires...

After *netilat yadayim* (ritual hand washing) and breaking the bread, the whole family sits together and delights in the delicious Shabbat foods.

Between courses, one should fill the Shabbat meals with spiritual content — with song, words of Torah, stories of tzaddikim, and gentle and pleasant conversation among the family members. *Certainly, at this exalted gathering, one must not speak lashon hara, nonsense, or politics.*

When the meal is conducted in this way, this table is elevated up

Parshat Bo - The Power of Shabbat Hymns

and is presented as an offering before the Holy One, blessed be He... Concerning such a table, the verse states: "And he said to

me: 'This is the table that is before G-d'" (Ezekiel 41:22).

Let us sharpen one final point...

The Power of Shabbat Hymns

We bring here an excerpt from the *zemiron* that we published, "*Mishulchano Shel Avinu*" ("From Our Father's Table"):

Our holy sages, with their crystal-clear vision and divine countenance, beheld the Shabbat *zemirot* (hymns) as a mighty source for drawing down G-dliness and exalted holiness straight from the heights of the upper holy worlds to the lowly person dwelling in this world. It particularly is conducive for educating the children and inculcating them with love of G-d and fear of Heaven, love of Torah, and the joyful observance of its commandments.

It is well-known that through singing the Shabbat *zemirot*, harsh judgments are sweetened, and compassion and kindness are bestowed,⁷ and a person merits attaining wondrous and exalted levels of faith and attachment to G-d and even come to a state of *teshuva* *ila'ah* (supreme repentance) and true healing of the soul from all of its maladies.

Through the power of Shabbat songs, we can protect our children from the ills and dangers of our age and of the street—and fortify them with pathways into the world of Torah and the diligent study of

∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

7. In *Siduro Shel Shabbat* (Shoresh III, Anaf 2, Aleh 3), it is written as follows: "'Azamer bi-shvachin' — the term *zemer* implies pruning; through the praises - 'shvachin' - of Shabbat, all judgments are nullified and sweetened..."

Likewise, in *Siddur Beit Yaakov* by the

Ya'avetz (Introduction to the Shabbat *Zemirot*, note 1), it is written: "One who sings these songs and praises brings goodness to the world; G-d cleaves to him and listens to his voice and is appeased, and He sustains the world so that it will be maintained and not destroyed."

it, implanting within them an unbounded sweetness in the study and pursuit of Torah. That sweetness is the guarantee that they become true children of Torah, cleaving to it and joyfully fulfilling its commandments !

It is well known that on one occasion, a towering luminary of Israel confessed that, because of his fervent devotion to Torah study, he would drastically abbreviate the Shabbat meals to hurry back to his learning, dismissing the Shabbat melodies as a mere "squandering of precious Torah time"; consequently, he never considered singing the zemirot properly at the Shabbat table with his only son—until the day he discovered, to his anguish, that this son, his sole child, had not remained upon the path of Torah and holiness he had so carefully blazed, but had strayed to graze in alien pastures.

Years later, in a moment of searing introspection, a heavy sigh burst from his heart, and he confessed to the companion beside him, "I attribute the entire failure of my son's upbringing to my neglect in singing at the Shabbat table !"

He went on to say, "Had I merited to prolong the zemirot properly at the Shabbat table, the sweetness of Torah would have permeated my son's heart, and of its own accord, he would have spent his life immersed in the study and pursuit of the holy Torah..."

To summarize the above: at the moment of Shabbat zemirot, a spirit of purity descends from the highest heavens upon every son and daughter seated at the Shabbat table, and by its power, they receive in their souls the courage and strength to sanctify themselves and to stand firm against every obstacle and difficulty throughout the week !

Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Shabbat contains the secret of unity, and therefore, on Shabbat, the light of unity shines. The principal and most auspicious time for fostering family unity is precisely during the Shabbat meals; in those moments, there is special heavenly assistance to attain family harmony and to create healthy relationships among all members of the household.
2. We must recognize that a healthy, stable, and proper relationship can be created and maintained only by establishing pleasant, respectful, eye-level, heart-to-heart dialogue between parents and their children. The relationship between them should not be authoritarian, like a commander to a soldier, but rather authoritative—on the one hand, clarifying to the child what we demand and expect of them, and on the other hand, responding to the child's needs.

Therefore, it is forbidden at the Shabbat table to be critical of anyone, especially not of one's children; criticism is a dangerous weapon, and whoever does not know how to wield it can cause destruction in his home.

3. Our task as parents is to reach into our children's souls, to kindle their inner flame, to strengthen them, and

to illuminate for them all the goodness in the world.

To achieve the overarching goal of gathering and uniting all of Israel together, one must first unite his closest circle (his own household: his wife, his children, his parents); only thereafter is he granted from Heaven the power to broaden and enlarge those circles, until ultimately he will be privileged to unite the whole of the Jewish people.

4. During the Shabbat meal, between one course and the other, one must fill the meal with spiritual content—song, words of Torah, stories of the righteous, and pleasant conversation among all family members. At these exalted moments, it is certainly forbidden to speak slander, trivialities, or politics. When the meal is conducted thus, the table is elevated and offered up before the Holy One, blessed be He, and concerning it, the verse says: "And He said to me, 'This is the table that is before G-d.'"

5. At the time of Shabbat zemirot, a spirit of purity descends from the highest heavens upon every son and daughter seated at the Shabbat table, and through that power, they receive

Parshat Bo - Summary and Practical Conclusions

in their souls courage and strength to sanctify themselves and to stand firm against every hindrance !

Through the power of Shabbat songs, we can protect our children from the ills and dangers of our age and of the street—and fortify them with pathways

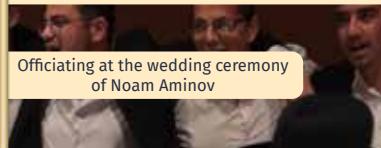
into the world of Torah and the diligent study of it, implanting within them an unbounded sweetness in the study and pursuit of Torah. That sweetness is the guarantee that they become true children of Torah, cleaving to it and joyfully fulfilling its commandments !

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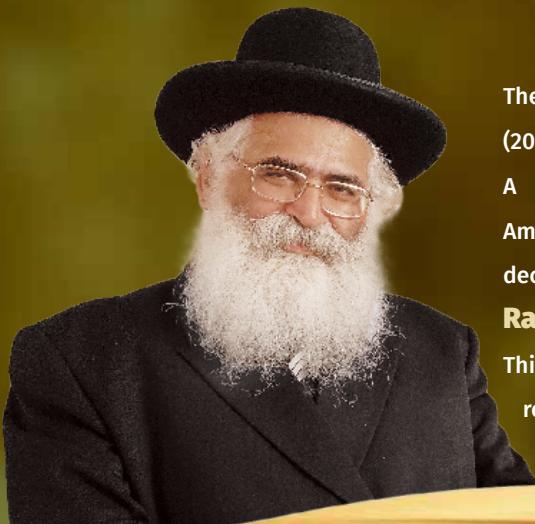
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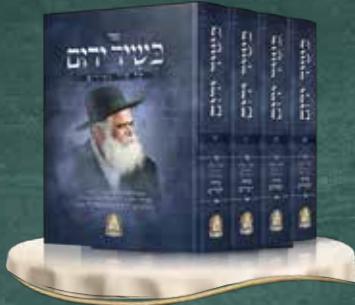
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Shabbat Times
Bo
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City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:44 pm	5:47 pm	6:16 pm
Miami	5:40 pm	6:35 pm	7:11 pm
Los Angeles	4:57 pm	5:56 pm	6:28 pm
Montreal	4:30 pm	5:37 pm	6:02 pm
Toronto	4:59 pm	6:04 pm	6:30 pm
London	4:16 pm	5:30 pm	5:48 pm
Jerusalem	4:50 pm	5:41 pm	6:15 pm
Tel Aviv	4:46 pm	5:38 pm	6:11 pm
Haifa	4:43 pm	5:39 pm	6:11 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:47 pm	5:42 pm	6:15 pm

Pathways
to the Heart

From the Words of
HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

Even when you see a Jew who seems far from Torah, since a Jew, at his root, is a believer, you must not push him away. To reach faith, one needs simplicity, and someone who lacks simplicity will never have complete faith.

This simplicity is found in people who do not keep asking questions; they believe.

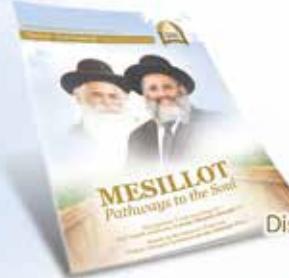


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