

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Balak*



# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Balak

## Emunah

A *bachur* asked the Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l* of Lubavitch, "We don't see Hashem, so how do we know He is here?"

The Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l* wrapped his hand in a towel and waved his hand. He asked the boy, "Who is moving the towel?"

"The Rebbe's hand."

"Do you see my hand?"

"I don't see your hand, but I know that your hand is moving the towel."

The Rebbe replied, "Similarly, we don't see Hashem, but we see the entire world functioning, the grass growing, animals living, people moving, and we know that Hashem is behind it all. The world and all its activities testify to Hashem, Who is running it."

Another example mentioned by the *tzaddikim* of Chabad is the *neshamah*. Everyone knows that they have a *neshamah*.

How else does he move, see, hear, think? The fact that he is alive proves that he has a *neshamah*. Similarly, says the Tzemech Tzedek, the life we see in the world testifies that there is a Creator. No one saw the Creator, but it is obvious that the Creator is there.

Furthermore, the wonders found in every aspect of creation also testify to the Creator. No one sees Hashem, but everyone looking at the world knows that he is in Hashem's presence.

The same applies to *hashgachah pratis*. We might not see Hashem, but His presence is unmistakable.

It states (*Tehillim* 16:8), *שׁוֹיֵתִי ה' לְנֶגְדֵי תְמִיד*, "I place Hashem before me, always..." According to what we explained, placing Hashem's presence before your eyes is very easy. Just look at the world, and you will see Hashem is before you! Every detail of the world testifies to the Creator! The "life" of the world testifies that there is a Creator!<sup>1</sup>

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1. Reb Gad'l Eisner *zt'l*, the renowned *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Gur, endured the horrors of Auschwitz and lost his only daughter in the war, but his *emunah* remained intact.

To demonstrate to the students how difficult it was to have *emunah* in that era, Reb Gad'l took a bottle cap from the table, hid it in his hands, and asked his student, "If someone would come into this room and search for the cap, would he find it?"

"No," the student replied. "He wouldn't think to look in your hand. He will look all over the room and not find it."

Reb Gad'l said that this is how it was during the Holocaust. People were searching for Hashem but couldn't find Him. This is the reason so many people fell away.

Reb Gad'l asked, "If someone knew I am holding the cap in my hands, would he search for it?"

The student replied that he wouldn't search for the bottle cap because he knew where it was.

Reb Gad'l explained that his *emunah* remained firm throughout the Holocaust because he didn't search for Hashem. He knew Hashem was there. Had he searched, he wouldn't have found Him, but he had no doubts that Hashem was with him.

The following is another approach Reb Gad'l shared with his students to describe how he found Hashem even during the Holocaust: "If someone lost a diamond worth millions of dollars in a dark room, would

The following pasuk states (Tehillim 16:9) לכן ישמח לבי ויגל כבודי אף בשרי ישכן לבטח, "Therefore, my heart rejoiced, and my soul was glad; even my flesh shall dwell in safety." This means that when you know you are always before Hashem, you will always be happy. And it is undoubtedly so. Emunah is a great fountain of joy and tranquility.

Toldos Yaakov Yosef (*Tzafnas Paneiach, Mishpatim* (ד"ה עוד י"ל ונבאר ענין תענית אסתר) elaborates on one aspect of this joy, based on a lesson and mashal told by baalei mussar:

A person is speaking to the king when someone enters the room and gives him a resounding smack in front of the king! Of course, the one having the audience with the king will not react to the smack he has just received. He would remain silent, thinking, "If the king sent him to hit me, what can I do? And if he hit me with his own will, the king will certainly punish him for hitting me while speaking to the king. There is no reason for me to get involved." This is what a person should think when someone humiliates or harms him in any way. There is no reason to punish him or take revenge. It was sent from Hashem, and it was destined to be. Furthermore, Hashem will certainly punish him, so why must you get involved?

The Toldos explains that avoiding machlokes is a source of great joy because that will save a person from problems and strife. And this is easy to accomplish with the awareness of שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד, that you are before Hashem. And therefore, שמח לבי, you can live a joyous and stress-free life.

It states in this week's parashah (*Bamidbar* 23:23), כעת יאמר ליעקב ולישראל מה פעל א-ל. The Divrei Yisrael *zt'l* (Modzhitz) teaches that this pasuk hints at the wonderful level of emunah, to know that everything is from Hashem. When you have this emunah, you won't get angry at those who wrong you and won't be upset when things don't go how you want. The pasuk discusses יעקב and ישראל. The *Or HaChaim* (*Bereishis* 47:28) says that whenever the Torah states *Yisrael*, it represents the Jewish nation when they are on a high level, and when it states *Yaakov*, it hints to the Jewish nation when they are on a lower level. The *pasuk* says, כעת יאמר ליעקב; this means that when Yidden are at a lower level, they say כעת that things happen according to the times. They attribute everything to chance, to nature, to the era. However, ולישראל מה פעל א-ל, when the Yidden are at a higher level, they say, מה פעל א-ל, everything happens by Hashem's decree.

This is as we say in the Shabbos *zemiros*, שכרו הרבה מאוד על פי פעלו. The Divrei Yisrael explains, שכרו הרבה מאוד, he will receive a great reward for his emunah, על פי פעלו, when he has the belief that everything happens על פי, by Hashem's decree.<sup>2</sup>

## Tranquility

The Zohar (vol.3 199:) teaches that the first two letters of בלק and בלעם spell בלבב, which means confusion, and the final two letters of בלק spell בלעם. Amalek, Bilaam, and Balak all wanted to bring worry and chaos into our hearts because then we are more

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he not search for it because it is dark and difficult to find? Of course not! He would crawl on his hands and knees and feel the floor until he found it. Similarly, when darkness covered the earth during the Holocaust, and it was hard to find Hashem, I knew that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was there. So, I continued searching for Him, despite the difficulties."

2. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 67:) relates that a certain woman sought to take dust from beneath Reb Chanina's feet for the purpose of performing sorcery against him. Reb Chanina told her, "If you succeed in employing sorcery against me, go ahead and do it. It states, אין עוד מלבדו, there is no strength in the world other than Hashem's strength."

Rashi explains that he told her, "If Hashem desires me, you won't be able to harm me. And if you do succeed to harm me, that means that it came from Hashem, and I accept it."

likely to fall into their hands, the hands of the yetzer hara.

The Nesivos Shalom zt'l (of Slonim) teaches that therefore it states (Esther 9:24), *כי המן... חשב, על היהודים לאבדם והפיל הגורל להומם ולאבדם*, "Haman... devised to destroy the Jews, and he cast the *pur* - this is the lot - to confuse them and destroy them." He first wanted *להומם*, to confuse them because he knew that then he would succeed in *לאבדם*, to destroy them.<sup>3</sup>

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner zt'l said that all the wealth in the world isn't as precious as a moment of tranquility and *yishuv hadaas*.

On the words *ואבדתם מהרה* the Baal Shem Tov zt'l taught that we should get rid of the habit of rushing.<sup>4</sup>

Without *emunah*, people lose their peace of mind. With every problem that arises, they panic, forgetting that whatever is happening is for their good, and then they fall into the hands of the yetzer hara.

It states in this week's parashah (23:19) *לא איש א-ל ויכזב וכן אדם ויתנחם*.<sup>5</sup> The Kaliver Rebbe Shlita (may he have a *refuah sheleimah*) explains that *לא איש א-ל*, means that if a man isn't an *איש א-ל*, a person who attributes everything to Hashem, *ויכזב*, such a person will tell lies

because he thinks he has to lie and to cheat to make a living. *ובן אדם*, when a person thinks that everything happens through the strength of man, *ויתנחם*, he will always have regrets, as Chazal say, *רשעים מלאים חרטות*, "The *resha'im* are constantly regretting." Whenever they do something that doesn't work out well, they are plagued with a conscience, "Why was I so stupid? Why did I do that?"

Life is always good for a person with *emunah*. He isn't rushing in a panic to earn a living or to gain other worldly gains because he knows Hashem is in charge. He does his *hishtadlus* while remaining calm and collected throughout the process.

The Midrash tells that someone was about to buy a diamond and asked the seller how to know if it was real. The merchant replied, "Bang on it with a hammer. If it is a real diamond, it won't break."

We use this *mashal* to describe *emunah*. How does one know if he has genuine *emunah*? If he is strong and can stand up to difficult tests without losing his tranquility, his *emunah* is real.

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3. The Gemara (Brachos 61) compares the yetzer hara to a fly. We can explain that this is because a fly doesn't harm people; it only confuses them. It flies and buzzes around and disturbs a person's peace of mind. And that is the first tactic the yetzer hara uses to ensnare people into his trap.

4. Incidentally, one of the pitfalls of technology is that it robs us of our peace of mind. Through technology, one can always be listening, watching, or reading something, and without peace of mind, one is left without the ability to think and connect with what is important.

At a wedding, the parents slowly walk the chasan and kallah to the chuppah. The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l says it is a message to the young couple that they can walk. There is no need to run. Everything is in Hashem's hands, and with Hashem's help, everything will work out well.

In some smaller cities in Eretz Yisrael, instead of traffic lights, there are traffic circles (roundabouts) in the middle of the road. In jest, I heard that this is because people prefer to circle rather than to stop at a red light. The most frightening thing for people is to be alone with themselves and their thoughts, without anything to do. But this is a sickness. Nothing is more enjoyable than a moment of clear thinking without disturbances. We can use quiet moments to reflect on what we are doing, what we should be accomplishing, and much more. It is a ploy of the yetzer hara to rob us of these precious moments.

5. Literally, the pasuk says, "Hashem is not a man that He should lie, nor is He a mortal that He should relent."

## The Miracle of Ignorance

The Chovos Halevavos gives a *mashal* of a person who sees a page written with perfectly formed letters, lines that are properly aligned, and words that express a comprehensive message. When he asks who wrote it, he is told, "No one wrote it. Ink spilled, and this is what came out."

Who would believe that?

Or, let's say you ask, "Who built this table?" and you are told, "No one built it. There was a lot of wood in this room. A strong wind blew, and the pieces came together and formed this table."

Once again, no one would believe that.

A third example is if you ask your fellow man where he bought his eyeglasses. He replies, "My cat ran into an optical store and ran over the frames and lenses. The storeowner couldn't chase the cat out of the store. By the time I got there, the pieces the cat stirred up formed this pair of eyeglasses. The storeowner was so surprised that it was so well put together that he let me keep the glasses for free."

Once again, we don't believe him. Eyeglasses won't be formed by running over metal frames and glass pieces.

The world is much more complex and even more detailed than the first example we gave. So why is it hard for people to recognize that Hashem created the world and didn't happen by chance? It should be obvious that Hashem created the world!

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* (צמח פנינים) answers that creation has two miracles: One miracle is the wonders of creation. The second miracle of Creation is that people see these wonders all the time, and they don't recognize them. And even if they realize the wonders, they have a blind spot that prevents them from connecting the dots and recognizing that the world was created by Hashem. They find endless wisdom, beauty, design, and order wherever they look. It is

mindboggling, and even more mindboggling, that they don't recognize the obvious- there is a Creator.

Rebbe Bunim says the second miracle is an even greater wonder than the first. That people can live in the world and not recognize Hashem is a more incredible wonder than the wonders of creation.

It states (*Tehillim* 92), מאוד עמוק ה' מאוד עמוק, מה גדלו מעשיך ה', מוחשבותיך, Creation is great, wonderful, fascinating, and yet, איש בער לא ידע וכסיל לא יבין, the fools see all of this, and they don't recognize Hashem! And that is the greatest wonder.

To grasp the extent of this miracle, we'll talk about a person walking through a very busy construction site. Powerful drills are cutting through a mountain, and monstrous tractors lift the stones hewn from the mountain and pour them into large trucks. Cement trucks are also at other parts of the site, pouring the foundation. Giant cranes are laying the prefabricated apartments. Many builders are at the site, and everyone is busy doing his job.

The person walking through the site is deep in thought. Perhaps he is thinking about money or maybe even about Torah. He is totally oblivious to what is going on. He doesn't see the tractors or the workers... Fortunately, he doesn't fall into one of the many pits, and he isn't harmed by the construction.

When he reaches the other side, someone asks him, "What do you say to all the construction? It is quite amazing. There is so much noise; so many things are happening at once..."

He replies, "What construction site? I didn't see any construction."

"That doesn't sound right. How did you walk through without seeing and without hearing what's going on? It's amazing."

It is even more amazing to be in this world and not recognize Hashem's wonders.

But that is one of the miracles of creation: that people can be in this wondrous world and have free choice to deny what they are seeing.

This lesson also applies to Hashem's *hashgachah*. Hashem's *hashgachah* is wherever we look. Hashem sends us *parnassah*, arranges *shidduchim*, guards our health, directs us in all aspects of our lives, and we take it for granted. We don't see the wonders that happen before our eyes every day, every second. As it states (Devarim 8:17), ואמרת בלבבך, כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה "You say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my arm earned me my wealth.'"<sup>6</sup> Tzaddikim said that עוצם ידי hints at this problem, as עוצם alludes to עצימת עינים, closing the eyes. Because the *yetzer hara* closes people's eyes until they think they succeed on their own. Hashem performs miracles for them all the time; they are blind and don't notice.

How can they be so blind? The miracles of Hashem's *hashgachah* are clearly revealed. But the answer is as Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa taught us, one of the miracles of creation, actually the greatest miracle, that people can close their eyes and not see what is so obvious.

### The Salvation is Arranged

Tzaddikim tell us that Hashem's salvation is prepared before us, we just don't recognize it.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 53:14) states, הכל בחזקת סומין עד שהקב"ה מאיר את עיניהם

blind, until Hakadosh Baruch Hu enlightens his eyes. As it states (*Bereishis* 21:19), ויפקח אלוקים, את עיניה ותרא באר מים 'Hashem opened [Hagar's] eyes and she saw the water-well,<sup>7</sup> and she gave water to her ill son, Yishmael.<sup>7</sup>

The well was in front of her beforehand, but she didn't see it until Hashem opened her eyes. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* (quoted in Sfas Emes חקת תרנ"ט) explains that "all one's needs are always available for him, only the human eye doesn't see it. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu opens up his eyes, he sees."

The Sfas Emes explains that (in last week's *parashah*) when Hashem told Moshe to speak to the stone, it was so the nation would see that the salvation was already there. The well and the water were prepared. All that was necessary was for them to recognize it. This applies to all our needs. They are all before us; we just have to open our eyes and recognize them.

Therefore, for the people waiting for Hashem's salvation, believe that the salvation is in front of your eyes. Daven and trust in Hashem; He will open your eyes, and Hashem's salvation will materialize.

It states in this week's *parashah* (22:31), ויגל, "Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes and he saw the *malach*." The *malach* was there beforehand, but Bilaam didn't see it until Hashem opened his eyes. Similarly, all of our needs are prepared for us, and when Hashem allows us to see it, the salvation comes.

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6. Reb Shmuel Tchuliner *zt'l* (a student of Reb Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l*) once enjoyed a certain *chesed* from Hashem, and he didn't stop speaking about it. He would tell whoever came to his house, "Did you hear what happened to me?" and he repeated the miracle and kindness that Hashem did for him.

After a while, his family asked him why he kept talking about this same miracle. Reb Shmuel Tchuliner replied, "The Or HaChaim says, 'The *yetzer hara*'s first ploy is to cause a person to forget Hashem's kindness,' and therefore I'm constantly repeating it to myself so that I shouldn't forget."

7. Many people say this Midrash as a *segulah* to find something they lost.

The truth is that it isn't just a *segulah*. The awareness that you can't see anything without Hashem's help increases your merits, and due to this awareness, Hashem will show you what you need to find.



### **Bitachon and Parnassah**

It states (*Avos* 4:12), הו"י מומעט בעסק ועסוק בתורה, "Work less and study Torah." You can work less, and Hashem will support you.

It states in this week's parashah (22:35) that the malach said to Bilaam, לך עם האנשים, "Go with the men," permitting him to go with שרי בלק, the officers of Balak. But he warned him that he won't be able to say anything Hashem doesn't allow. Why did the malach permit Bilaam to go? Rashi writes, בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך, "In the way that a person desires to go, he is led."

Tzaddikim say that it is the same regarding parnassah. Many people work many hours to earn a living, thinking they have no choice. But there is another way. He can choose to work less and to spend this extra time in avodas Hashem, and Hashem will support him. He will receive brachah in his parnassah, in the fewer work hours he puts in. Hashem will lead him and grant him success on the path he chooses. It is on the path a person desires to go that he is led.<sup>8</sup>

The Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* says that when the Or HaChaim HaKadosh was Rav in Morocco, he advised his community not to work six days a week. It is sufficient to work the first three days of the week, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. At the end of the week, on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, they should devote themselves to Torah. The Or HaChaim guaranteed them that they won't lose money because of this.

They followed his counsel, and they were successful. They didn't lose money because of it.

Obviously, when one devotes three days a week to study Torah, he will become a better person, enriched with *yiras Shamayim* and good *middos*, and that's what happened to this community in Morocco.

A few years later, the Or HaChaim moved to Eretz Yisrael, and the people in Morocco gradually returned to their old customs of working six days a week. They thought that this would increase their income. But they soon admitted that they earned the same amount as when they spent three days a week studying Torah.

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8. A man told his family, "I'm stopping to work. I'm going to invest all my strength in Torah and tefillah. I will serve Hashem in the forest. I will go there for a week with my Gemara and Tehillim. Don't prepare food for me because Hashem will support me!"

A neighbor overheard his announcement and scoffed at the idea. "How does he expect to obtain food in the forest?"

The neighbor followed him into the forest, and from afar, he heard the *baal bitachon* shout, "Please, Hashem! I'm hungry. Send me something to eat!"

On cue, the neighbor threw him a food package. The man danced joyously and said, "Thank you Hashem for answering my tefillos!"

This happened every day for a week. The neighbor supplied the food, and the *baal bitachon* praised Hashem.

At the end of the week, the neighbor came to his home and said, "It wasn't Hashem who answered your tefillos. I watched you from a distance in the forest and threw you food packages whenever you prayed for food."

The Yid replied, "I am as thankful to Hashem as I was before because it wasn't you who sent me the food packages; it was Hashem. Hashem gave you the idea to follow me into the forest and to throw food packages to me so that I could be sustained. That's how Hashem arranged *parnassah* for me this week. But it was from Him and not from you."

They saw that the Or HaChaim's counsel was correct. Setting times for studying Torah didn't detract from *parnassah*.<sup>9</sup>

### Concealed Miracles

The Chasam Sofer (Yorah Deiah 356) writes, "Everything written in the Torah we, ourselves, saw it occur. The exception is the story of Bilaam..."

"The miracles of yetzias Mitzrayim and the miracles that occurred in the desert were performed before all six-hundred-thousand members of Bnei Yisrael. There wasn't one Yid who didn't see it. (According to the view that Yisro came after matan Torah, Moshe's children weren't there. But besides this exception, there isn't one Yid who didn't see the wonders with his own eyes.) A father won't inherit a lie to his children; therefore, it is like we saw the miracles with our eyes.

"Also, the creation of the world, the stories of the snake in Gan Eden, the mabul, and Dor Haflagah [is like we saw these miracles with our own eyes]. The Ramban (Drashos HaRamban) writes that Adam HaRishon saw that he was created alone, without a father and mother, he saw what occurred in Gan Eden, and that he was banished. Adam repeated all of this to Shem, the son of Noach, the Rebbe of Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov

Avinu was fifty years old when Shem was niftar, and Yaakov heard all of this. Shem also taught Yaakov Avinu about the mabul [he was in the teivah] and the Dor Haflagah. Yaakov told his children [he told it to Levi], and Amram heard it from Levi. Amram told it to his sons, Moshe and Aharan. And the entire generation heard it from their parents...

"We witnessed the episodes of the entire Torah, except for the parashah of Bilaam. Because, who told us about the meetings between the king of Moav and a sorcerer called Bilaam? Who knew that he built seven mizbichos and that he wanted to curse, but it was turned around and became a brachah?

"Bnei Yisrael were dwelling in the desert, while they [Balak and Bilaam] were in Moav, on top of a mountain. They looked down and saw the Jewish nation from a distance. How could the people in the desert know that they were being watched from a mountaintop and that they were using sorcery to harm them? Even Moshe Rabbeinu didn't know about it, he heard from Hashem's mouth, and he wrote it in the sefer Torah. Yet, the Navi shouts, זכר נא מה יעץ בלק [that we must remember this episode when Balak tried to have the Jewish nation cursed].<sup>10</sup>

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9. Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizensk *zt'l* said, "One can earn *parnassah* from dealing with sawdust and splinters. The only condition is that he shouldn't be disgusted with his field of work because then it won't have a *brachah*."

The Radak (*Tehillim* 145:17) writes, "Hashem gives all animals *parnassah* in a צדק וישר, correct and proper way. Although animals prey on other animals- such as cats, lions, bears, leopards, and other animals that eat other animals, and as there are birds that eat other birds - nevertheless, this is all צדק, correct, because when these animals were alive, Hashem supplied for them the foods that they needed. And when they were destined to die, it was decreed that they should die in a way that will grant pleasure [and sustenance] to other animals."

10. The Chasam Sofer concludes, "Even if a person believes in the entire Torah, with all its mitzvos, only he isn't certain about the story of Bilaam, he is an apikores! He doesn't believe in Hashem! No one would say that Bilaam is a primary foundation of the Torah, upon which the Torah is built, but nevertheless, if a person doesn't believe in this story, he doesn't believe in Hashem. Certainly, in regards to the final redemption, which is written clearly in the Torah, from Hashem's mouth to Moshe Rabbeinu [as it states] אם יהי נדחק בקצה השמים, that even if we are dispersed to the corners of the world, Hashem will return us to Eretz Yisrael, and it states (Devarim 32:43) וכפר אדמתו עמו, that Hashem will return us to Eretz Yisrael, and so on [if one doesn't believe in this, he doesn't believe in the Torah]."

The Chasam Sofer is teaching a lesson in emunah, but it is also a lesson in bitachon. It is a reminder that we should always place our trust in Hashem because no one can help us but Hashem.

Let us think about this scenario: It states (Michah 6:5) עמי זכר נא מה יעץ בלק מלך מואב ומה ענה אתו בלעם בן בעור מן השטים עד הגלגל למען דעת צדקות ה' "My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab planned, and what Bilaam the son of Beor answered him. From Shittim to Gilgal, may you recognize the kind deeds of Hashem." The pasuk tells us to remember Hashem's kindness when He turned Bilaam's curses into blessings. Let us not forget that only Hashem knew about the danger. Only Hashem knew that nations were plotting to curse the Jewish nation, and apparently, Bilaam's curses were something to be afraid of. Moshe Rabbeinu didn't know about the danger; the nation didn't know, and they didn't realize that they should daven. And Hashem performed the miracle for them, turning the curse into a blessing!

This reveals to us that we must have bitachon in Hashem. Sometimes, we think we have the strength and the ability to protect ourselves. This is a widespread belief in which people err. Everyone will admit, however, that we can't protect ourselves from surprises. How can we defend ourselves against the goyim who come up with new ideas each day on how to harm the Jewish nation? We don't know what to expect next to be ready. This reality reminds us that our only hope is to trust in Hashem. It was from such a danger, from Bilaam's curses, that Hashem saved us. It happened concealed on a mountaintop, but Hashem knew, and Hashem foiled their plans.

The Meshech Chachmah (Devarim 10:20) describes different kinds of *bitachon*:

One type is when someone trusts the government to help him. Another kind of *bitachon* is when a wife trusts that her husband will support her. A third kind of *bitachon*, a very high level of trust, is when a child of a king trusts that his father, the king, will provide him with his needs.

Bitachon in Hashem is even stronger because Hashem can protect us and help us with matters we aren't even aware of. Hashem knows what we need, more than we know.

For example, if someone plots to harm the king's son, the king won't know about it. And even if he knows, he might be unable to prevent it from transpiring. Hashem knows all our needs, including the matters that we aren't aware of, and Hashem can save us. Therefore, the highest form of bitachon is to trust in Hashem.

The Meshech Chachmah writes, "הוא מלכנו" הוא אבינו, Hashem yisbarach is our King and our Father, and therefore, הוא ישיענו, He will save us (based on Yeshayah 33:22). We believe that Hashem is close to His creations to give them their food and all their needs and to protect them from illnesses. Hashem knows a person's needs more than the person himself is aware of them. And Hashem has tzaar when we lack something, as it states (Yeshayah 63:9) בכל צרתם לו צר... Hashem feels the person's needs more than the person feels them, as Chazal say on the pasuk (Shemos 3:7) כי ידעתי את מכאובי Hashem has the ability, and He knows everything that happens to a person... He knows what people are plotting, and therefore, He cares to do favors for them more than they could care for themselves. Therefore, a person should have bitachon and be calm and tranquil, and he should only do the hishtadlus that are necessary, as Hashem commanded all creation to do...<sup>11</sup>

11. If we were to praise the holy *avos*, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, we wouldn't know where to begin or end. There is so much to say and more than we can even fathom. Nevertheless, in the *brachah* of ארבת

## Beginnings

It is important to start the day with holiness because that sets the tone for the rest of the day. As tzaddikim say (Shemos 13:2) קדש לי כל בכור, it is important to make the bechor, the beginnings, holy.

This concept is stated in Rashi (23:24) in this week's parashah: "When [Yidden] awaken in the morning from their sleep, they become strong like a lion to grab mitzvos, to put on a talis, to say the Shema, to put on tefillin." They begin the day with holiness.

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zt'l (quoted in Beis Yaakov, Ki Savo) says that the mitzvah of bikurim (to bring the first fruit that grows on one's property to the Beis HaMikdash) is to remind us to sanctify everything that is 'first'. He adds that in our generation, when there is no Beis HaMikdash, we keep the mitzvah of bikurim by sanctifying everything new. Therefore, one should make the beginning of the day holy. He should start the day with Torah and tefillah. This is the reason we begin the day with Modeh Ani. We thank Hashem even before our feet touch the ground. The beginning of the day should be for Hashem, which helps the rest of the day follow accordingly.

The Divrei Yisrael (Bereishis 4:7) explains the pasuk לפתח חטאת רובץ that the yetzer hara

stands לפתח, at the beginning of the day, and he wants to ruin the beginnings, that they shouldn't be for Hashem. ואלך תשוקתו, his primary desire is to destroy the beginnings, ואתה תמשול בו, but if you don't permit him to take the beginnings, you can win over the yetzer hara.

The Mishnah Berurah (549:2) writes, "Five tzaros took place on Shivah Asar BeTamuz: (1) the luchos were broken (2) The korban tamid ceased (3) הובקעה העיר, the walls of Yerushalayim were breached (4) Apustamos the rasha burned a sefer Torah. (5) An idol was erected in the heichal."

One of the reasons that we fast is because the luchos were broken.

Chazal (Tanchuma, Ki Sisa) teach that the first luchos were broken because they were given in public. For the second luchos, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, אין לך יפה מן הצניעות, there is nothing better than when a mitzvah is performed with tznius, without fanfare, without people knowing about it, as it states (Michah 6:8) והצנע לכת עם ה' אלוך. Therefore, the second luchos, which were given in a more concealed manner, weren't broken.

The Sfas Emes zt'l (Ki Sisa 5639) asks, doesn't Hakodesh Baruch Hu know the future? He knew that the first luchos, which were given with קולות וברקים, with loud sounds and with lightning, in a revealed manner, wouldn't

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עולם we request that Hashem answer our tefillos, ובעבור אבותינו שבטחו בך, in the merit that our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov had bitachon in Hashem. The Shem MiShmuel (Mikeitz תרע"ה) learns from this the great merit of bitachon. It is an extremely special service before Hashem. From all the merits the avos have, their bitachon was chosen as a great merit!

The son of Reb Refael Bliner, a Lubavitzer chassid, became very ill. He came to the Tzemech Tzedek and asked the Tzemech Tzedek to daven for his child.

The Rebbe replied, טראכט גוט וועט זיין גוט, "Think positive, and things will be good."

The chassid replied, "I request that the Rebbe should think positive thoughts about my son, that he should recover. The Rebbe's positive thoughts will certainly help my son, but what can my thoughts accomplish?"

The Tzemech Tzedek replied that a positive thought helps, and one doesn't have to be a Rebbe to accomplish that.

This counsel is related to the concept of bitachon. Think positively, trust that Hashem will help you, and it will be so.

last. So, why didn't Hashem initially give the Torah in a concealed manner?

The Sfas Emes replies that this was the first time that Hashem was speaking with the Jewish nation; he was giving them the Torah. At such a time, the only way to give the Torah is with hislahavus. It is impossible to begin a beginning in a concealed, silent manner.

We quote the Sfas Emes: "If it weren't for the hislahavus at the beginning, with great revelation, it would be impossible to afterwards give the Torah in a concealed manner. However, since the Torah was given with קולי קולות, in a loud voice, now the Torah can be given in a concealed manner. And this is a lesson for all generations. You must begin with great hislahavus, even if the hislahavus won't last..."<sup>12</sup>

The Rokeiach (introduction) writes, אין חזק, כחסידות בתחילתו, "Nothing is stronger than chasidus at the beginning." And it has to be that way. The beginnings should be with a lot of energy and excitement, and that gives momentum for the good deeds to continue.

In contrast, Siforno (Bereishis 9:20) discusses Noach's error that the first thing he planted after the mabul was a vineyard, as it states, ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם. Siforno writes, "He began with something that isn't proper, and that's why improper things emerged. This is because a drop of קלקול, imperfection, at the beginning results in a lot of problems in the end, as this is known regarding the sciences when they have a false foundation at the beginning."<sup>13</sup>

There is a lot to think about when we study these words. Beginnings are important. The beginning sets the mode for everything that will follow.

### Or HaChaim HaKadosh

The Or HaChaim Hakadosh's *yahrtzeit* is on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, so we will discuss some stories of this holy tzaddik and some praises of his holy *sefarim*.

As we wrote, the Or HaChaim lived in Morocco and moved to Eretz Yisrael. He settled in Teveria, but he was once invited to a meal with Reb Chaim Abulafia *zt'l*. The Or HaChaim HaKadosh didn't want to eat anything and said, "I feel that there's *tumah* in this house."

Soon afterwards, it was discovered that the maid had died. (People first thought she had fallen asleep in the kitchen.) People began saying that the Or HaChaim was greater than Reb Chaim Abulafia because he sensed the *tumah* while Reb Chaim Abulafia apparently didn't.

After this, the Or HaChaim left for Yerushalayim and settled there in honor of Reb Chaim Abulafia. He didn't want people to say that he was greater than Reb Chaim Abulafia.

There are different versions of the following story, and we will tell it as Reb Mottele Slonimer *zt'l* would say it:

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh came to a particular city and needed a place to stay for Shabbos, but he didn't know in which home

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12. When a person prepares a cup of coffee, he boils up water to the highest degree and then makes the coffee. But he won't drink the coffee when it is that hot. He will wait for it to cool off. So, why doesn't he initially cook the water to the degree that he plans to drink it and prepare the coffee at that temperature? The answer is that the coffee wouldn't taste good if the water didn't boil at the beginning. This is a *marshal* for the need to begin with hislahavus. The hislahavus may cool off with time, but there must be hislahavus at the beginning.

13. We can compare it to when one mistakenly buttons his shirt's top button with the hole intended for the second button. At first, he doesn't realize there is a problem, but when he finishes all the buttons, he sees that the shirt is lopsided, and he has to start all over again. This illustrates the problem of beginning slightly off.

the kashrus was reliable. He heard someone say *l'kavod Shabbos kodesh* when he was preparing for Shabbos, and the Or HaChaim felt confident that he could eat in that home.

That city had a very special Rav, and at each of the three Shabbos meals, the Rav would repeat *divrei Torah* he heard from heaven.

On Friday night after the *seudah*, the Or HaChaim HaKadosh's host brought the Or HaChaim to the Rav's home. At one point in the middle of the Rav's speech, the Or HaChaim corrected him.

The Rav said, "I swear you are Reb Chaim ben Atar (the Or HaChaim HaKadosh) because I heard this *doar Torah* in heaven in the name of Reb Chaim ben Atar, and you said it exactly as I heard it."

After the morning meal and again at *shalosh seudos*, the Or HaChaim came with his host to the Rav's home to listen to his holy *drashos*.

During *shalosh seudos*, the Satan appeared to the Rav and said, "Finish *shalosh seudos* quickly. It's late."

"What is the hurry?" the Rav asked the Satan. The Satan explained that every Shabbos, the *neshamos* in Gehinom have permission to leave Gehinom and go to Gan Eden. "When Shabbos is over, I must return the *neshamos* to Gehinom. But I have to wait until the Or HaChaim HaKadosh says *havdalah*, as that marks the end of Shabbos. After the Or HaChaim's *havdalah*, I return the *neshamos* to Gehinom. But you are making a long *shalosh seudos* with your *divrei Torah*, preventing the Or HaChaim from saying *havdalah*. And I can't carry out my mission to return the *neshamos* to Gehinom! So, please finish *shalosh seudos* quickly, and I will send the souls back to Gehinom."

When the Rav heard the Satan's explanation, he decided to conduct *shalosh seudos* even longer to help the *neshamos* stay in Gan Eden a little longer.

The Satan kept returning to the Rav, urging him to finish *shalosh seudos*, but the Rav ignored him.

Once, the Rav got angry with the Satan and said, "What's the big rush?! Take it easy!"

Immediately after saying this, the Rav asked for *mayim achronim*. They *benched* and finished the meal.

The Rav explained that after he became angry, his anger lit the fire of Gehinom,<sup>14</sup> so he knew that it wouldn't help to prolong *shalosh seudos*. So, they might as well *bench*, daven *Maariv* and say *havdalah*.

When Reb Mottel Slonimer told this story, he emphasized the severity of anger as it turns on the fire of Gehinom.

In addition to being a wonderful, holy *sefer*, the *sefer Or HaChaim* has many *segulos*. One *segulah* is for bearing children. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* said that since the Or HaChaim didn't have his own children, he placed his entire power of bearing children into the *sefer Or HaChaim*. Therefore, studying this *sefer* is *mesugal* for bearing children.

Studying Or HaChaim is also a *segulah* for *refuah*. The son of Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz became ill, and his father accepted on himself to study a *daf* of *Or HaChaim* (as printed in the *Chumash* of Shkov) each day (*Imrei Pinchas, Shaar HaTorah*, 133).

Reb Shpraver of Brashov (author of אפרקסתא דעניא) *zt'l* didn't have any children, and his Rebbe, the Imrei Yosef of Spinka *zt'l*, advised him to learn a certain *vort* from the Or HaChaim, as a *segulah* to have children. He

14. Anger is Gehinom, as Chazal (*Nedarim* 21) say, "Whoever becomes angry, all forms of Gehinom rule over him."

studied that piece every day until he had a child.

Towards the end of Reb Shpraver's life, he expressed regret that he forgot which piece of the *Or HaChaim* is *mesugal* for bearing children.

The Lev Simchah of Gur *zt'l* heard this story and said, "The truth is, every piece of *Or HaChaim* is *mesugal* for having children. The *Or HaChaim* didn't have children, so he placed his power of bearing children into his *sefer*."

It was medically impossible for Reb Hillel Shlesinger *zt'l* to bear children. A doctor said, "When hair grows on my palm, you will have children."

But Reb Hillel Shlesinger refused to lose hope. He went to the *kever* of the *Or HaChaim* and made a *kabbalah* that he would study *Or HaChayim HaKaodsh* each week as a *segulah* to have children. He was blessed with three daughters. One married Reb Moshe Halberstam *zt'l*, another married Reb Sender Freund *zt'l*, and the third married Reb Nochum Shapiro *zt'l*—three great scholars of Yerushalayim.

When one of the daughters was nine, she went to the doctor complaining of a cold. The doctor diagnosed her with diphtheria and immediately brought her into the operating room to save her life.<sup>15</sup>

Reb Hillel Shlesinger made a *neder* that if his daughter recovered, he would bring her to the *Or HaChaim's* *beis medresh* in the Old City of Yerushalayim so that she could light a candle there. (In Yerushalayim of those years, this was a renowned *segulah* for *yeshuos*.) He also promised

that if she becomes well, he would light a candle *liluy nishmas* the *Or HaChaim* every week before Shabbos.

After the operation, his daughter recovered and obviously, he kept his promises. (This daughter later married Reb Moshe Halberstam *zt'l*.)

About a hundred years ago, there was a rabbinic convention in Vilna for *Vaad HaYeshivos* in the home of the Greineman family. Many *gedolim* were present, including the Chofetz Chaim, Reb Chaim Ozer, and the Chazon Ish *zt'l*.

After the meeting, before leaving, the Chofetz Chaim came to the kitchen, and he saw the host's daughter, S. Greineman, sitting near the window, checking rice for bugs.

"How many times do you check the rice?" the Chofetz Chaim asked her.

She replied that she checks the rice twelve times. The Chofetz Chaim expressed his surprise that she checks the rice so many times. She explained that her relative, the Chazon Ish, would be eating with them, so she wanted to be certain that the food would be at the highest standard of *kashrus* in honor of the Chazon Ish.

The Chofetz Chaim was impressed by her desire to honor *talmidei chachamim*, and he blessed her with (1) a long life, (2) always to have a clear mind, and (3) never to need eyeglasses. (The Chofetz Chaim understood that her eyes must be weak since she checked the rice near the window to catch the sunlight.)

All of the Chofetz Chaim's *brachos* materialized. She never needed eyeglasses and lived in good health until she was *niftar* at ninety-eight years old.<sup>16</sup>

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15. At that time, there was a diphtheria epidemic in Yerushalayim, and three girls from her class were already *niftara* from this disease.

Reb Hillel ran to Harav Dushinsky's *yeshiva* to inform the *rosh yeshiva* of his daughter's situation. Rav Dushinsky interrupted his *shiur*, and the entire *yeshiva* said *Tehillim* for Reb Hillel's daughter.

16. She was always healthy, but on the last day of her life, she wasn't feeling good. She went to the hospital, and before they could examine her, her *neshamah* had already gone up to heaven.

This girl was an orphan, and when she came of age, the Chazon Ish was her *shadchan*, and she married the *gaon*, Reb Mordechai Shraga Feivel Eidelman *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish moved to Eretz Yisrael, and so did the Eidelman couple, who settled in Petach Tikvah.

Sixteen years had passed since her wedding, and they were still childless. She came to the Chazon Ish, together with the Chazon Ish's Rebbetzin, and expressed her distress that she still didn't have children.

The Chazon Ish gave her a *brachah*.

She said, "I don't want a *brachah*; I want a promise that I will have children."

The Chazon Ish lowered his head into his hands, and when he raised his head, he said, "I can't promise you that."

She said, "I was an orphan, and you were my *shadchan*. Now you must take responsibility for the *shidduch*."

The Chazon Ish put his head down once more, and when he raised it, he said, "For this, you need the strength of a *gadol*. Go to the *kever* of the Or HaChaim HaKadosh, and there you will have your *yeshuah*."

It was in 5704, and she told the Chazon Ish that it wasn't safe to go to Har HaZeisim. The Chazon Ish replied, "I have no other solution."

On the fifteenth of Tamuz, the Or HaChaim's *yahrtzeit*, she went to the Or

HaChaim's *kever* at two in the morning together with her relative, the Rebbetzin of Reb Beinish Finkel *zt'l*. They poured out their hearts and prayed for a child. Precisely nine months later, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, she had a son.<sup>17</sup>

In 5773, a great rosh yeshivah lost his eyesight, and doctors told him it was impossible for him ever to see again. He asked his students to bring him to the *kever* of the Or HaChaim. At the *kever*, he vowed to learn *Or HaChaim*, as this is a renowned *segulah* for *yeshuos*. Some days later, he went to the hospital again, and this time, the doctors discovered that the part of his brain connected to his eyesight began to work again, which meant it was possible to restore his eyesight, and they succeeded in doing so.<sup>18</sup>

Studying *Or HaChaim* is also *mesugal* for *teshuvah*. Whenever Reb Yaakov Yosef of Skver *zt'l* heard about a *bachur* who needed *chizuk* and was beginning to fall off the *derech*, he would advise that people learn with him Or HaChaim. He added that the section of Or HaChaim doesn't necessarily need to discuss mussar or chassidus. Any piece of Or HaChaim can bring people to *teshuvah* and improvement.

The *gaon*, Reb Meir Arik *zt'l*, would study the entire commentary of the Or HaChaim, each week. He said that the first time he finished the entire *sefer*, he felt he had become a new person.

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17. The hospital staff was shocked by the miracle. In those days, if a woman didn't have children for sixteen years, it was nearly impossible for her ever to bear children. They didn't have treatments available today. Because of their excitement, a nurse accidentally dropped the child, and the child's life was in danger for several months. In the end, the child recovered and lived a long life.

18. One year, a day after the Or HaChaim's *yahrtzeit*, someone I know called me to tell me about the salvation he had after accepting on himself to study the Or HaChaim's commentary. For *parnassah*, he sells *sefarim* and had a stock of 250 sets of *Or HaChaim*, plus other *sefarim*, and was having a hard time selling them. This was causing him a financial loss. On the *yahrtzeit*, he traveled with some friends to the Or HaChaim's *kever*, and they were talking about how studying *Or HaChaim* is *mesugal* for *yeshuos*. He immediately made a *kabbalah* to study *Or HaChaim*, and the salvation came very soon afterwards. The next morning, someone called him and said that he needed a large quantity of *sefarim*. His first order was 250 sets of *Or HaChaim*!