

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Tazria - Metzora



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Tazria - Metzora

Beginnings

Negel vasser (washing one's hands upon awakening in the morning) is mesugal for yiras Shamayim. Likewise, everything related to negel vasser, preparing the water near the bed before going to sleep, and pouring out the water after use is mesugal for yiras Shamayim.

A bachur who needed to be more careful with preparing negel vasser was scheduled to have surgery at Ichilov Hospital (in Eretz Yisrael). As a zechus for the success of the surgery, he made a kabbalah tova (resolution) to be more cautious with negel vasser.

But negel vasser wasn't part of the hospital room's décor, and on the night before the operation, he accepted his fate that this night he wouldn't have negel vasser near his bed.

But when his father returned from davening Maariv in the beis medresh in Ichilov, he had a negel vasser set for his son with him.

The son couldn't believe his eyes. "Where did you get this?"

His father replied, "After maariv, in the hospital's beis medresh, someone stood up and announced that he bought a large quantity of negel vasser sets to donate to the hospital. But the hospital didn't want to accept them. So, he said to us, 'I have many sets of negel vasser now, and I don't have what to do with them. Whoever wants a set can take one.' So, I took a set for you."

The lesson is that when you make a kabbalah tova, Hashem helps you keep it!

For many bachurim and kollel yungerleit, a new zman (semester) is beginning. To maximize their success in their learning, it is highly recommended for bachurim and yungerleit to make a kabbalah not to speak *devarim beteilim* (idle talk) for the first half-

hour of the seder. And if a half-hour is too hard, they can make a kabbalah for less time. Even five minutes at the beginning of the seder devoted to studying Torah can make a big difference. Generally, after they begin the seder with studying Torah, they will continue learning even after the half-hour passes.

All beginnings are important, as it sets the mode for everything that follows. Therefore, the beginning of the zman is important, and the beginning of each seder is important. Being diligent at these moments can help us succeed in Torah immensely.

When yizkor is recited, someone announces, "*Kinder aroys*," that the children should leave. We can explain (*b'derech tzachus*) that this is because children generally don't say yizkor, and if one isn't going to be saying anything in the beis medresh, it might be better that he isn't there.

This is said to encourage people to make good use of their time in beis medresh. Often, when people are young, they don't recognize the immense gift of being able to be in a beis medresh. So many people hardly have time to study Torah, and you can spend many hours there. But be wise and use the time well.

When preparing a cup of tea, people cook up water until it boils and then make the tea. But they don't drink the tea at that boiling temperature. Instead, they first wait for the tea to cool off a little. So, they wait twice. First, they wait for the water to boil and then for the water to cool off. Why don't they simply cook the water to the temperature they want to drink it?

The answer is that coffee only tastes good when prepared with boiling water. It doesn't taste good when it is made with quasi-boiling water.

Sefiras HaOmer

One Friday night, chassidim sat together at a *zits* (chassidic gathering) and discussed the importance of eating with *kedushah*. The following morning there was a *kiddush* in shul, and hot kugel was served. Some people grabbed the kugel, mumbled a *brachah*, and indulged. Reb Aharon, the Rav of Zhitomir

zt'l, had attended the Friday night *zits* and was inspired to eat with holiness. He decided to wait a few moments before he began eating to weaken the grip of the *yetzer hara*. Meanwhile, he used his fork to cut his portion of *kugel* into small pieces. That's when he found a needle in his *kugel*. Reb Aharon would say, "Since then, I make sure to attend every Friday night *zits* because the *zits* saved my life. Had I eaten quickly, I would have swallowed the needle..."

Rebbe Zev of Zhitomir zt'l once looked out his window and said, "I see a cheese blintz running down the street."

The chassidim looked out the window wondering what their Rebbe was referring to, but all they saw was a *yungerman* running down the street with his tallis and tefillin tucked under his arm. The Rebbe explained, "That man's mother-in-law made cheese blintzes this morning and told him to daven quickly, so he could eat them while they're hot. The Baal Shem Tov zt'l teaches that a person is where his thoughts are. Therefore, since this *yungerman* so was excited about the cheese blintzes, that's how he appeared to me."

Reb Hillel Kolemaia zt'l was visiting Rebbe Avraham Yaakov of Sadigura zt'l. When Reb Hillel was getting ready to leave, the Sadigura Rebbe said, "Reb Hillel, you are renowned for your *mussar* lessons. Please give me some *mussar*."

Reb Hillel Kolemeia said, "Why doesn't the Rebbe give *mussar* to his chassidim?"

The Rebbe replied, "I teach my chassidim to eat properly. If they do that, their deeds will automatically be good."

It states in this week's parashah (15:31) והזרתם את בני ישראל מטמאתם, "You shall separate

Bnei Yisrael from their tumah." The Sfas Emes (Tzaria 5643 and Metzora 5646) says that the root of the word והזרתם is זר, which means crown. This teaches us that when you separate from the impurity of this world, this becomes your crown.¹

Today

One of the lessons of Sefiras Ha'Omer is to focus on today. We proclaim היום יום... לעומר. I ignore yesterday's failures, errors, and aveiros, and I don't think about how I will keep up my teshuvah tomorrow. Today I can serve Hashem, and that is my focus.

It states at the beginning of parashas Metzora (14:2) ביום טהרתו, "on the day of his purification." The Divrei Shmuel zt'l explains that the pasuk instructs us to focus on ביום, this day, and that will help us attain taharah. He writes, "Don't think about your aveiros of the past [which will make you distressed and lose hope] and don't think about what will be in the future [which will make you feel that it is impossible to maintain your teshuvah for a long time]. Think about this day alone. Today I can make a nachas ruach for Hashem with Torah and mitzvos." Focus on this day alone, and you will become tahor.

The Beauty of Struggles

It states (Shir HaShirim 7:2) מזה יפו פעמיך בנעלים, "How beautiful are your footsteps in the shoes..."

The Gemara (Succah 49:) says that בנעלים refers to עליה לרגל when the Yidden go up to the Beis HaMikdash for the mitzvah of ראייה ברגל on the three regalim.

The Vilna Gaon zt'l asks the following question. How can the pasuk be referring to

1. Furthermore, the Sfas Emes teaches that if you fall into aveiros, r'l, and then you separate yourself from them, והזרתם, the aveiros and tumah turn around and become your crown. This is based on the principle that when one does teshuvah, his aveiros become virtues. Thus, והזרתם, he receives a crown, מטמאתם, through the aveiros and tumah.

the mitzvah of עליה לרגל? Why, it is forbidden to enter the Har HaBayis with shoes!

The Vilna Gaon zt'l answers that the Torah promises (Shmos 34:24) ולא יחמד איש את ארצך בעלתך לראות את פני ה' אלקיך שלש פעמים בשנה, "No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem, your G-d, three times a year." However, as they walked to the Beis HaMikdash, there were certainly many moments when they became very scared. They thought, "I shouldn't have come! Everything I own will be stolen!" They had to repeatedly remind themselves to rely on Hashem's promise and that they had nothing to fear.

When they came to the Beis HaMikdash, they no longer had these anxious thoughts. They were overcome by the kedushah they saw and felt in the Beis HaMikdash, and they totally forgot about their anxieties.

Which part of the pilgrimage did Hashem enjoy most? Was it when they journeyed to the Beis HaMikdash with a heavy heart or when they were in a state of spiritual bliss as they stood in the Beis HaMikdash?

Most people will say Hashem enjoys more when we are in the Beis HaMikdash, wholly attached to Hashem.

But the pasuk tells us that the opposite is true. The pasuk says, מִה יָפוּ פַעַמִּים בְּנִעְלִים, your feet are so beautiful when you perform this mitzvah of aliyah l'regel, and the most beautiful part is בְּנִעְלִים when you were still wearing your shoes, walking up to the Beis HaMikdash. Those are the most precious moments to Hashem. It is your struggles with the yetzer hara that Hashem loves the most.

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l repeated this vort from the Vilna Gaon and noted that it is a great chizuk for bachurim. Bachurim struggle with their yetzer hara, and they think that Hashem doesn't have nachas ruach from them because of their struggles. But it is the opposite. These are the times that they are most precious to Hashem.

Reb Yitzchok Hutner zt'l writes in a letter, "When we tell stories of the greatness of *tzaddikim*, we have a habit to begin at the end [of their lives] and discuss the great levels the *tzaddikim* reached. We skip the many years they struggled with their yetzer hara, and we think they were born *tzaddikim*. Everyone praises the Chofetz Chaim's *shemiras halashon*, but who speaks about his struggles and the ups and downs he encountered until he reached that level? This is just one example among a thousand. Leaving out these chapters of their lives is a problem because when a *bachur* with a strong desire to grow in *avodas Hashem* is confronted with a challenge or a downfall, he becomes convinced he will never reach the levels of the *tzaddikim* he wishes to emulate. He thinks that if he faces challenges, he has no hope. But that is ridiculous. Know, my friend, you will fall time and again, and there will be battles that you will lose. But in the end, you will emerge victorious and wear the crown of success on your head. The wisest of all men said, שְׁבַע יָפֹל צַדִּיק וְקָם, 'A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises.' The wise understand that the *tzaddik* rises *because* he fell seven times [and kept lifting himself again]. I beg you, don't think of *tzaddikim* as people who are at peace with their *yetzer tov*. Rather, when the *yetzer hara* is burning inside you, and you're struggling to overcome the *yetzer hara*, those are the moments when you are most similar to the *gedolim*, even more than when you are at peace with the yetzer hara."

We daven that we shouldn't have *nisyonos*, but when they come, we must know that these are the best times. There are various types of *nisyonos*, such as *ben adam l'chaveiro*, *ben adam l'makom*, and *yiras Shamayim*. Hashem loves those times more than when we are at peace with the yetzer hara because these are the times we struggle to serve Hashem.

Yesurim are a Gift

It states (14:34) ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית ארץ אחזתכם, "I will give tzaraas in the house..." ונתתי sounds like it is a gift. How is tzaraas a gift?

Rashi writes, "It is a good tiding for them that they will get tzaraas. During the forty years the Yidden were in the desert, the Emora'im hid gold in the walls of their homes, and due to tzaraas, these [treasures] will be found."

When tzaraas was detected in the walls of their homes, they were required to break open the walls, thereby finding the gold that the Amora'im hid there. Therefore, tzaraas is a gift.²

This doesn't apply only to tzaraas. Whenever a person has a problem, he should know ונתתי, that it is a gift from Hashem.

The Gemara (Nidah 31.) gives the following example:

Two people left their homes and headed to the port to catch a ship that was sailing overseas. They looked forward to the wealth they would earn on this important business trip. However, one of the two men stepped on a thorn; he couldn't continue walking and missed the ship. He cursed and shouted, upset that he had lost out on this business opportunity.

Sometime afterward, he heard that the ship had sunk. Now he praised Hashem. He discovered ונתתי that the problem he had (the

thorn) was a gift from Hashem to save his life.

The Gemara says that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Yeshayah 12:1) אוֹדֶה ה' כִּי אֲנִי אֶתְּנֶה לָּךְ, "I will thank You, for You were wroth with me." We praise Hashem for His wrath and anger because, in retrospect, we discover how good it was. As the pasuk continues יְשׁוּב אַפְּךָ וְתִנְחַמְנִי, "Your wrath turns away, and You comfort me." We find out that it was for our good.

The Gemara adds that this is also the translation of the pasuk (Tehillim 72:18) עוֹשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת לְבַדּוֹ "[Hashem] performs wonders alone." Often, no one knows about the miracles that Hashem performs but Hashem, Himself. The Gemara says, "Even a baal hanes (a person who a miracle happened to him) isn't aware of the miracles."

There's a Midrash that discusses tzaraas and connects this topic to the pasuk אֵךְ טוֹב לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, that Hashem does solely good for Yisrael. The Divrei Yisrael explains that this is because even when it doesn't appear to be good, it truly is. We can be sure that, in completely hidden ways, everything is for our good.

The Ben Ish Chai (on this Gemara) says there are revealed and concealed miracles, and both types of miracles are alluded to in the word נִס. The word נִס refers to the revealed miracles. These are the miracles that we see and know about. The concealed miracles are alluded to in the miluy³ of נִס because the miluy of נִס is also נִס.⁴

2. Reb Shmuel Vosner zt'l asks: If one earns wealth from the tzaraas, why is it called nega, a plague? Reb Shmuel Vosner zt'l replies that when there is tzaraas in the walls of the home, one must break the walls. To break the walls of a Jewish home is always a plague, even if there is immense financial gain.

He intended to warn us about the internet. Some people bring the internet into their homes to earn money, but by doing so, they risk breaching the holy walls of a Jewish home. We tell them, "Even if you gained money if a Jewish home was broken in the process, it is a plague – not a worthwhile investment."

3. The miluy means the filling. They are the extra "filling" letters that are pronounced when one says נִין or סִמָּ.

4. The Ben Ish Chai explains that the miluy of נִ is another (נִי) נִ, and the miluy of סִ is סִי, which is

Hashem always performs miracles for us. Sometimes they are concealed, but everything that happens to us is Hashem's kindness.

Speak Positively

When a person has tzaraas, he is supposed to say to the kohen (14:35) כִּנֵּנִי נִרְאָה לִי בְּבֵיתִי, "Something like a *nega* (tzaraas) has appeared to me in the house." Notice the כ at the beginning of כִּנֵּנִי. This means that he isn't telling the kohen that he saw a definite *nega*, but instead that he saw something that appears like a *nega*.

Rashi explains, "Even a Talmid chacham, who knows that it is a *nega*, shall not make his statement using a decisive expression, saying, 'A *nega* has appeared to me.' He should say, 'Something like a *nega* has appeared to me.'"

The Tosfos Yom Tov (Negaim 12:5) writes several explanations why one shouldn't say definitively that it is a *nega* of tzaraas. Here are a few of the reasons:

The Mizrachi teaches: He doesn't say that it is tzaraas to honor the kohen, to let the kohen decide whether it is tzaraas or not.

The Maharal teaches: Chazal say that until the kohen calls it a *nega*, the tzaraas isn't *tamei*. It only has the tumah of tzaraas once deemed a tzaraas by a kohen. So, it would be untrue to say it is a *nega* because it isn't yet.

Another answer is that the person shouldn't call it a *nega* because this will convince the kohen to see it that way.

The Tosfos Yom Tov then writes his own explanation. It is based on the principle אַל תִּפְתָּח פִּי לַשָּׂטָן (that one shouldn't open his mouth to the Satan). It is wiser if he doesn't proclaim that it is a *nega* because this can cause what he says to occur. A *nega* can change colors and turn to a lighter shade of white and then

become *tahor*. By the time the kohen sees the tzaraas, it might be *tahor*. But by proclaiming that it is tzaraas and that he is undoubtedly *tamei*, his words might cause the tzaraas to remain.

This is as the Gemara (Moed Kattan 18.) says, בְּרִית כְּרוּתָה שְׁפִתַּיִם, there lies a power in words, that whatever one says can occur.

And this isn't only when one says something negative. The power of speech is very significant, and saying positive things can also cause good things to happen. People tend to complain and say that things aren't going well. They would be wiser to get into the practice of saying that everything is good. Their words can cause change for the better.

Reb Shlomo Kluger zt'l says that this is the reason we say on Rosh Hashanah night the יהי רצון by the *simanim*. We verbalize that it will be a sweet year, and our words create that reality.

The Gemara (Brachos 60:) states, לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה, אָדָם רָגִיל לֵאמֹר כָּל דְּעֵבִיד רַחֲמָנָא לְטָב עָבִיד, "One should always say, 'Everything Hashem does is for the good.'"

Once, Reb Akiva came to a city and asked for a place to stay overnight, and no one took him in. He proclaimed, "Everything Hashem does is for the good." He didn't complain. He believed and said that it was all for his benefit.

He slept outdoors that night, in the fields outside the city. He had a rooster, donkey, and candle with him. A wind blew out the candle, a cat ate the rooster, and a lion ate the donkey. Reb Akiva said, "Everything Hashem does is for the good."

Thieves came to the city that night, and everyone was taken captive. Reb Akiva was saved because he wasn't in the city and didn't have a donkey, rooster, or candle that

gematriya sixty, ס. So the miluy of נ is also נ, alluding to concealed miracles that cannot easily be noticed. But they are found when you search for them.

would give away where he was staying. Reb Akiva told his students, "Didn't I tell you, everything Hashem does is for the good."

What was Reb Akiva telling his students?

The Ben Ish Chai (Ben Yohoyada) explains that he was showing them that even if there is a *gezeirah* for something terrible to occur (and perhaps it was decreed that he, too should be in captivity), by saying that it is good, his positive words turn it over and it becomes good.⁵

The Benefits of Yesurim

We asked why the person who has tzaraas says כָּנַע, that it appears like a *nega*. Why doesn't he say decisively that he has a *nega* of tzaraas?

We can answer that it is because, truthfully, it isn't a *nega* (נֶגַע). On the contrary, it is *oneg* (עֵנֶג), a pleasure, because everything that occurs (even when it seems negative) is for the good.⁶

Even if a person doesn't fully believe in his heart that the difficult aspects of life are for his benefit, he should nevertheless pretend, speak and act as though he believes that it is all for the good. The Gemara (Tamid 28) states, "What is the good path a person should choose? יִחְזִיק בְּאִמוּנָה יְתִירָה, he should have a lot of *emunah*, as it states (Tehillim 101:6) עֵינֵי בְּנֵאֲמָנִי אֶרֶץ לְשֶׁבֶת עִמָּדִי, 'My eyes are to the believers of the land to dwell with Me.'"

Rashi says that this means he should be honest in business. (Rashi translates אִמוּנָה and בְּנֵאֲמָנִי as trustworthy and upright). The Chida

says that the Gemara means he should be cautious never to tell a lie. Doing so (being honest in business or being careful not to lie) will grant him an extra dose of *hashgachah pratis*, as it states עֵינֵי בְּנֵאֲמָנִי אֶרֶץ לְשֶׁבֶת עִמָּדִי, "My eyes are to the trustworthy of the land to dwell with Me."

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin zt'l has another explanation. He explains that אִמוּנָה יְתִירָה means that one should act and speak on a level of *emunah* that is beyond his level. Even if he doesn't believe, in his heart, that it is all for the good, he can act and speak as though he believes it. Doing so, will help him attain genuine *emunah*. Doing so will grant him *hashgachah pratis*, as it states, עֵינֵי בְּנֵאֲמָנִי אֶרֶץ לְשֶׁבֶת עִמָּדִי, 'My eyes are to the believers of the land to dwell with Me.'"

Chazal say (according to one opinion) that all forbidden foods become *batel* in a ratio of 1/60, but מִין בְּמִינוֹ, when it is the same type of food (like a drop of non-kosher meat mixed with kosher meat, or a drop of non-kosher milk mixed with kosher milk) even in a ratio of 1/1000, it won't become *batel*.

Rebbe Shmelka of Nickelsberg zt'l said that the Gemara hints to *taavos*. They generally can become *batel* at age 60. When a person turns 60, many of the desires he struggled with in his younger years become *batel* and less prominent. מִין בְּמִינוֹ alludes to *apikorsus* (disbelief in Hashem, which is called מִינוּת). Even if he lived to be one thousand years old, it doesn't become *batel* with time, on its own. This tells us that we should try to clean our hearts from *minus* and *apikorsus*, but it won't go away on its own.

5. It states (Koheles 9:17) דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים בְּנִחָת נִשְׁמָעִים, "The gentle words of the wise are heard." נִחָת is *roshei teivos* (candle, donkey, rooster). Wise people speak like Reb Akiva, and say that everything is for the good, and then it becomes so.

6. When one believes that everything is for the good, he will never be sad. The Ben Ish Chai teaches: "A person doesn't harm his finger, only if it was so decreed. But it wasn't decreed that he should be sad. That he takes on his own. (A hint is עֲצִבְהֶם מַעֲשֵׂה בְּנֵי אָדָם, *atzvus* is man's doing.) It wasn't decreed from heaven that he should be sad because *atzvus* is disgusting to Hashem, so how can it be that Hashem decreed it on him? One shouldn't even be sad when it comes to *aveiros*... Life's challenges are a test to see if he will accept them joyfully."

Reb Yosef Shaul Nottenson zt'l (author of Shut Shoel u'Meishiv) teaches that there are illnesses that are within the body, and there are external illnesses. (A skin infection is an example of an external illness, and heart failure is an example of an internal illness). He writes that the same goes for diseases of the soul. Some conditions are *chitzoni*, external, such as evil temptations and there are internal illnesses. For example, he says bad middos and apikorsus are internal diseases.

He writes that this is merely a *melitzah*, a thought, but not precisely so, but he writes it anyway because it is a novel idea.

We see that apikorsus can be a great struggle, and indeed, one way to overcome the battle is to believe that everything, even the hardships, is for one's benefit. But one counsel is to pretend that he believes it is good, which will help him reach that level.

The Benefits of Shame

Reb Eliyahu Dessler zt'l writes the following mashal:

A king wanted to do a favor for one of his servants, so he sent him to a room with many precious gold items, and the king told him that he could fill his bags and take anything he wanted.

The servant didn't believe that the king truly meant his favor, and he didn't believe that the items he saw in this room had any true value. He told himself, "The king wants to clean up this room, and with this trick, he thinks I will work hard and take everything out. But I won't be fooled." He took a few small items and smugly said to himself, "I will show the king and his men that the next time they want to clean up a room, they should find someone else to do it. I am not a fool."

But when he brought the few items home, he discovered that these trinkets were made from real gold and silver. It wasn't a trick after all, he found. The king truly wanted to grant him a great treasure. The servant

ripped his clothing from regret. He could have taken so much more, and he didn't.

The nimshal is related to Torah and mitzvos. We often don't fully believe there will be a great reward, so we don't invest in grabbing as many mitzvos as possible. However, there will come a day when we recognize that each mitzvah is gold, and we will regret that we didn't take more.

This story is also a mashal that can help us understand the benefits of yesurim and the benefits of shame and humiliation. We think we are only losing, but there will come a time when we discover that each humiliation was like gold and wish we had more.

Baalei mussar compare it to a person whom the king told that he must stand in a public area and take off everyone's shoes, and then put them on new shoes. He feels humiliated. He can't believe that this was forced onto him. He had never felt so disgraced in his entire life.

But if this person owns a shoe store, he does the same work and is happy with it. He is glad to take off their shoes and put on a better pair.

The difference is that when one knows he will gain from the task, he doesn't feel the humiliation. The same applies to all yesurim and all types of shame. If we knew what we gain from it, it wouldn't bother us at all.

The Belzer Rav zt'l said that when one collects money for tzedakah, he needs two pockets. One pocket is for the money he receives, and the other pocket is for the humiliation he endures. Which pocket receives the better portion? The humiliation is far better because embarrassment for a mitzvah removes all aveiros.

The Midrash states, "Don't be afraid of negaim (tzaraas) because they are for the goyim. However, you will eat and drink and be happy."

Rav Vosner explains that the goyim need yesurim and negaim to atone for their aveiros, but you accept humiliation with emunah that it is for the good. Therefore, you don't need yesurim to remove your

aveiros. You can eat, drink, and be happy. You will be healthy and have no pain or problems because whatever aveiros needed to be removed were removed with the humiliation you endured."⁷

7. A family in Beitar was childless for many years. The husband is involved in community work, and he was once at a community meeting in Tzfas (the city where he grew up). At the meeting, someone insulted him cruelly. He was ready to answer back. He has a big mouth and could make whoever humiliated him wish he had never started up with him.

But before he could say anything, someone rushed over and said, "Please don't respond to his harsh words. I have an older brother who needs a shidduch. Please give him the merit of your silence."

He remained silent. Two weeks later, the bachur was engaged.

Now comes the second half of the story, which we repeat in the words of the baal hamaaseh:

"I told my wife what happened, how in the merit of my silence, an older bachur became a chasan.

"At first, she was upset that I didn't keep the merit of my silence for ourselves, to merit having children. But she had learned a new strategy. She would wait for a time when she would be embarrassed, remain quiet, and use that merit to have children.

"About a year ago, I was vacationing with my wife in Tzefas. We were walking down the street, minding our own business, when some rowdy people walked up and began insulting us. My wife began to cry. I thought she was crying from humiliation. I was ready to answer back, but my wife told me one word, 'silence,' and I understood what she meant. She was crying and praying to Hashem that in the merit of her humiliation, we would bear a child. So, we walked on – the people behind us continued their chants, but we didn't respond.

"Exactly nine months later, our first daughter was born."

There's a beis medresh in Lakewood that was built through the fundraising efforts of one yungerman, who is one of the gabai'im of that congregation. He felt that since he raised the money, he had the right to make the rules of the beis medresh. So he insisted that there be no speaking during the tefillah.

Each week before kriyas haTorah he stood on the bimah and announced, "In this beis medresh, we don't speak from the beginning of the tefillah until the end."

Some people in the beis medresh wanted to schmooze and didn't appreciate his weekly announcements.

Each week, after his weekly announcement, they would shout sarcastically, "Yashar koach! Yashar koach!" They made a joke out of it.

Their jeers bothered the gabbai. However, it didn't stop him from making his weekly announcement because it was important that there shouldn't be any speaking during the tefillah.

One week, the mockers' insults at him were more insulting than usual. They shouted, "Who are you to tell us what to do? Just because you have a loud voice doesn't make you in charge. I also have a loud voice..."

He descended from the bimah in shame. He didn't answer back. After the tefillah he went over to his friend, Reb Aharon Deutsch, who was childless after seventeen years of marriage, and told him, "In the merit of the shame I just endured, and in the merit of my silence, may Hashem help that you should have children."

The following Shabbos, the gabbai went to the bimah again and made his weekly announcement, but his heart was no longer in it. He was still hurting from the humiliation. A short while later, he decided to leave that beis medresh.

Lashon Hara

We return to the pasuk we quoted above (14:35) כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי בְּבֵית, "Something like a nega (tzaraas) has appeared to me in the house." The כִּ at the beginning of כִּנְגַע means that he isn't telling the kohen that he saw a nega, but rather that he saw something that appears like a nega.

Rashi explains, "Even a Talmid chacham, who knows that it is definitely a nega, shall not make his statement using a decisive expression, saying, 'A nega has appeared to me.' He should say, 'Something like a nega has appeared to me.'"

We asked above why he can't say, "I saw tzaraas," and we answered it in several ways. Reb Chaim Vital zt'l answers that the tzaraas seen with the physical eyes is only a reflection of the primary plague deep within his neshamah. Therefore, one says, כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי בְּבֵית, "I saw something that appears like tzaraas..." but he didn't see the primary tzaraas. The primary tzaraas is on the soul.

Therefore, it is a mistake to think that tzaraas don't exist in our times. Although it doesn't exist as a white mark on one's skin, it does exist in the realm of the soul.

Furthermore, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l writes (quoting early sefarim) that in our times, tzaraas doesn't appear as a white mark on the skin or as a red blotch on one's clothing. Today, the mark of tzaraas is poverty. So, if a person wants to save himself from poverty, that should be enough incentive to be cautious about speaking lashon hara because tzaraas comes from speaking lashon hara.

The Gemara compares lashon hara to the three cardinal sins: idolatry, adultery, and murder.

The Or Hachaim HaKadosh (14:9) writes, "Nothing distances a person from his Creator like lashon hara." Yet, people aren't careful with it. Every mitzvah has a mazal. Lashon hara has a poor mazal.

The Gemara (Shabbos 155:) teaches, לֵית דַּעֲנִיָּא, מַכְלָבָא וְלֵית דַּעֲתִיר מַכְלָבָא, "There isn't anything poorer than a dog, and nothing wealthier than a pig." The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains that the Gemara is hinting to the wealthiest and poorest mitzvah. The richest and best-kept mitzvah is the prohibition of eating חֲזִיר. (Even non-religious Yidden often refrain from eating this food.)

Nevertheless, he kept up with his friends from this beis medresh, especially with Reb Aharon Deutsch.

One day, he said to Reb Aharon Deutsch, "The 3rd of Iyar, the yahrtzeit of Rebbe Shayele Kerestirer zt'l is approaching. Come with me to Kerestir, and you can daven at the tzaddik's kever for children. So many experienced yeshuos there."

By then, it was already eighteen years after his chasunah. He had lost hope of ever having children. The gabbai urged him to reconsider.

Reb Aharon replied, "If you make peace with the people who embarrassed you in our beis medresh, I will go with you to Kerestir."

That wasn't an easy request, but it was important for him that his friend goes to Kerestir. So he called up the people who humiliated him and made up with them. They asked him for forgiveness and said they hoped he would return to the beis medresh. They promised they would never embarrass him again.

Reb Aharon and the gabbai traveled to Kerestir on the yahrtzeit. Less than a year later, Reb Aharon had a daughter.

Reb Aharon Deutsch commented, "Chazal say there are three partners in the creation of man: the father, the mother, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But for this child, there were five partners because she was born in the merit of the gabbai's humility, and in the merit of Rebbe Shayele Kerestirer."

The dog is the poorest and least kept mitzvah, which represents the prohibition of speaking *lashon hara*. The dog represents *lashon hara*, as the Gemara says, "Whoever speaks *lashon hara*, it would be proper to throw him to the dogs."

Despite its severity, people aren't as cautious as they should be with this prohibition.

The Beis HaLevi *zt'l* would often open his *tabak pushkah* (snuffbox) and immediately close it. One of his students was curious about this, so when he had the opportunity, he opened the snuffbox, and he found the letters שפ"ו שט"ו written inside. He asked the Beis HaLevi about this. The Beis HaLevi replied that they are *roshei teivos* for שומר פיו, "Someone who guards his tongue is protecting himself from troubles." The Beis HaLevi would open his snuffbox, read the message, and remember to be careful with his speech. You save yourself from much trouble when you are cautious with your speech.

Rebbe Uri of Streisk *zy'a* said, "When one desires to say something forbidden and he holds back, it's as though he fasted eighty-four days. Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zy'a* added, "And I say, *nach un nach, un nach*," which means that it's like fasting for eighty-four days, and much, much more than that.

Praise Hashem

People take all the good they enjoy in life for granted. They think it couldn't be otherwise, so they don't recognize that they must praise Hashem for everything they enjoy.

There was a *gadol* in Yerushalayim who wanted to help parents recognize all they should be thankful for, so when someone came to him and told him, "I have a mazal tov! My wife just had a child," he would ask the parent, "How many fingers does the baby have? Ten? Baruch Hashem! Mazal tov! Mazal tov! You should have much nachas...!"

He would mention the ten fingers to remind the parent that they should also praise Hashem for that. Nothing should be taken for granted.

Once, a baby was born, and the parents watched in horror as the doctor painstakingly looked at each newborn child's fingers.

"Doctor, is something wrong?" they asked.

"Everything is fine," the doctor replied. "As a doctor, I must check the child's health and report it in writing. My job is to check that the child has all ten fingers, which your baby indeed has."

I heard about an eighty-seven-year-old man hospitalized and placed on a respirator. Two weeks later, when he recovered, the hospital personnel told him, "It was an emergency, so we put you on a respirator. But now you will need to pay for it. It will be ten thousand dollars..."

The old man began to cry.

"OK. We see that ten thousand dollars is too much for you to pay. We will work to get you a deduction."

He cried some more.

"You know what? We will give you a 50% discount because we see how hard it is for you to pay."

He replied, "I wasn't crying over the cost. When I heard that breathing for two weeks costs ten thousand dollars, I realized how thankful I must be to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, who always enables me to breathe. And Hashem gives me my breath for free and without any pain. How thankful I should be to Hashem!"

This story reminds us of the following Gemara (Bava Metzia 86.):

On a very hot day, Reb Shimon ben Chalafta sat on top of a mountain and asked his daughter to wave a fan for him. He told her that he would pay her with a package of besamim. And then the wind blew, and Reb

Shimon ben Chalafta was relieved. Reb Shimon bar Chalafta exclaimed, "How many packages of besamim do I owe to the Creator of these winds." He was willing to pay a package of besamim to his daughter for making wind, and now Hashem was giving it to him, and Hashem gives it all the time.

The Or HaChaim (Devarim, 8:18) writes, "The yetzer hara's first plot is to cause a person to forget Hashem's kindness, and that is how he destroys people."

Reb Shlomo Brevda zt'l was walking down the stairway from his second-floor apartment and slipped. He almost fell all the way down to the street below, but with Hashem's help, he managed to grab onto the banister at the last moment.

He was certain that, after Hashem saved him, he wouldn't be the same person. But soon, he forgot about the entire event and was acting and serving Hashem as he had before. He went to the Chazon Ish zt'l to ask why this occurred.

The Chazon Ish replied, "Everyone experiences miracles. That's why we say in Modim *על ניסך שבכל יום עמנו* '[We praise You] for the miracles You perform for us every day.' But the yetzer hara causes people to forget. Man's avodah is to remember the *chasadim* Hakadosh Baruch Hu does with him all the time."⁸

Someone wrote a letter to Reb Matisyahu Luria zt'l bemoaning all the hardships he was going through. Reb Matisyahu replied, "If a person would put on one side of a scale everything he should be thankful for, and on the other side he places the issues he is frustrated and upset about, the good will far outweigh the bad. He will laugh at himself for making an issue over his troubles since he has so much good in his life."

Reb Matisyahu Luria said that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Tehillim 150:2) הללו כרוב גדלו, the word כרוב is like ביטול ברוב (annulled in the majority), and גדלו refers to Hashem's kindness. The pasuk is saying: Recognize all the good you have in life, and then the bad becomes batel b'rov. With this thought in mind, הללו, you will be able to praise Hashem.

Praising Hashem Results in Salvations

The Tur (Orach Chaim 579) lists the Tehillim that one is recommended to recite on a fast day that was established for an *eis tzarah* (when the nation or the community is in danger, r'l). One of the chapters is (Tehillim 136:1) הודו לה' כי הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו "Give thanks to Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever." This chapter is called הלל הגדול. It states twenty-six times כי לעולם חסדו, "His kindness endures forever." But why should we recite this during an *eis tzarah*?

I heard that it is because we are praising Hashem for the miracles that *will* occur. We are thanking Hashem now for the upcoming miracles, and that brings on the miracles.

The Yam Suf split after Moshe praised Hashem for the miracles that would occur. This is taught in the Mechilta (Bishalach 3):

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe, 'Moshe! My children are in a tzarah. The sea is before them, and an enemy pursues them from behind, and you are standing here and davening so long?'

"Moshe asked, 'What should I do?'

"Hashem replied, 'Raise your staff and stretch it out over the sea and praise and sing songs of gratitude to the One Who wages wars.'

8. The Kav HaYashar (ch.18) writes, "There isn't a person who doesn't experience miracles. Especially in these generations when there are so many tzaros. Evil dictates, frightening wars, hunger, captives, and many illnesses exist. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu showered His kindness on you and saved you from all of the above, you must always remember His kindness. You cannot be a kafuy tovah."

We understand from this Mechilta that praising Hashem saved the Jewish nation when tefillos couldn't. The sea split before Bnei Yisrael because Moshe praised Hashem for the miracles that *will be*.

The Noam Elimelech (Likutei Shoshanah, ד"ה פדות שלח לעמו) writes:

"Hashem always prepares the cure before He smites (מקדים רפואה למכה). What is the cure which Hashem prepares? It is to praise Hashem's great name... This is as we say בורא נורה תהילות, Hashem prepares the cure, with our praises." Because when we praise Hashem for the upcoming salvations, we will merit experiencing them.

The Meor Einayim (Tzav) writes, "The Yidden in Mitzrayim made the entire Seder exactly as we make our Sedarim today. They told the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* because they trusted that Hashem would certainly take them out of Mitzrayim. This drew down Hashem's kindness, and they were redeemed..." They praised Hashem even before the miracles occurred, they praised Hashem for *yetzias Mitzrayim* before it happened, and that drew down the miracles.

The Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuvah 4:12) says that this is alluded to in the pasuk (Tehillim 52:11) אודה לעולם כי עשית "I will praise You forever" and ואקוה שמך כי טוב נגד חסידך "I trust that You will do chesed for me," in the merit of my praises.

The Rabbeinu Yonah writes that it is also alluded in the following words (Tehillim 116:3-4) צרה ויגון אמצא ובשם ה' אקרא "Distress and grief I will find, and I will praise Hashem's name." (116:13) כוס ישועות אשא "I will raise the cup of salvation..." He praised Hashem during hard times, and this brought about the salvation.

The Kaf HaChaim (281:8) writes in the name of the Chesed l'Avraham, who received the kabbalah from Reb Yehudah HaChosid that, "When one has a tzarah, he should make a kabbalah that when he has his salvation he will say Nishmas with joy and with a singing voice before ten people and

he will merit the salvation. Many tried this and succeeded."

I heard from a Yid living in Antwerp who waited many years to have children that his wife heard about this segulah. So she made a kabbalah that she would make a seudas hoda'ah with nishmas in front of ten people when she had her salvation, and she had her salvation.

The Chesed l'Avraham (Reb Avraham Azulay, grandfather of the Chida) was traveling from Eretz Yisrael to chutz l'aretz to collect money for the poor of Eretz Yisrael. When they were in the middle of the sea, stormy weather set in, and the ship was on the verge of sinking. Reb Avraham made a kabbalah that if the sea calms down, he will praise Hashem every day and tell people about the miracle that happened to him. Immediately, the sea settled down.

He changed his signature to a picture of a ship to praise Hashem for the miracle and to publicize the miracle that happened to him.

A girl suffered from a lot of mucus and couldn't breathe well. She went to many experts, but they all said they never saw anything like it before and didn't know what was causing the problem. The only advice they received was that the girl should go to Arizona, where the air is arid. She was there for three weeks, but it didn't help much. The girl with her family returned to their home in New York, frustrated that they didn't yet find a solution.

At this time, the girl made a kabbalah that every night, before going to sleep, she would write in a diary ten things she was happy about; ten good things that happened to her that day, and praise Hashem for these favors.

On the forty-first day of this good custom, she had a special notation to write in her diary. She wrote, "I am breathing well, without pain. It is like I was never ill." She had her salvation from praising Hashem. (I heard this story from the girl's father.)

I heard from a talmid chacham that he lost his hearing r'l, and the doctors didn't have a cure for him. He began thinking about all the kindnesses Hashem performs for him each day. Because although he couldn't hear, all his limbs functioned well,

and he praised Hashem for that. He also praised Hashem for giving him a healthy family and so on.

Then he went to another doctor who prescribed him a new medication. In a short time, his hearing returned, almost like before.