

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Vayakheil

Shekalim



Torah WELLSPRINGS

CONTACT INFORMATION

Mail@TorahWellsprings.com
718.484.8136

Weekly bulk orders in USA:
Wholesale@BeerEmanah.com

Weekly in your email free!

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Lashon Kodesh

באר הפרשה

subscribe+subscribe@beerhaparsha.com

English

Torah Wellsprings

Torah+subscribe@torahwellsprings.com

Yiddish

דער פרשה קוואל

yiddish+subscribe@derparshakval.com

Spanish

Manantiales de la Torá

info+subscribe@manantialesdelatora.com

French

Au Puits de La Paracha

info+subscribe@aupuitsdelaparacha.com

Italian

Le Sorgenti della Torah

info+subscribe@lesorgentidellatorah.com

Russian

Колодец Торы

info+subscribe@kolodetztory.com



USA OFFICE Mechon Beer Emunah
1630 50th St, Brooklyn NY 11204
718.484.8136

ERETZ YISROEL OFFICE

מכון באר האמונה
רח' דובב מישרים 4/2
עיה"ק ירושלים תובב"א
025 688 040

יו"ל ע"י מכון באר אמונה

COPYRIGHT 2024 כל הזכויות שמורות

Duplication of this gilyon in any format, for any sales
or marketing purpose, without written permission by
Machon Be'er Emunah, is against the law and Halacha.

Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Vayakheil - Shekalim

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Yeshuos on Shabbos Shekalim | 4 |
| Time for Change..... | 4 |
| Take Advantage of the Time..... | 5 |
| Kedushah | 7 |
| Change in a Moment | 10 |
| A Fiery Coin | 11 |
| Desire..... | 11 |
| <i>Hakaras HaTov</i> | 14 |

Torah Wellsprings - Vayakheil - Shekalim

Yeshuos on Shabbos Shekalim

Rebbe Yisrael of Chortkov *zt'l* teaches, "Every Shabbos of the four *parshiyos* brings bounty to the world. On parashas Shekalim, the bounty for parnassah and wealth come to the world."

The Ateres Yeshuah (*Moadim, Mishpatim, Shekalim*) writes, שבת שקלים מסוגל להמשכת פרנסה, "Shabbos Shekalim is *mesugal* for attaining parnassah."

The Imrei Yosef of Spinka *zt'l* taught that this Shabbos is *mesugal* for tefillos to be answered. He explains that the *shekalim* (which were donated to the Beis HaMikdash at this time of year) covered the cost of the *korban tamid* for the entire year. Chazal (Brachos 26:) say, תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום, "The tefillos correspond to the *korban tamid*." So, this Shabbos is *mesugal* for tefillos to be answered.

The brothers Reb Meir and Reb Zanzvil Kahana *z'l* from Drogmeresht came to the Imrei Yosef of Spinka for Shabbos Shekalim in the year 5643. It was their first time by this great tzaddik, and they hoped they would get their salvation there, as both were *baalei yesurim*.

Reb Meir spoke to the Imrei Yosef on *erev* Shabbos. He told him that he didn't have children and that his wife was ill. The Imrei Yosef told him to give a *pidyon* of one hundred gold coins, and he would have a *yeshuah*.

There wasn't enough time for Reb Zanzvil to speak to the Rebbe on *erev Shabbos*. At the Friday night *tish*, the Rebbe blessed Reb Zanzvil that his children should have a *refuah sheleimah*. The Rebbe added that on Shabbos Shekalim, one can request that all one's tefillos be answered. (He told them the explanation we wrote above, that this Shabbos is *mesugal* for tefillos to be answered.).

Both brothers had their salvation and became devoted chassidim of the Imrei Yosef.

Time for Change

The word שקל in the Gemara means to take. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* said that Shabbos Shekalim is an ideal time for one to take himself in his hands and improve (*Imrei Yehudah*).

Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer *zt'l* would say (*Imrei Pinchas* 4:225), "I wait for this time [when we read the four *parshiyos*], when I meet with the *Eibeshter*."

We say in the *yotzros* of Shabbos Shekalim, אור פניך עלינו אדון נשא, "The light of Your countenance upon us, Master, extend." This indicates that on this Shabbos, *keviyachol*, we meet with Hashem. The Ruzhiner Rebbe *zt'l* said, "In the [Shabbosim of the] four *parshiyos*, each Yid can become attached to the *Shechinah* because each week represents another letter of Hashem's name¹" (הוי"ה).

1. A bachur from the Ponevezh yeshiva suffered a spiritual descent and joined the Israeli army. After some time, the rosh yeshiva Reb Shmuel Rozovsky *zt'l* wrote him a letter. It read, "To my dear friend, regardless of where you are and in what state you are, I want to meet with you and speak to you."

When he received the letter, he was overwhelmed with joy. "The rosh yeshiva wants to speak to me!" He quickly got permission to leave the army camp. After a long conversation with Reb Shmuel, he permanently left the army.

This story helps us understand the unique opportunity we are presented with during the four *Parshiyos*. Hashem Himself tells us that He wants to meet with us, and that fills our hearts with joy.

The Alshich HaKadosh explains that the ancient law of Persia was that if a person sentenced to death merited to see the king, he was pardoned. When *Achashveirosh's* anger was aroused on Haman, someone quickly covered Haman's face, so Haman wouldn't see the king's face and be forgiven. The Alshich explains that this is the meaning of (*Esther* 7:8), ופני המן חפר, "Haman's face was covered." Someone covered Haman's face so he wouldn't see *Achashverosh's* face and be pardoned. As we said, during the weeks of the "four parshiyos," we merit seeing Hashem's face, *keviyachol*. And when one sees the King's face, all his sins are pardoned.

It states (30:13, 15), זה יתנו כל העובר על פקודים... לחפר על נפשותיכם, מחצית השקל... לכפר על נפשותיכם, "This they should give... a half-shekel... to atone for your souls." The Yerushalmi writes that כל העובר על פקודים means "all those who transgressed Hashem's commands" (and sinned with the *egel*) with the *machatzis hashekel*, לחפר על נפשותיכם, they will have atonement.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Tisa* 3) states that Moshe said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam! When I die, will no one mention me?"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, "I swear, just as you are now standing and teaching them *parashas Shekalim*, and you raise their heads, so will it be every year. When the nation reads this parashah before Me, it is like you are standing there, and you raise their heads." Raising the heads of the Jewish nation means so much. It means, as we say

on Rosh Hashanah, שנהיה לראש, that we become the head of the world, and not as it appears now to the gentiles, that we are just the tail. It also means that we will have financial success. And most importantly, it means that we will have spiritual success. Tzaddikim said that an animal's head and body are at the same level. Their body leads their head. In contrast, the head of a human being is above his body because he can lead his body according to the dictates of his intelligence. On this Shabbos, Moshe Rabbeinu raises our heads, and we can live in this world with our heads leading our bodies rather than the body leading the head.

The Gemara (Chagigah 16.) states, "Human beings are similar to malachim in three ways. They have intelligence like malachim, walk erect like malachim, and converse in lashon hakodesh like malachim." So, one of the attributes of a human being that makes them similar to malachim is that they walk erect, with their heads above their bodies. This occurs on this Shabbos, when Hashem raises our heads, and we become like the malachim, with our heads leading us.

Take Advantage of the Time

Shabbos Shekalim is approaching. A few days afterwards, will be rosh chodesh Adar. Not long after that will be *Shabbos Zachor*, *Purim*, and other holy days. We should take advantage of this special time. It would be a mistake to go through these days the same way as the rest of the year.²

2. Reb Mordechai is a travel agent who travels often. On one of his trips, he had enough points to travel first class if he added just one hundred shekel. Reb Mordechai struggled financially, but he was curious how it felt to travel first class, so he booked the upgrade.

Reb Mordechai felt like a millionaire on the flight. He sat among the wealthiest people on board and had a comfortable seat (he kept playing with the buttons, trying to find the most comfortable position).

He felt special already at the airport. He didn't have to wait in line with everyone else. There was a special agent for fortunate people like himself who flew first class.

A Yid, flying economy class, wanted to see who was flying in the first-class cabin. (Perhaps it was just a matter of curiosity, or perhaps the purpose of his trip was to raise money for *hachnasas kallah*, so he figured he might as well begin his mission on the plane.) Whatever his motives, he waited for a time when the stewards didn't notice and slipped

It can be compared to a person marrying off his child and is at the chasunah celebration right now. That night isn't usual, and he doesn't feel like a mundane, regular weekday evening. Praise to Hashem should be in his heart and his speech. If a person says, "How can I be different than I am all year? I am an honest person, and I am not on those higher levels," his reasoning is wrong. There are times when one should take himself in his hands and go up and live on a higher plane. As we wrote above, שקלים means to take oneself in hand to change himself, and we also wrote that Moshe comes and raises our heads. So, we shouldn't be the same at this time of year as we are the entire year. It is time to go up a notch.

A bachur sat in the front seat of a bus. An elderly person got on the bus, and the bachur didn't stand up for him to give him the seat. The elderly person wanted to sit down, but he didn't have any complaints about this bachur because he saw that the bachur's eyes were closed. "He didn't even see me," the elderly man thought. He waited patiently for the bachur to open his eyes and see him, but the bachur's eyes were closed throughout the bus ride! The elderly man was impressed. "This bachur is very careful with his eyes," he thought.

When they neared the final stop, he spoke to the bachur (who had finally opened his eyes). He asked him where he learned and to which chassidus he belonged. He wanted to

know which places teach their students so well to be cautious with their kedushah.

The bachur replied, "There is nothing to be impressed with. When I saw you get onto the bus, I quickly shut my eyes. I wouldn't feel comfortable sitting here when I see an elderly person standing."

This story addresses the people who keep their eyes shut and say they don't see anything. We know that Shabbos Shekalim and other significant days are approaching; we shouldn't keep our eyes closed and pretend that we don't see anything and that we don't know anything that is going on. Open your eyes and connect to the holiness of this time.

Chazal (Chagigah 4.) say, אי זהו שוטה, זה המאבד, כל מה שנותנים לו, "Who is a fool? It is a person who loses everything that was given to him." A talmid chacham said to Reb Yankele of Pshevorsk zt'l that he saw this quote from Chazal often quoted in the words of the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim* without the word כל. Those quotes state, אי זהו שוטה, זה המאבד, מה שנותנים לו, "Who is a fool? It is a person who loses what was given to him." When he saw those sources, he was worried. "Perhaps I am called a שוטה by Chazal because I lose so many good opportunities." Hashem gives us Shabbos, yom tov, and other special opportunities, and he doesn't utilize these days and opportunities to the fullest. However, when he saw that the Gemara Chagigah added the word כל, that comforted him. Because although he felt

into the first-class cabin.

When he saw Reb Mordechai, he said, "Oh, it's just that shlepper!"

Reb Mordechai said that at that moment, his balloon popped, and he felt like a poor man again. He had almost convinced himself that he was wealthy, and now someone who knew him realized the truth: he was just a poor man.

Reb Mordechai added that he realized then that it wasn't sufficient to *pretend* to be wealthy. If you want to feel wealthy, you have to be wealthy.

The *nimshal* is as follows. Shabbos Shekalim is approaching, a time when we can "take ourselves in our hands," a time we can do *teshuvah* and improve our ways. However, if you just go through the motions and don't change, you will continue to be "just that shlepper."

guilty that he lost opportunities in life, he wasn't losing כל מה שנותנים לו, *everything* that was given to him. At least, to some extent, he does make use of the gifts that Hashem sends him. To a degree, he does attempt to connect with the holiness of the special days that Hashem gives us, and that is sufficient that he won't be called a שוטה by Chazal.

This talmid chacham gave over this idea to Reb Yankele of Pshevorsk zt'l, who praised his temimus and explanation immensely.

Let us remember that Shabbos Shekalim is a special time. We should not lose the gift that Hashem gave us. And even if we won't use the gift to its fullest, at least we shouldn't be like the fools who lose *everything* Hashem gives them!

Reb Sariyah Dibletzky zt'l (*Davar Nechmad*) writes, "Reb Eliyahu Cohen and Reb Chaim Abulafia zt'l heard from Reb Chaim Vital's students that one should recite the entire *Tehillim* on Rosh Chodesh Adar. This will fix his *neshamah*. There are other secrets, too [for reciting the entire *Tehillim* on Rosh Chodesh Adar]. It is proper that those who fear Hashem should gather to make this *tikkun*." As we are explaining, the main thing is that one shouldn't be a שוטה, a fool who loses everything that was given to him. So, if you can't say the entire *Tehillim* on Rosh Chodesh Adar, say as many chapters of *Tehillim* as you can. Do something, and don't be a fool who loses every opportunity Hashem gives him.

Like all other towns and cities, Lubavitch had its town *meshugene*, who was well loved by the townspeople. But he was just one *meshugene* in a small town and sometimes felt lonely. One day, he was invited to move to the larger city of Vitebsk, where there would be more *meshugoyim* for him to hang out with. The offer tempted him, but he felt, "How could he leave the people of Lubavitch without their town *meshugene*?"

He wanted to discuss this with the Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch zt'l, known as the Rebbe Maharash. But the Rebbe's gabai

refused to give him an appointment. He felt that it would be a waste of the Rebbe's time. Undeterred, the wily *meshugene* waited until the Rebbe was leaving town, as he often did for his health.

As the Rebbe's wagon passed, the *meshugene* leaped aboard and explained his dilemma to the Rebbe. The Rebbe advised him to remain in Lubavitch since the town needed him to be *their meshugene*.

After he jumped off the wagon with a satisfied grin, the *meshugene* was almost immediately surrounded by chassidim who wanted to know what he had discussed with the Rebbe. He gladly shared with them his dilemma and the Rebbe's advice.

"But you are a *meshugene*!" marveled one of the chassidim. "How do you know to ask and follow the Rebbe's advice?"

"*Meshuga, meshuga*," he replied sagely, "but *seichel* (common sense) you must have." This story is a lesson for us, who aren't wise, and we waste the excellent opportunities that Hashem gives us. *Meshuga, meshuga*, but we must be smart enough to save as much as we can and utilize this holy time to the best of our abilities.

Kedushah

The Kedushas Levi (*Tetzaveh*) writes, "The twelve months of the year correspond to the twelve shevatim... Adar corresponds to Yosef, and from Yosef came two shevatim, Ephraim and Menashe. Therefore...in a leap year, there are two Adars."

Adar represents Yosef HaTzaddik, and Yosef HaTzaddik represents *midas hayesod*, *kedushah*. Therefore, Adar is an ideal time for attaining *kedushah* and *taharah*. A primary aspect of *kedushah* and *taharah* is to create boundaries for ourselves, to keep far away from aveiros.

On Shabbos, the Brisker Rav zt'l preferred to keep away from the *Shabbos lecht*, so he shouldn't accidentally touch them. Some people thought this was extreme, but these

same mockers wouldn't stand on the edge of a high roof. They wouldn't even stand a couple of feet away from the roof's edge because they are afraid of somehow falling off. So, when you are afraid, you keep far away. The Brisker Rav was afraid of aveiros, so he wanted to keep far away from them.

Chazal (Shabbos 13.) say, לך לך אמרין לנזירא, "Go away," we say to the nazir. 'Go around and around. Don't come near the vineyard.'"

The nazir isn't allowed to eat grapes, so we tell him that he shouldn't even pass through the vineyard. He shouldn't pass through a place where there is a test.

Most people think that סחור סחור is just a double expression, which means the same if it would have been written once. סחור means to go around, and סחור סחור is emphasizing that he should make a detour and go around the vineyard.

The Prishah (Yorah Deiah 383), however, writes, "Most people make a mistake when they translate this Gemara... סחור means go around, and it states סחור twice. We tell the nazir, 'Don't come near to around the vineyard...' So, סחור סחור means the nazir should distance himself even from the boundary. סחור, keep away, סחור, from the border, כרמא, of the vineyard. This is how distant we should be from aveiros.

When a person is cautious with his kedushah, he will only gain.

Reb Shmuel Katz was niftar recently. Years ago, he worked in the Twin Towers in New York City, on the eighty-fifth floor, one of the floors from which no one survived when the planes hit on September 11th, 2001.

Miraculously, Reb Shmuel Katz survived and lived for another twenty-two years. This is what happened. He was supposed to be in the office at nine a.m. But the trains were packed then, and it was hard for Reb Shmuel to guard the eyes. He asked his boss to let him come to the office at eleven, but his boss told him that it was impossible. "If you come at eleven, you can stay home and not return here," he said.

Reb Shmuel didn't give up, and his boss finally agreed to let him come at eleven and work later each night. He wasn't present when the planes crashed into the Twin Towers, and that saved his life. One only gains from guarding his kedushah.

The Rashash zt'l was a giant scholar of kabbalah, and there is a story of how it all began. He was an orphan living in Yemen, so he had to work to support his family. Once, while selling items to people's homes, he was tested with the *issur* of *yichud* and an aveirah, like the test of Yosef HaTzaddik. He jumped out of the window to save himself from the aveirah, and that is when he began to grow immensely in Torah and kabbalah.³

A bachur wanted to learn in a yeshiva in Tel Aviv. He asked Rebbe Shlomke for his opinion. Rebbe Shlomke would answer questions after immersing himself in a mikvah. This time, he immersed in a mikvah but didn't answer the question.

A couple of years later, Rebbe Shlomke asked his gabbai about this bachur. The gabbai replied that he went to the yeshiva in Tel Aviv and is studying very well there.

Rebbe Shlomke said, "I'm glad to hear that. When I went to the mikvah, I understood

3. The Chasam Sofer zt'l teaches that a person can choose any day and turn it into a yom tov by excelling in avodas Hashem on that day. For example, he can add hours of Torah study on that day, or chapters of Tehillim, and so on. He makes this a special day for Hashem. Hashem says (Vayikra 23:2) מועדי ה' אשר תקראו אתם, מועדי ה' אלהיכם, these are My yomim tovim.

Sometimes, it happens without planning. A person does a great mitzvah one day, and he has made that day his yom tov, a precious day before Hashem.

that it would be good for him to go to the yeshiva in Tel Aviv, only I didn't have the heart to tell a bachur to go to Tel Aviv (because of the tests on the eyes that are there)."

Rebbe Shlomke sometimes answered questions related to life-and-death situations. He felt confident that he could answer correctly after his immersion in a mikvah. But this time, the question was too great for him to answer. It was hard for him to advise a bachur to go to Tel Aviv, where there would be difficult tests with the eyes.

Reb Shmuel Minkes *zt'l* once saw an elderly woman holding a siddur with the commentary of the Baal HaTanya written in the margins. "Please sell me the siddur," Reb Shmuel Minkes pleaded. (Reb Shmuel wanted this siddur because the Baal HaTanya was his Rebbe.) "If you give me the siddur, I will buy you another one. Anyway, you don't read the commentary."

She refused to sell it. He offered to pay a lot of money for the siddur, but she didn't agree to sell it. She explained, "Sometimes, a siddur becomes torn or frayed, and people can't read the words. However, if this siddur gets frayed, the commentaries will be torn, but the words of the siddur will remain intact."

Reb Shmuel Minkes repeated this story and said this is the idea behind making *gedorim* and *siyagim*, fences and boundaries. These boundaries distance us from *aveiros* because even if we transgress a boundary, we have not committed the *aveirah* itself. But if we don't have any limitations or borders, we are liable for *chas veshalom* transgressing the mitzvos themselves.

A chassid of the Trisker Magid *zt'l* wanted to move to America because he thought he could earn a comfortable parnassah there. The Trisker Magid *zt'l* told him not to go.

This happened over one hundred years ago when religious institutions and yeshivos weren't yet established in America. The chassid kept returning to his Rebbe, asking for the Rebbe's permission, but the Rebbe repeatedly refused.

The chassid said, "Why is the Rebbe afraid of America? Many good Yidden live there."

The Rebbe answered with a *mashal*:

A *talmid chacham* saw an unlearned person holding a large siddur that was filled with secrets of Kabbalah. The *talmid chacham* told the unlearned man, "Let's switch siddurim. It will be better for both of us. You will have a smaller siddur, easier to carry around, and I will have a siddur filled with Kabbalistic secrets."

The *am ha'aretz* refused to part from his large siddur. He explained, "If I have your siddur, and the first few pages of the siddur fall out, I have lost the *Adon Olam*. But with my siddur, even if the first pages of the commentaries fall out, I still have the *Adon Olam*."

The *nimshal* was understood. A person must make boundaries for himself. If he isn't cautious and moves to a place that poses great challenges, he might end up losing the *Adon Olam*, *chalilah*.

Dr. Bick, a *maskil* (of the Enlightenment movement), said to Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l*, "Why do you take an extreme route? Wouldn't it be better to compromise and follow the middle path?"

The Rebbe took him to the window and showed him horses trotting in the middle of the road while people walked on the sidewalk. The Rebbe explained, "Animals take the middle road. I don't want to be like them."⁴

4. Once, Dr. Bick told Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz, "Let us both compromise and meet in the middle. And then our communities won't be as different as they are today. I will encourage my followers to be a bit more traditional and religious, and you will encourage your community to loosen up a bit and be more like us."

Change in a Moment

If a person is sleeping on his left side and then turns onto his right side, he has changed sides in a moment. This reminds us that (a) a person can improve his direction in life in a moment, (b) but if he isn't cautious, he can turn the wrong way in a moment.

The Maharam Paparish *zt'l* (a student of the Arizal) said that at the *levayah* of the holy Remak *zt'l*, the Arizal saw a pillar of fire in front of the Remak. The *chevra kadisha* in Tzefas stopped near the Beis Yosef's kever to bury the Remak there. The Arizal said, "This isn't the right place. I see that the pillar of fire has gone further." The pillar stopped

further up the mountain, and the Remak was buried there. Today, the Arizal, Reb Shlomo Alkabetz who wrote the *Lecha Dodi*, and several other great *tzaddikim* are also buried there.

At this *levayah*, the Arizal realized that a certain *bachur* had also seen the holy pillar of fire that went before the Remak. The Arizal wanted to take this *bachur* to be his son-in-law. However, later, the Arizal changed his mind since the *bachur* had fallen from his level. A person has ups and downs. We are human, and we can't always maintain high levels. We tell this to encourage

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz replied that they have a custom to cut their fingernails and burn them with three wood splinters on Fridays. "I will tell my *chasidim* that from now on, they could burn their nails with only two wood splinters. That is about the only compromise I can agree to."

Immediately after saying this, Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz exclaimed, "Chas v'shalom! Even this, I will not compromise."

(It is explained that Rebbe Yehoshua never intended to compromise; he only expressed it this way to demonstrate the extent to which they will cling to the Torah and their *minhagim*.)

A *chassid* of the Kedushas Tzion of Bobov *zt'l hy'd* was engaged for marriage, and his *kallah* told him that she didn't want him to wear a *shtreimel*. So, the *chassid* asked his Rebbe what he should do, and the Rebbe told him to at least wear the *shtreimel* for Kiddush on Friday night.

The *chassid* came up with a different solution. He wore the *shtreimel* throughout the week of *sheva brachos*. After the week, he continued wearing the *shtreimel* – even on weekdays. His wife told him again that she really doesn't like that he wears a *shtreimel*. So, he offered to compromise. He would only wear a *shtreimel* on Shabbos and *yom tov* and never during the week, and she was satisfied with this.

A *chasan* wasn't planning on wearing a *shtreimel* after his *chasunah*. Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* asked him about that. The *chasan* answered, "Clothing doesn't mean anything to me. A *shtreimel* is a hat... What's inside the person is what's important."

The Rebbe replied, "The Gemara (*Gittin* 60:) says, 'לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה', 'Hakadosh Baruch Hu made a *bris* with Bnei Yisrael because of the Oral Torah.' It is the Oral Torah that creates the bond between Hashem and the Jewish nation. But what is the Oral Torah today? The oral Torah used to be Mishnah and Gemara, but these are already written. Today, *minhagim* are the Oral Torah. Customs are therefore important. Because of them, Hakadosh Baruch Hu makes a *bris* with the Jewish people."

One of the reasons customs are so important is because when one begins departing from them, one can never know how far he might fall. It states (*Devarim* 1:44), 'בשעיר עד חרמה'. The Slonimer *tzaddikim* explained, "To veer away from a family custom, even by a hairsbreadth (בשעיר), leads to *עד חרמה*, destruction because he might end up falling away from *Yiddishkeit* entirely."

The Atzei HaChaim of Sighet *zt'l* said, "Those who sometimes go this way and sometimes that way with Torah observance are like the *tumah* of a cross." A cross, a *שתי וערב*, goes in both directions, and they do the same. Sometimes they are religious, and other times not. And this can occur, *chalilah*, when people don't set clear boundaries.

caution, always to try the best we can, and when we fall, to pick ourselves up again.

Reb Yaakov Blau zt'l, from the gedolim of Yerushalayim, was married to a woman raised in America. Her sister, who still lived in America, requested that she send a picture of herself and her husband. Rebbetzin Blau was embarrassed to send a picture of how she looked now that she was dressed as a Yerushalmi woman, vastly different than how her sister remembered her. She requested from her husband that they dress up like standard people, just for the picture. Reb Blau said that he would ask Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld.

Reb Yosef Chaim advised them not to do so, although it was just for a picture and just for a moment. He said, "Who knows? Perhaps this will be the only picture that will remain of you and your wife, and your descendants will think that this is how she dressed."

Indeed, this is the only picture that remains of them.

The lesson for us is that whatever we do creates an image for our children. Sometimes, it is a decision of a moment, but that decision might remain in our DNA or our children's consciousness forever. Therefore, we must be cautious every moment.

A Fiery Coin

It states (30:13) *זה יתנו... מחצית השקל*, "This they shall give...a half a shekel..."

The word *זה* implies that Hashem pointed to it. Rashi explains, *זה יתנו, הראה לו כמין מטבע של*, "Hashem showed Moshe a vision of a coin of fire that weighed half a shekel and said, 'This is what they should give.'"

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (9) explains this in greater detail, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu took a coin of fire from under His throne, He showed it to Moshe and said, *זה יתנו*, 'This is what they should give.'" We can explain that Moshe didn't have difficulty understanding

what a *machatzis hashekel* was. Moshe's question was how it was possible for half a coin to accomplish so much. How can such a small donation raise the heads of the Jewish nation and grant them atonement for the *egel*?

Hashem showed Moshe a fiery coin. This means it is the fire and the *hislahavus* that Klal Yisrael have when they perform this mitzvah, which is so precious to Hashem.

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l was once in Germany, and he heard the Rav of a beis medresh ask in his *drashah*, "Why did Hashem show Moshe a *מטבע של אש*, a coin of fire? Hashem could have shown Moshe a true silver coin! The answer is that Hashem did not only show him the size and weight of the coin. Hashem showed him the way the coin should be given. It should be given with a fiery *hislahavus*."

Towards the end of *parashas Mishpatim*, it states (24:17), *מראה כבוד ה' כאש אוכלת בהר*, "The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the mountain-top before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael."

The Kedushas Levi (Mishpatim) teaches, "If a person wants to know whether Hashem enjoys his service, he should check to see if he has a yearning and *hislahavus* to serve Hashem like a burning fire. If he does, this is a clear sign that Hashem enjoys his service. Heaven helps him and sends into his mind holy thoughts [of *hislahavos* so Hashem can enjoy his mitzvos]."

Desire

The Mishnah Berurah (685:2) explains that every year, in the month of Adar, it was announced in Jewish cities that they should donate a half shekel towards the purchase of the korban tamid of the following year. This is because every year, from *Rosh chodesh Nisan* until next year's Nisan, the korbanos had to be bought from a new collection of half-shekels, as it states (Bamidbar 28:14) *זאת עולתו... בחדשו*, "This is the olah...in its newness." The collection began in Adar. Today, we

don't donate the half-shekalim because we don't bring the *korbanos*. However, by reading about the donation of the shekalim in the Torah, together with our desire to perform the mitzvah, it is considered as if we brought the half-shekel to the Beis HaMikdash, as it states (Hoshea 14:3) וְשִׁלְמָהּ פְּרִים שְׁפִתֵינוּ - our words should be instead of *korbanos*. This is why we read parashas Shekalim from parashas Ki Sisa this week.

The Sfas Emes (Shekalim 5633) explains that the specialness of the *korbanos*, which are so beloved by Hashem, is the strong desire the Yidden have to serve Hashem. "This desire exists today, and perhaps even more than before." We desire to bring *korbanos*, we want to serve Hashem, and therefore, our reading about the *machatzis hashekel* and our desire to do Hashem's will is so precious to Hashem.

Chazal (Yalkut Yeshayah 391) states, "In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will come to Har Tavor and Har Karmel to build the Beis HaMikdash on these mountains. They merit this because these mountains wanted the Torah to be given on them. The Satmar Rebbe (Shavuos p.127) says that if this will be the reward for *domeim*, inanimate matters, a great reward will certainly come to a human being who desires to receive the Torah.

The Midrash (Shmuel Rabsi 3) states that before Shmuel was born, a *bas kol* came forth and announced that soon a child would be born. His name will be Shmuel, and he will merit receiving *nevuah* from Hashem. What did Bnei Yisrael do? They all named their children Shmuel. Only Shmuel, the son of Chanah, became the navi. Nevertheless, since they wanted and desired to bear this holy child, they merited that their children also had at least one moment of *nevuah* in their lifetime. The Chida in *Yosef Tehillos* says that this is the meaning of וְשִׁמְאוֹ בְּקוֹרָא שְׁמוֹ. Since they called their children Shmuel, they merited prophecy at least once. This shows us the great virtue of desire and what it can accomplish.

The Midrash (Mishlei 12) states, "Whoever sleeps on his bed at night and thinks, 'Tomorrow I will wake up early, and I will do a favor for this person and for that person, in the future world he will be happy with the tzaddikim in Gan Eden.' The Midrash doesn't say that he is rewarded for helping those people. He deserves credit because he genuinely desired to do *chesed* for them.

The *mashpiah* Rebbe Mendel Futerfas zt'l told the following story at a Chassidic farbrengen. A Lubavitcher chasid was sent to a Siberian prison surrounded by huge mountains. For several months a year, it was dark there. As usual, his "crime" was teaching children Torah. He didn't have sefarim or any item of kedushah, and his heart was broken. On his first Shabbos afternoon in this prison, he went outside and was surprised to hear someone singing zemiros. The singing came from a distance, but he could hear it clearly because it was so quiet, and there weren't many trees around to block the sounds. He followed the sound of the singing and found a Yid with long hair singing Yedid Nefesh with passion, his eyes closed. He was so involved in the song that he hardly noticed that he had a visitor. They sang songs together for a long time, and then the man with the long hair opened his eyes and greeted his guest joyously. He said, "I am so happy to see you. I have been in Siberia for twenty years now, and this is the first time I've seen the face of a religious Jew." And then he said anxiously, "I don't have talis or tefillin, and I don't have a shofar. Did you bring an item of kedushah, a mitzvah to perform?"

The chasid replied, "All that I have is *tefillin shel yad*. They saw the tefillin worn on my head, and they confiscated that, but they didn't know that I had tefillin on my arm. Tomorrow, I will bring the *tefillin shel yad* to you so you can put it on."

The next morning, this Yid put on tefillin for the first time in twenty years with immense joy and hislahavus. He said the brachah with all his heart, he said the first

pasuk of Shema, and when he uttered the word אֶחָד he was niftar.

Reb Mendel Futerfas repeated this story at a farbrengen, and then said, "Everyone should ask himself how he would look after twenty years of living in Siberia. Would he sing Yedid Nefesh and other zemiros on Shabbos afternoon, or would he forget about his connection with Hashem? Will he be searching for an opportunity to perform mitzvos?" Reb Mendel concluded, "And now that we can keep all the mitzvos, we should certainly keep them all with joy and hislahavus!"

Chazal (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu 22:2) say, "A person is obligated to say, מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשי, אבותי, "When will my actions be like the deeds of the avos [Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov]." But how can we reach those great levels?

One common answer is that יגיעו means to touch. We want our deeds to at least touch and have a drop of similarity to the deeds of our forefathers.

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zt'l said that יגיעו could be translated as interests or motives. For example, there is a term in Chazal called נוגע בעדות, which means one can't give testimony when he has personal needs and intentions. So, נגיעה is a person's interest, the motivation behind his deeds and words. Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa said that we must yearn for our deeds to have a נגיעה, motivation, similar to the motivation of the avos. We shouldn't perform mitzvos out of rote; rather, we should yearn to perform the mitzvos with heart and soul as our avos would serve Hashem. We should have a sincere desire to serve Hashem.

The Gemara (Sotah 49.) says, "After the Churban Beis HaMikdash, on what does the world stand? It exists on the kedushah that we say in וְבָא לְצִיּוֹן." What is special about this kedushah more than any other kedushah that we say?

We say kedushah in the brachah Yotzer Ohr (before kriyas Shma), and we say kedushah

in Shemoneh Esrei. The Shibolei HaLeket (quoted in Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim 132) writes, "They added that we should say another kedushah in וְבָא לְצִיּוֹן, because they weren't able to say kedushah in the davening because guards would stand in the *beis haknesses* and didn't permit them to say kedushah. After the tefillah, the guards left, and then they would say kedushah loudly. They said the kedushah and the translation of Targum... so it would be considered as if it was said twice. This double kedushah made up for what they missed in Shemoneh Esrei and the brachah of Yotzer Ohr. Today, we say kedushah during the tefillah, nevertheless the takanah remained to repeat it in וְבָא לְצִיּוֹן because they thought perhaps sin will result [that they will once again be forbidden to say kedushah]."

These words of the Shibolei HaLeket help us understand why this kedushah is so special, and why the world stands on it. When guards stood in the *beis haknesses* with drawn swords, forbidding the community from saying kedushah, people didn't say, "We can't say kedushah, so what can we do? Let us make peace with the reality." Instead, they sought ways and devised plans to say kedushah and sanctify Hashem's name. When the *resha'im* left the *beis medresh*, they immediately shouted out, twice, קדוש קדוש קדוש to complete the two kedushahs that they missed. The tefillah in וְבָא לְצִיּוֹן is very precious because it demonstrates the yearning and the desires of the Jewish nation to keep the Torah as best as they can in all generations and all situations, even when it was risking their lives.

When Yidden say kedushah in וְבָא לְצִיּוֹן, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "I don't have any pleasure in the world like the time they raise their eyes, they look at my eyes, and I look into their eyes (Sefer Heichalos, quoted in Tur 125). Again, this can be because of the desire and yearning for Hashem expressed in this tefillah.

And therefore Shulchan Aruch (132:1) states, "We have to be very cautious to say *ובא לציון* with kavanah." The Zohar HaKadosh also writes about this very high and exalted tefillah.

The kedushah of *ובא לציון* is called קדושה דסידרא. Rebbe Asher of Stolin (Seder HaYom, quoted in Beis Aharon) said, *יזהר בקדושה דסידרא לומר בכוונה גדולה כי זה תיקון על כל היום שיהיה מסודר בכל הענינים*, "Be cautious with the kedushah of the seder [which is *ובא לציון*] to say it with a lot of kavanah because it is a great rectification for the entire day that everything should be מסודר, organized and well, in all ways."

There are people who are happy to have the opportunity to say, "What can I do? I am an *onus*. *אנוס רחמנא פטריה*, the Torah doesn't obligate the person when it isn't his fault and responsibility. But at these times there comes forth the innermost feelings of an *ehrlicher Yid* who shouts, "Why should I lose this opportunity to say kedushah?" He doesn't look for excuses, he doesn't want to be exempt, he wants to perform the mitzvah.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Drashos 166) says that this is the meaning of the words *על חטא שחטאנו לפנים באונס וברצון*, "For the sins that we sinned by accident and with desire." Why should we say viduy for sinning באונס, by accident, against our will? Those aveiros aren't our fault!

But the problem is that it was באונס וברצון, which means we were happy that we had this onus. Let's explain this with a *mashal*:

A Yid and a non-Jew were traveling together, and they stopped to eat lunch.

"Do you want some wine?" the goy asked.

"No thanks. I am a Jew, and a Jew may not drink wine of non-Jews."

"How about a sausage? I have extra."

"No, thank you. We can't eat that either."

"It is very good. Are you sure you can't eat any of it?"

"I'm positive. The only time one may eat such foods is when his life is in danger."

The goy took out a knife and said, "Eat my food, or I'll kill you."

The Yid began eating. What could he do? It was *pikuach nefesh*.

A few moments later, the goy said, "I'm sorry I did that to you. I was just joking."

The Yid said, "I forgive you for playing that prank on me, but I won't forgive you for telling me that it was a joke so soon. Why didn't you wait until I finished the meal?"

This is an example of *על חטא שחטאנו לפנים באונס וברצון*. The problem wasn't the sin that was performed באונס, since he was coerced. The problem was that it was also ברצון, that he wanted that situation!

Chazal say that Haman had the ability to decree annihilation, *r'l*, because *שנהנו מסעודתו*, *של אחשורוש*, because they *enjoyed* Achashverosh's meal. The problem wasn't that they attended the meal. They had to be there, or they would be punished by Achashverosh. The problem was that they were happy to be there. *שנהנו*, they enjoyed the meal. Because even when one is forced to perform an aveirah, *chalilah*, his wish should be that he wasn't put in that situation.⁵

Hakaras HaTov

It is known that we must have *hakaras hatov*. When someone does you a favor, you must feel indebted to him, seek to help him, and certainly never harm him.

5. The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe, Esther*, ד"ה איתא במגילה) explains that the food at this party wasn't kosher. Nonetheless, they were permitted to eat there since it was a situation of *pikuach nefesh*. Their fault was that they should have eaten at home before going to the party, so the food at the party would be *אכילה גסה* (eating when completely full, which isn't considered eating, according to halachah).

We are even obligated to have *hakaras hatov* towards animals when they help us.

Many readers saw the photograph of Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l* giving a dish of milk to a cat. This is the real story behind the picture:

The *bachurim* who learned in yeshivas Kfar Chassidim were bothered by the many rats that nibbled at their food and got into their belongings. They brought a cat to the yeshiva campus, and the cat got rid of all the rats.

After the mission was accomplished, the *bachurim* wanted to send the cat away. Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l* was the *mashgiach* of Kfar Chassidim, and he told the *bachurim* that they must first show *hakaras hatov* to the cat. The picture of Reb Elyah giving milk to the cat is how he showed the cat *hakaras hatov* for helping the *bachurim*, and then they sent the cat away.

The Yerushalmi (*Terumos* 8:3) tells:

Someone invited a talmid chacham for a meal. At the meal, the host brought his dog and had the dog sit down next to the host. The talmid chacham asked, "Is there a reason you are disgracing me?"

The *baal habayis* replied, "*Chas v'shalom!* It is simply that I owe a favor to this dog. Once, kidnappers came to the city. They intended to catch people and sell them as slaves. One of the kidnappers wanted to take my wife. This dog bit him...and the kidnapper left us in peace. Therefore, I must honor this dog."

We've seen that we must show *hakaras hatov* to people who do us favors, and even to animals. What about *domeim*, inanimate objects? Must we have *hakaras hatov* towards them too? The answer is yes. Our obligation to have *hakaras hatov* is even for *domeim*, objects that don't have feelings.

We can prove this from the *makos* in Mitzrayim. Moshe Rabbeinu performed most *makos*, but the first three *makos* – דם צפרדע כינים – were performed by Aharon HaKohen. Why didn't Moshe do those?

Rashi (*Shemos* 7:19) explains that as an infant, Moshe was cast in the Nile to be

saved from the Egyptians who were killing all the newborns. The Nile saved him, and therefore, Moshe couldn't bring plagues on the Nile (דם צפרדע). It had to be done by his brother Aharon.

Similarly, about מכת כינים Rashi (*Shemos* 8:12) writes, "It wasn't appropriate that Moshe should hit the earth since the earth protected Moshe..." because when Moshe killed the Mitzri, he buried him in the sand. Therefore, Aharon hit the earth and brought forth the כינים. It wasn't proper for Moshe to bring a plague onto the earth that protected him.

The Nile and the earth don't have feelings, yet Moshe couldn't bring a *makah* on them. He had to have *hakaras hatov* even for a *domeim* (inanimate).

The Shita Mikubetzes (*Bava Kama* 92:) writes, "A student of the Ri Migash *z'l* wrote the following:

"The Gemara (*Bava Kama* 92:) says, בירא דשתית מיניה לא תרמי ביה קלא. If you drank water from a well, don't throw in a stone or any other matter. Don't disregard it, and don't do anything bad to it because you once benefited from it. The Gemara is using a well as a *mashal* for all matters: If you gained benefit and pleasure from something, it isn't proper to damage it..."

[This lesson shows us that we should have *hakaras hatov* for inanimate items. The well doesn't have feelings or care if someone throws in a stone. But if we benefited from the well, we mustn't disgrace it.]

"Rabbeinu (the R'i MiGash) told a story that happened with his *Rebbe*, the Ri'f. Someone asked the Ri'f to be his judge, and the Ri'f emphatically refused. This was the reason:

"There was a time when the Ri'f *z'l* was ill, and he went to the home of someone who had a bathhouse. The Ri'f bathed there and it was very good for his health. The owner of the bathhouse asked the Ri'f to stay in his home until he was fully cured, and the host honored the Ri'f immensely until the Ri'f recovered.

"As time passed, this person [who hosted the Ri'f] lost his money and suffered from hunger, etc. He was deeply in debt. His

financial situation became so bad, he had to sell the bathhouse to pay back his debts. The Ri'f said, 'I won't judge anything that has to do with the bathhouse, such as regarding its sale or evaluating its value because I enjoyed this bathhouse. He said this about a bathhouse, which has no feelings.'

The Ri Migash adds that if the Ri'f was cautious not to judge a bathhouse, indeed, how cautious one must be not to be the judge for a human being who helped you. He writes "It would be wrong to judge [the person who did a favor for you]. Whoever does has left the path of *mussar* and *derech erez*. Chazal say, לא לידון איניש לא למאן דרחים ליה, ולא למאן דסני ליה, 'A person shouldn't judge someone he loves or someone he hates.' There are two reasons why you shouldn't judge someone you love: One is because you might bend the judgment in favor of your

friend you love. And if you can be cautious with your soul and you can judge correctly, nevertheless, it is wrong to judge your friend, because you will be, משלם רעה תחת טובה, paying bad to someone who did kindness with you."

The Ri MiGash concludes that our primary *hakaras hatov* should go to Hashem. He writes, "Hashem bestows perfect goodness on us. *Kal v'chomer* it is proper that we praise Hashem with perfect praises, and that we shouldn't do anything that will get Hashem angry, and we shouldn't do anything that Hashem hates."

Because when one trains himself in the attribute of *hakaras hatov* for *domeim*, for animals, and certainly for human beings, he will also have *hakaras hatov* for Hashem, for all the kindness He bestows on us.⁶

6. Reb Dardak oversaw the Steipler gaon's *sefarim* distribution in America. Sometimes, Reb Dardak would write letters to the Steipler, and the Steipler would answer him.

Years passed, and the Steipler *gaon's sefarim* started being distributed through the stores like all *sefarim*, and Reb Dardak's services were no longer needed.

Also, at that time, the Steipler stopped answering letters. He was weaker and had become world-renowned as the *gadol* of Klan Yisrael, and it was impossible to answer the many letters people sent him.

One day, the Steipler received a letter from Reb Dardak. The Steipler decided to make an exception and answer him. He wrote a letter and brought it to Reb Dardak's father's home (Reb Chaim Shmaryahu Dardak from Bnei Brak), and the Steipler asked him to send it to his son in America.

Reb Chaim Shmaryahu was surprised that the Steipler wrote the letter and took the effort to bring it to his home.

The Steipler explained, "I don't write letters anymore, but I made an exception this time. I didn't want your son to think that I only responded to his letters when I needed his services, and now that I don't need his distribution, I stopped writing to him."

Reb Chaim Shmaryahu assured the Steipler that he would send the letter.

A few days later, on *erev Shabbos*, the Steipler knocked on Reb Chaim Shmaryahu Dardak's door again.

"Did you send the letter yet?" the Steipler asked.

"No."

"Good. I wrote another letter and want you to send this one."

Astounded, Reb Chaim Shmaryahu asked, "Is this letter different than the first letter you gave me?"

"No. They are the same. I'll explain: I don't want you to send the first letter, because I wrote it for the wrong reasons. I wrote the first letter so your son shouldn't think negatively of me. But that isn't the right reason to write a letter. I should write to your son because I have *hakaras hatov* for distributing my *sefer*. Therefore, I wrote a second letter. The words are the same, but the intention is improved."