

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Bo



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Emunah and Bitachon

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 2:6) says, "Whenever Hashem's presence is revealed, it is forbidden to wear shoes." The kohanim didn't wear shoes in the Beis HaMikdash because Hashem's presence was in the Beis HaMikdash. When Moshe came to the burning bush, Hashem told him to take off his shoes.¹

The Korban Pesach was eaten while wearing shoes, as it states (12:11) **וְכֹה תֹאכְלִי** "So shall you eat the [korban Pesach]... your shoes on your feet..."

On the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, Hashem's presence was revealed in Mitzrayim, as it states (12:12) **וַיַּבְרְתִּי בָּאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם** **בְּלִילָה הַזֹּה וְהַבִּיאָתִי כֹּל בָּכֹור בָּאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מֵאֶתְمָ וְעַד בְּהַמִּהְמָה וּבְכָל אֶלְךָ מִצְרָיִם אָעַשָּׂה שְׁפָטִים אַנְהָה** "I shall go through

the land of Mitzrayim on this night, and I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Mitzrayim, from man to beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment - I am Hashem." The Maharil Diskin asks that since Hashem's presence was in Mitzrayim on that night, shouldn't they have gone without shoes? Why did they have an obligation to wear shoes specifically?

Maharil Diskin answers that at the time of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, it was necessary that Bnei Yisrael have bitachon, to trust that Hashem would save them. Their emunah and bitachon brought about the salvation. Therefore, Hashem had them put on shoes, as if they were ready to leave. (They also were girded with a belt, and they held their walking staff in their hands.)² They had to demonstrate that they

1. Hashem said to Moshe (Shemos 3:5) **עַלְיוֹ אֶדְקָתָ קָרְבָּן** "Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground."

See also Yehoshua (5:15). A malach told Yehoshua to remove his shoes, as it states **שְׁלַמְלָךְ מַעַל וְגַלְגָּל כִּי הַפְּקוּד אֲשֶׁר עַמְּךָ עַמְּךָ עַלְיוֹ קָרְבָּן** "Remove your shoes from upon your foot, for the place upon which you stand is holy," and Yehoshua did so. This is also the reason we don't wear shoes on Yom Kippur. Hashem's presence is revealed, making it appropriate to go without shoes.

Mishnas Chassidim explains that it is beneficial for us to go barefoot on Yom Kippur and in the Beis HaMikdash because this enables us to acquire the holiness that's there.

2. It states (Tehillim 22:6), **אָלֵיךְ זַקְנָךְ וְנִמְלָטוּ בְּךָ בְּתָחֹ וְלֹא בְשֹׁוּ** "They cried out to You, and they escaped; they trusted in You, and they were not shamed." The Midrash (Tehillim) says that this pasuk refers to *yetzias Mitzrayim*. They were redeemed in the merit of their *bitachon*.

The Sforno (12:11) states that they wore belts when they ate the korban Pesach, as it states **מַתְנִיכֶם חֲגוּרִים**, and this was to demonstrate their readiness to set out on the road. "It was to show their bitachon, without any doubts, in Hashem yisbarach. They were preparing themselves to travel when they were still in the prison [of Mitzrayim]."

The Chasam Sofer (*Oros Chasam Sofer*) *zt'l* explains that **וּמְקַלְכָם בִּידֶיכֶם** "your staff in your hands," hints at *bitachon*, because **מַקְלֵל** is *roshei teivos* **לְךָ**, "For always have we put our hope in You" (from *Shemonah Esrei*).

Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to smear the blood of the korban Pesach on the doorposts and lintel, and Hashem said (12:13) **וְרָאָתִי אֶת הַדָּם וְפִסְחָתִי עַלְכֶם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בְּכֶם גַּגְתָּה לְמַשְׁחָתִ בְּהַבְּתִי בָּאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם** "When I shall see the blood and I shall pass over you; there shall not be a plague of destruction upon you when I strike in the land of Egypt." How did the blood on the doorposts and lintel protect them from makas Bechoros?

Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes, "The blood didn't stop the plague, and not placing the blood wouldn't bring the

trust Hashem will redeem them from Mitzrayim. This was so important that it overrode the general benefit of not wearing shoes when Hashem's presence is there.

Bnei Yisrael are, **מאמינים בני מאמינים**, believers, the children of believers. Hashem told them to leave Mitzrayim, and they did so, even before they had time to prepare food for the voyage. As it states (12:39) **וְגַם צְדָה לֹא עָשׂוּ לְהֶם**, "nor had they made provisions for themselves." Rashi writes, "This is telling the praises of the Jewish people. They didn't say, 'How can we go out to the desert without food?' They had emunah and went. As it states (Yirmiyahu 2:2) **זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נָעוּרִיךְ אֶחָבָתְךָ לְלֹלְתִּיךְ**, "I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your youth, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land." They trusted in Hashem, and this merit is remembered in all generations.

It states (12:34) **וַיִּשְׁאַל הָעָם אֶת בָּצָקָו טְרַמָּה יְחִמְזָה**, "The people picked up their dough when it was not yet leavened, their leftovers bound in their garments on their shoulders."

Rashi teaches that **טְרַמָּה** means the *matzah* and *maror* left over from last night's seder. The Torah tells us that they packed them in their clothes, and placed them **עַל שְׂכָנָם**, over their shoulders. Why is it important to know exactly how they carried the *matzah* and *maror*? Zera Kodesh (Haggadah Shel Pesach, from Rebbe Naftali Ropshitzer zt'l) says that this is another indication that they relied

solely on Hashem. A person casts on his shoulder that which he doesn't pay much attention to. This is how the Jewish people left Mitzrayim. They hardly took food along with them, and whatever they did have, they threw over their shoulders. This is all because they trusted Hashem to support them.

Indeed, miraculously, that drop of matzah was all they needed. They ate it for thirty days, and then the manna fell for forty years. They left Mitzrayim with bitachon, and Hashem supplied them with food and with all their other needs.³

The reason for yetzias Mitzrayim and the ten makos was to teach emunah, and the parents will teach it to their children. As it states (10:2)... **וְלִמְעֵן תְּסִפְרָבְנִי בְּנֵי בְּנֵי**, "So that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son..." The following words of the pasuk are **וַיַּדְעָתֶם כִּי אָנִי הִ**, "you will know that I am Hashem." The Maharam Shik zt'l asks why it doesn't say (ליקוטי מהר"ם שיק, נא) **וַיַּדְעָשָׂכְיִ**, "They will know that I am Hashem." If the purpose for the makos is to tell the children the miracles that occurred, the end of the pasuk should use the words **וַיַּדְעָתֶם כִּי אָנִי הִ**, "they [the children] will know that I am Hashem," not **וַיַּדְעָתֶם כִּי אָנִי הִ**, "So that you may know that I am Hashem."

The Maharam Shik quotes an answer from Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zy'a. If a person desires to teach emunah to his fellow man, he must be accomplished in this matter, himself, because then it will be **דָבָרִים הַיִצְאִים מִן**

plague. The pasuk is teaching us that when a person has *emunah sheleimah* in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and trusts in Him, and isn't afraid of Pharaoh or concerned about his decrees, and slaughters the abomination (avodah zarah) of Mitzrayim in the open, and he places the blood of the korban Pesach openly on the doorposts and lintels, he is a tzaddik. He has bitachon in HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Thus, he deserves to be protected from the plague."

So, it wasn't the blood that protected Klal Yisrael. It was their bitachon in Hashem.

3. It states (Shemos 8:9) **וַיִּמְתַּהּ הַצְּפְרָנִים מִן הַבָּתִים מִן הַחֶצְרָתָה וּמִן הַשְׂדָה**, "The frogs died from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields." But the pasuk doesn't mention that the frogs that leaped into the ovens died. Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos says that, indeed, those frogs didn't die. "This is because they trusted in Hakadosh Baruch Hu and they went into the ovens on Hashem's command." We learn from this the greatness of bitachon. Even frogs that trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu are protected from harm.

הַלְבָןִים אֶל הַלְבָן, "Words emanating from the heart that enter another person's heart." But if the person doesn't have emunah, his words won't be influential. The pasuk therefore says, וְלֹמַעַן תְּסִפֵּר בְּאוֹנִי בָּנֶךָ וּבָנָךָ... if you want to teach emunah to your children and to your grandchildren, you must first know it yourself. You have to attain this emunah first, and then you can teach it to others.⁴

The same applies to concepts of mussar. You must be interested in the lesson yourself, so you can influence others.

The Power of Denial

Even when one has clear emunah, Hashem grants each person free will. If he chooses to ignore all evidence and everything he knows in his heart, he has the power to do so.

Moshe said that *makas Bechoros* will occur בְּחַצֶּת הַלְיָלָה, around midnight, as it states (11:4-5) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה פָּה אָמַר הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחַצֶּת הַלְיָלָה אַנְּיִ אֵצֵא בַּתּוֹךְ מִצְרָיִם וְמַה. "Moshe said, 'So said Hashem, 'At about midnight I shall go out amid Mitzrayim. Every firstborn in the land of Mitzrayim shall die...'" Why didn't Moshe say בְּחַצֶּת, that it would occur precisely at midnight? Rashi writes, "Moshe said בְּחַצֶּת and not בְּבָבָבָב, because perhaps Pharaoh's stargazers will err [with the clock. They might think that midnight passed, and the plague had not yet begun]. They will say that Moshe is a faker (משה בְּדַאי הָוָא)." Therefore, Moshe said that the plague will occur בְּחַצֶּת הַלְיָלָה "around midnight".

The Brisker Rav zt'l asks that even if they erred with their calculations, wouldn't they believe that it was from Hashem? After all, in the end, makas Bechoros occurred, and there was a great shout and cry in the whole Mitzrayim. As Hashem forewarned (11:5-6) וְלֹמַעַן בְּכָנָר בְּאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם... וְהִיא אֲצַקָּה גָּדוֹלָה בְּכָל אָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם, "Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die... There shall be a great outcry in the entire land of Mitzrayim, such as there has never been and such as there shall never be again." Indeed, this occurred. How could Pharaoh's stargazers make an issue of one minute? How could they not see Hashem's hand? Especially since they had already seen nine makos, and every warning Hashem gave them transpired. Why would they say משֵׁה בְּדַאי, that Moshe isn't truthful?

The Brisker Rav explained that this shows us the power of denial. A person can see the greatest proof, but if he doesn't want to believe, he'll come up with something irrational to deny it.

This is the root of the *apikorsus* in the world. When we look at the wondrous world, the miracles of hashgachah pratis, the wonders of Torah, the history of the Jewish nation, and more, Hashem's presence is clearly visible to us. But if someone chooses to deny it, there isn't much that can be done to stop that. He'll pick up on the most minor matter, create conspiracy theories, and doubt the most obvious.

Therefore, Moshe was cautious that they shouldn't have the slightest matter to hold

4. In parashas Shemos, Pharaoh said פְּנֵי רִבָּה, and Hashem said (see Rashi 1:12). The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l said that פְּנֵי connotes doubt, perhaps. פְּנֵי, on the other hand, means definite. Pharaoh said פְּנֵי רִבָּה, let doubt increase among the Jewish nation. Let them not have clarity on what to do and how to proceed. Hashem's response was, כִּי רִבָּה, that there will be certainty and clarity among the Jewish people.

5. Last year, large sections of the state of California were consumed by forest fires. Firefighting crews and aircraft battled the blazes for months before they were contained. Tens of thousands of people were forced to evacuate their homes, and thousands of homes were destroyed in the inferno. Experts estimate the total economic damage of these fires at \$250 billion or higher. This occurred in one of the most modern states in the world. The only thing that could have helped them was rain, but it didn't rain for a long time.

on to, to deny Hashem's miracles and Hashem's love to the Jewish nation.⁵

The Arizal (Shaar HaPesukim) teaches that the word **פָּרָעָה** has in it the letters that spell **הָרַף** neck. The neck is the area of the body that divides the mind from the heart. Our obligation is to allow the realization of the mind to reach the heart. At yetzias Mitzrayim, when we were saved from **פָּרָעָה**'s influence, the knowledge of the mind reached the heart. We were able to believe in our hearts what our minds knew.

The "power of denial" is especially strong in our times. There is so much *kefirah* in the world. A person must fight against the stream to remain with his emunah.

It states (Tehillim 119:86) **כִּלْ מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֶמְוּנָה שְׁקָרָךְ רְדָפָיִנִי עִזּוּנִי**, "All Your mitzvos are emunah; falsehood pursued me; help me."

What is the connection between the beginning and the end of this pasuk?

We don't know Hashem's reasons, and why this had to occur; nevertheless, we do see hashgachah pratis, Hashem's hand in this episode. Two days before the fire broke out, a prestigious event was held in Los Angeles, California. It is an awards ceremony, honoring the top actors. (Many movies are filmed in Los Angeles, California, and many famous actors live there.) At this celebration, whenever an actor was called up to receive their medal, the actor would say a few words and thank those who helped them reach this milestone. The final speaker at the event was a comedian. He said the following disgusting words: "It isn't surprising that in this atheistic city, no one considered thanking G-d for helping them reach their milestone." Everyone cheered and rejoiced with those terrible words. In the following days, the Creator showed them the weakness of man. A massive fire started, and no one could put it out, other than Hashem, alone, the One Who holds the key of rain. This was a lesson that everything is in Hashem's hands, and all their accomplishments are from Him.

Most importantly, Hashem wanted the Jewish nation to learn this lesson. As the Chofetz Chaim said: When a person speaks in front of a large crowd - mostly goyim, but there are some Yidden there as well - and he speaks in Yiddish, everyone understands that he is now speaking to the Yidden. He certainly isn't speaking to the goyim, since they don't understand Yiddish. Similarly, when punishment comes to the world, Hashem isn't speaking to the goyim. Sadly, they don't recognize Hashem or understand His messages. It is like Hashem isn't speaking their language. It is obvious that Hashem is speaking primarily to the Yidden, to teach them that they shouldn't make the same error. So, the fire was a message primarily for the religious Jews, who believe in Hashem and seek His closeness. The fire served as a reminder of man's weakness, and that one can't do anything without Hashem. Our success is from Hashem, and our gratitude is to Him.

6. The Chazon Ish (Igros 3:1) said, "I want to discuss the foundations of emunah because emunah is the entire essence of man. A weak perception of emunah is the root of the illness of negative and foolish thoughts that enter the courtrooms of a person's heart."

The Rebbe of Toldos Aharon zt'l (introduction to Divrei Emunah) answers that the Gemara (Sanhedrin 97a) states that in the generation before Moshiach comes, it will be hard to find "truth", and there will be a lot of falsehood in the world. This describes our times. There is so much *kefirah* in the world, and people shout falsehoods. We can therefore explain that the pasuk is saying **שְׁקָרָךְ רְדָפָיִנִי**, at that time when falsehood pursues us, **עִזּוּנִי**, and we need Hashem's help to save us, the only solution is **כִּלْ מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֶמְוּנָה**, to focus on emunah.⁶

ולמִעּוֹן תְּסִפְרָ בְּאֹזְנֵי בָּנֶךָ וּבָנֶךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר (10:2) הַתְּעַלְּתָה בְּמִצְנָאִים וְאֵת אָתְתִּי אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַתִּי בָּם וַיַּעֲשֵׂם כִּי אַנְּנִי הָ

"In order that you tell into the ears of your son and your son's son how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and [that you tell of] My miracles that I placed in them, and you will know that I am Hashem."

Why was it necessary to speak specifically into the *ears* of the children and grandchildren? Reb Yosef Shlomo

Kahaneman zt'l, the Ponovizher Rav zt'l, explains that when there is a lot of noise around, and you want someone to hear what you are saying, you have to raise your voice and speak *directly into the ear of the listener*. In Mitzrayim, there was a lot of *kefirah*. Pharaoh said (Shemos 5:2) **מַיְהֵא אֲשֶׁר אָשְׁמָע בְּכֶלְיוֹ** "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice." It wasn't only Pharaoh who spoke that way in Mitzrayim, but all of Mitzrayim shouted that they didn't know of Hashem. When there is so much noise in the world, and you want to teach emunah, the only solution is to shout it into the ear of the listener; otherwise, he won't hear what you are saying.

The Ohev Yisrael, the Apte Rav zt'l, explains the reason we have a mitzvah of **וְהִנֵּת לִבּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא** (13:8), to tell the story of yetzias Mitzrayim to one's children at the Seder. He writes, "The truth is that even if a child asks his father about *yetzias Mitzrayim* any other time of the year, the father must answer him. Nevertheless, the holy Torah teaches us that throughout the year, even if you tell your son the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the words won't settle in the child's heart. [He won't fully accept the concepts of emunah that you tell him]... The Haggadah teaches, **לֹא אָמַרְתִּי אֶלָּא בְשָׁעָה שֵׁשׁ מֵצָה**, 'the time to speak about *yetzias Mitzrayim* is when matzah and *maror*

are in front of you.' This is because at the Seder the mind is open for comprehending... and *emunah* and *bitachon* hover over all Jewish people. At this time, when you tell your son the entire story, your words will certainly enter his ears, and he will truly believe in *yetzias Mitzrayim*. The rest of the year, when there's darkness in the world, the son isn't able to receive the father's words properly to believe."

This lesson is like what we wrote above. It is hard to teach emunah when there is "noise" in the world screaming the opposite. Therefore, the Ponovizher Rav explained, the Torah says to speak emunah *into the ears of the children*. In other words, make sure they hear the message, because it is so easy to miss it. This is why we must take advantage of this holy night of the Seder to speak about yetzias Mitzrayim. It is a night our words are mesugal to be heard.⁷

Caution with Bein Adam l'Chaveiro

It states (11:7) **וְלֹא יִשְׁרָאֵל לֹא יָחִזְקֶל בַּלְעָד לְשָׁנוֹ**, which means that on the night of yetzias Mitzrayim, no dogs barked before a Yid. Hinted in these words is another lesson. **וְלֹא יִשְׁרָאֵל לֹא יָחִזְקֶל בַּלְעָד לְשָׁנוֹ** alludes to sharp words. The Ruzhiner zt'l (Irin Kadishin) explains that the pasuk hints at the prohibition of speaking sharply and unkindly to one's fellow man.

7. In particular, mothers have the power to impart emunah in their children. Before makas arbeh, Pharaoh was about ready to permit the Yidden to serve Hashem in the desert. But he made a condition. He said וְאַמְرָךְ אֶלָּם לֹא עָדֹר אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים מֵאֱלֹהִים הַחֲלִילִים, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּנֵרֶב וְבְנֵי יַעֲמֵד גָּלָךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְבְנֵי יְהוּדָה גָּלָךְ יְהוָה הָלָן, וְאַמְרָךְ (10:8-11) [Pharaoh] said to them, 'Go, worship Hashem your G-d. Who and who are going?' Moshe said, 'With our youth and with our elders we will go, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our cattle we will go, for it is a festival of Hashem to us.' ... [Pharaoh] said to them... " Not so; let the men go now and worship Hashem, for that is what you request."

Pharaoh refused to let the women and children go along. Moshe replied בָּנָינוּ וּבָנָנוּ... גָּלֵל, "With our sons and with our daughters... we will go." He said that the women and the children must also go to the desert to serve Hashem. The Ridvaz of Slotzk zt'l explains the root of their debate. Pharaoh knew that he didn't have any power over Bnei Yisrael when they kept to their emunah. Pharaoh also knew that the transmission of emunah is dependent on the mother's influence. Therefore, he didn't permit the women to go to the desert to celebrate the holiday. He feared that during this three-day holiday, the nation would become stronger in their emunah, and Pharaoh didn't want the women to benefit from it. He wanted them to remain in the impure land of Mitzrayim, and then, the emunah that the husbands bring back won't last for long. (באים והנוגת להר"מ שטרנברג שליט"א)

One should always speak sweetly, kindly, and softly, as it states (Mishlei 15:1) **מְשֻׁנָּה כְּךָ יִשְׁיבְּ חַנְחָה**, "A gentle reply turns away wrath."

לֹא יִתְּהַנֵּן, don't be sharp with your tongue, rather **לְבָב** – **בָּבָב**, your mouth should be kind as your heart is kind.

This lesson is related to the makah of Choshech. Regarding Choshech, it states (10:23) **לֹא רָאָה אִישׁ אֶת אֶחָיו**, "A person didn't see his brother." The Chidushei HaRim zt'l explains that the greatest darkness is when

it is so dark that one doesn't see his fellow man. This is when one is only interested in himself and doesn't care about helping others.⁸

The pasuk then writes, **וְלֹא קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתְחַפֵּשׂ**, "no one rose from his place". The Chidushei HaRim explains that this means that one doesn't receive aid from heaven. Because there is a rule: When one helps others, Heaven helps him. When one doesn't help others, **וְלֹא קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתְחַפֵּשׂ**, he can't get up. He doesn't receive the salvations he needs.⁹

8. Rashi (10:21) writes that one could actually touch the darkness of Choshech. Rashi writes, **שָׁהָה כְּפֹל וּמְכֹפֵל**, and **וְעַב עַד שָׁהָה בּוֹ מִמְשָׁה**, "It was doubled and quadrupled and thick until it had substance." This is the meaning of the words **מִמְשָׁה**. The darkness was so thick, it had a **מִמְשָׁה**, substance. Yalkut Shimoni says that the thickness of the darkness of makas Choshech was the thickness of a *dinar* coin. There is a popular *vort* that this hints that money is often the cause of the darkness, until **אֶת אֶחָיו**, "A person didn't see his brother." This is because when a person's primary focus is his desire for money and wealth, he cannot hear the cries and requests of the poor and needy. He acts like he doesn't see them.

In contrast (10:23) **וְלֹא בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִיה אָרוֹן בְּמִשְׁבְּתָם**, "For all Bnei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings." This means that the way of Bnei Yisrael is to see their fellow man, and try to help in any way they can (see Chofetz Chaim, Shaar HaTevunah, ch.5).

It is important to consider your fellow man as righteous and essential. With that thought in mind, you will want to help him. Although everyone has faults, consider how a person views himself. Everyone knows his own faults, yet he judges himself favorably, *l'kaf zechus*. One might even consider himself to be a tzaddik; he sometimes believes there is no one greater in the world than him. This is despite all his faults, because he focuses on his good points. This is how we should view our fellow man. This is how to perform the mitzvah of **וְאַהֲבָתָ לְרַעַךְ מִשְׁׁךְ**, to love our fellow man like yourself.

Reb Pinchas of Koritz zt'l (Imrei Pinchas, ט"ש) says that every Yid possesses a holiness and a uniqueness that no one else in the world has. When we think about this, we are inspired to help our fellow man, for his importance is enormous.

Reb Elya Lopian zt'l related that in the city of Anipoli, two neighbors were locked in dispute for decades. One of them became ill, and he requested that they bring the neighbor to him, because he didn't want to die in the midst of a machlokes. The neighbor was very happy when he heard about the request. Finally, after years of dispute, there would be peace. Standing at the bedside of the ill person, they both cried. They knew that this was the last time they would meet until the coming of Moshiach. The ill person asked his neighbor to come closer to him, as he wanted to kiss him. The neighbor lowered his head, and then he suddenly shouted in pain. The dying person bit off his ear!

The ill person smiled and said that after taking revenge, he could die in peace.

Reb Elya Lopian repeated this story to show the dreadfulness and depth of bad middos. Even on his deathbed, his only desire was to take revenge.

9. Reb Asher Fruend zt'l appointed a yungerman to care for an unwell person. After a while, this yungerman told Reb Asher that he couldn't do it anymore. It was too hard for him. Reb Asher replied, "You need a *tikun*, and he is your *korban*." In other words, the yungerman thought he was helping the ill person. Actually, it was the other way around. The ill person was helping him. The yungerman needed a rectification, and the ill person, whom he served, helped him attain his perfection.

A person's greatness is measured according to the extent to which he helps others. The following is a hint at this concept:

Moshe Rabbeinu said to Hashem (Devarim 3:24) אַתָּה הַחֲלֹתָ לְהַרְאֹת אֶת עֲבָדֶךָ אֲתָּה גָּדוֹלָךְ, "You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness". Rashi writes, אֲתָּה גָּדוֹלָךְ – זוּ מִדְתָּן טוֹכָן, "Your greatness is Your goodness." We can say that the same applies to people. They are called "great" when they help others. A kind person is truly a great person.¹⁰

There is a lesson repeated in the name of the Apter Rav zt'l (Yalkut Ohev Yisrael) and in the name of the Ruzhiner zt'l (Irin Kadishin). It states in this week's parashah (13:2) קְרַב לְיִצְחָרֶל בְּכָרֶב פֶּטֶר, "Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first issue of every womb among Bnei Yisrael, of man and beast, is Mine."

קְרַב לְיִצְחָרֶל בְּכָרֶב, if a person wants to be kadosh for Hashem, consider everyone to be greater than you. בְּכָרֶב, the first thing you should do is בְּאַדְםָן בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, have rachmanus on Bnei Yisrael. Perhaps you will say בְּאַדְםָן, וּבְבָנְמָה, that he isn't a person, just an animal [so why should I help him?] לִי הוּא, Hashem says that that is for Him to determine. Your mission is to have rachmanus on all Yidden.

It states (Shemos 2:6) וַתַּפְתַּח וַתַּרְאָה אֶת הַיּוֹלֵד וְהַנָּגָה, "She opened [the teivah] and saw the child. Behold, a youth was crying. She took pity on him..." The pasuk states both הַיּוֹלֵד and הַנָּגָה. How can both terms

describe the same child, a הַיּוֹלֵד is a younger child than a הַנָּגָה? The meforshim ask this question (see Rashi).

Yalkut Shimoni and the Baal HaTurim answer that הַיּוֹלֵד refers to Moshe, and the הַנָּגָה refers to Aharon. Aharon (Moshe's brother) stood near Moshe's teivah to see what would happen to him, and he was crying from concern and worry. Basya said, מִילְדי הַעֲבָרִים זֹה. She was saying, "If a brother cares so much for his younger brother until he cries for him, I know they are Jewish children." For this is the essence of a Yid, to be concerned for the welfare of his brothers.

אַף לֹא תֵּצֵא אִישׁ מִפְתַּח בֵּיתוֹ עַד (12:22), בְּכָרֶב, "No man shall leave the entrance of his house until morning." If they leave their homes, they may be punished together with the Mitzrim when they were smitten with makas Bechoros. Rashi explains, "This tells us that after the angel had permission to damage, it doesn't differentiate between a tzaddik and a rasha."

Rebbe Shlome Zvhiller zt'l asks that if the angel doesn't differentiate between a tzaddik and a rasha, then it also won't differentiate between a first-born Mitzri or a second or third born. Why did those Mitzrim (who were born second or third, etc.) survive, and only the first-borns died?

Rebbe Shlomke replied that it is because they had the mitzvah of tzedakah and vatranus. Just before the makah, the Yidden

10. One Motzei Shabbos, after Reb Avraham Genichovsky zt'l returned home from shul, a neighbor, who didn't cover her hair, came to ask him advice about some important matter. This woman was an almanah, so after taking counsel, she asked Reb Avraham if she could stay to hear havdalah. Reb Avraham (who had sterling middos, and especially after hearing that she was a widow) immediately replied, "Of course, you can stay for havdalah."

The family wondered how Reb Avraham would say havdalah. The neighbor didn't cover her hair, so it was forbidden to say havdalah in front of her. The family thought, "Perhaps he will turn his face away from her? But that might embarrass her."

When the rav was about to pick up his becher for havdalah, he said out loud, "Now, everyone, let's face towards the Kosel Maaravi." This solved the problem because now he wasn't facing her when he said havdalah. The woman wasn't embarrassed because she thought the rav always says havdalah in the manner people say Shemonah Esrei, facing the place of the Beis HaMikdash.

went to them and asked to borrow clothes and utensils, and they obliged. The merit of their kindness, generosity, and *vatranus* granted them life and protected them from death.

We discover from this that even *resha'im* will be granted life and protection when they practice *chesed* and *vatranus*.

It states (13:16) **כִּי בָּחָזָק יְדֵ הַזִּיאָנָה מִפְצָרִים** "for with a strong hand Hashem removed us from Mitzrayim." Tzaddikim explain that **בָּחָזָק יְדֵ** indicates that people gave *chizuk* (חזק) to one another. In this merit, **הַזִּיאָנָה מִפְצָרִים**, Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim.

Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (Rabba ch.23) tells us that in Mitzrayim, the Yidden would gather, and "They would sit together until they became one group, and they made a bond together that they would perform *gemilus chasadim* with one another." In the merit of their unity and kindness, we were redeemed from Mitzrayim.¹¹

Changing One's Ways

It states (12:2) **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם**, which the Beis Avraham zt'l explains that Hashem gave us the ability to renew ourselves and become new people. These words were told to the Jewish nation when they were in Mitzrayim,

at the 49th gate of impurity. Even from that lowly place, Hashem told them, **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם**, that they could start anew.

The Gemara (Brachos 29) says, "Don't believe in yourself until your final day. Think about what happened to Yochanan Kohen Gadol. He was Kohen Gadol for eighty years, and at the end of his life, he became a *tzeduki* (heretic)." The Rebbe of Kotzk zy'a said that just as a tzaddik can change and become a *rasha* (as this happened to Yochanan Kohen Gadol), a *rasha* can also change his ways and become a tzaddik. The opportunity for change is always in our hands.

It states in this week's parashah that the korban Pesach in Mitzrayim should be eaten (12:11) **נַעֲלִיכֶם בְּרוּגִלִּיכֶם** ("Your shoes in your feet"). This is an unusual expression. It seems it should have been written as **רוּגִלִּיכֶם בְּנַעֲלִיכֶם**, "Your feet in your shoes"!

Therefore, the Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l explains that **נַעֲלִיכֶם בְּרוּגִלִּיכֶם** means we should place a lock (גִּילִּית) on our routine (נַעֲלֵי). If you are accustomed to a specific behavior that isn't good, place a lock on it and change your ways. It is possible to do so. **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם**, a person has the ability to change. The Torah says, **נַעֲלִיכֶם בְּרוּגִלִּיכֶם**, put a lock on your bad habits, and train yourself with better habits.¹²

11. In parashas Shemos, Pharaoh decreed (5:7) **לَا תִּאֱסֹפֵן לְתַתְּ תַּבְנֵי לְעֵם** "You shall not continue to give stubble to the people to make the bricks."

There is an extra **לְיַ** in **תִּאֱסֹפֵן**. Rebbe Dovid'l Lelover zt'l explains that **לְאֱסֹפֵן** means that Pharaoh forbade them from gathering. The Midrashim say that the Jewish nation would gather every Shabbos to strengthen their emunah and belief that Hashem would redeem them. Probably, at these gatherings, they also reminded themselves that they are a holy nation, descendants of the holy Avos and Imahos. And they probably set guidelines, so they don't become like the goyim by clinging to their native language, clothes, names, etc.

Pharaoh was frightened by these gatherings, so he commanded **לֹא תִּאֱסֹפֵן**, "No more gatherings!"

12. People asked a tightrope walker, "Which part of your stunt is the hardest to perform?" He replied that reaching the end of the rope was the hardest because there he had to turn around. Turning around is always tricky.

One year, before starting the Seder, the Yismach Yisrael of Alexander zt'l announced, "If one doesn't believe that he has the potential tonight to change from being a *rasha* to being a tzaddik, he is the *rasha* of the Haggadah."

An egg can change and become a chicken, or it can remain the same and be cooked and eaten as an egg.

The second plague was *tzefardeia*. Rashi writes that one giant frog came out of the Nile. Every time the Mitzriyim hit it, many frogs came out of it. Why did they continue hitting it if they saw the results?

The Steipler Gaon zt'l answers that this is human nature. People have bad habits; they know that they only cause them trouble, and yet they keep returning to them. In response to this tendency, the Torah urges נעליכם ברגליך, to change your ways.¹³ We can do so, because *החודש הזה לכם*

It states (Koheles 4:13) טוב ילך מסכן וחכם מלך זקן, "Better a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king..." Rashi explains that the young child is the yetzer tov, and the old king is the yetzer hara. The Kotzker zt'l says that the *yetzer tov* is called a young child because children are ready to change their ways. The *yetzer hara* is called "melech zakein uksil," a foolish, old king, representing someone who isn't prepared to change his ways.¹⁴

Tefillah

The Rebbe Rayatz of Lubavitz zt'l said that people think all we have to do is wait for Moshiach, and when the time comes for our redemption, we will be redeemed. But waiting isn't enough. Tefillah is needed. In Mitzrayim, the time for redemption had arrived, but they also needed to daven to be saved. When they davened, the geulah happened.

Rabbeinu b'Chayei (2:23-24) writes, "The time for redemption had arrived, but they didn't deserve to be saved. They davened a lot to Hashem, and Hashem accepted their tefillos. This teaches us that the future redemption depends on teshuvah and tefillah. To be redeemed from Mitzrayim, they needed teshuvah and tefillah." Also, to be redeemed from our present galus, we need tefillos.¹⁵

Rebbe Leibele Eiger zy"a said that we place an egg on the *seder* plate to indicate that it is a night when one can change completely, or he can remain the same after the night passes. It's up to us.

13. The next words of the pasuk are ומקלכם בידכם. Following the path of remez, the Sar Shalom explains that means "your leniencies." The Torah tells us, *מקלכם בידכם*, take these leniencies into your hands. Get a grip on yourselves and on the situation, and stop being lenient in the areas where you should be stringent.

14. *החודש הזה לכם* teaches us that the dates of the calendar are dependent on the determination of beis din. When beis din declares it rosh chodesh, it is rosh chodesh. When they announce a leap year, it becomes a leap year.

The Midrash comments on that, "Everything is in our hands! Everything is in our possession."

The Chidushei HaRim zy"a says, "If a person would know what this means, and what is in his hands, he wouldn't waste a minute." He can accomplish so much with his tefillos and mitzvos. If he knew what he accomplishes, he would be very active in avodas Hashem at all times.

15. Many Yidden were drafted to fight the war during World War One. At that time, when communication was difficult and limited, some women didn't know whether their husbands were alive or dead for many years. A group of women once came to the Chofetz Chaim zt'l, crying and pleading that he pray for them. The Chofetz Chaim cried with them, blessed them, and told them they should also daven. He said, "Go to the beis medresh, open the aron kodesh, and pour out your heart before Hashem. Hashem wants you to daven, as it states (Yeshayah 62:6-7) אל דמי לכם ואל תתנו דמי לו אל תחרישי," "Be not silent. Give Him no rest..."

The women asked the Chofetz Chaim, "What should we say?" These women were accustomed to saying the tefillos printed in Yiddish in siddurim, such as the *techinos* said after lighting the Shabbos lecht and the *techinos* for motzei Shabbos. They didn't know how to articulate their own tefillah. The Chofetz Chaim told them, "Tell Hashem what is lying on your heart. When a child is hungry, he doesn't look for *techinos*. He cries in his own words. Do the same. Pour out your heart before your compassionate Father" (Sichos Chofetz Chaim vol.2, p.21).

Sometimes, when one is going through challenges, he can't open his mouth to pray before Hashem. He is wrapped in bitterness and can't bring himself to daven. All he can do is shout, "Oy vay!" from the depths of his heart. The Yismach Yisrael (Shemos 2, quoting his father Rebbe Yechiel of Alexander zt'l) writes that this tefillah and moan is also sufficient.

The Yismach Yisrael writes, "This gives chizuk to every Yid when he knows that Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees his troubles and sufferings, and he knows that Hashem recognizes how hard it is for him to pray. Due to his many tzaros and aveiros, he almost can't open his mouth in prayer before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Nevertheless, he shouldn't give up. He should shout out to Hashem with all his strength. Even if all he accomplishes with his tefillah is a single *krechtz* before Hashem from the depths of his heart, Hashem will take into consideration his suffering, low level, and confusion. With Hashem's immense compassion and kindness, He will listen to this moan and save him."

The Maor v'Shemesh (ד"ה ויהי בימים הרבים הָם) writes, "There are times that the tefillah can't go up because the *mekatrigim* create an iron wall, as it states (Yeshayah 59:2) כי עונותיכם מבדילים, 'Your sins separate...' The Zohar says that the solution is to shout from the depths of the heart, with all one's kavanah - a shout, without words. This is called *זעקה* and *שוועה*. The malachim, the *mekatrigim*, don't know about this tefillah; only Hashem Himself

knows. Hashem listens to this shout because it was emitted with truth and from the depths of the heart, and Hashem answers this tefillah. It is a more significant tefillah than a tefillah said with letters and words, which the malachim understand and can be *mekatreg* and preventing. This doesn't occur when one shouts out to Hashem without saying words. Only Hashem, Who knows man's thoughts, understands, and Hashem will fulfill the desires of his heart."

Kedushah

Choshech, darkness, was the ninth plague. It is known that the ninth sefirah is called Yesod,¹⁶ which is associated with kedushah, tznius, pure thoughts, pure eyes, and the like.

וַיְשִׁבַּת מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדָו עַל הַשְּׁמִינִים נִזְהָר (10:22-23) It states (10:22-23) חִשְׁקָן אֲפָלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִזְרָחִים שְׁלֹשֶׁת יְמִים... וְלֹכֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אָוֹר בְּמָוֹשְׁבָתָם, "Moshe stretched forth his hand toward the heavens, and there was thick darkness over the entire land of Mitzrayim for three days.... but for all Bnei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings." This plague brought on a contrast. It brought darkness for the Mitzrim and light to the Yidden. Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen (Tzidkas HaTzaddik 174) explains that this is the nature of the sefirah Yesod (kedushah, tznius, shemiras einayim, etc.) When one is cautious with Yesod, he will have a lot of "light" and holiness in his life. This explains why this makah brought light to the Jewish nation. However, those who contaminate Yesod (they aren't cautious

The women's tefillos were certainly special because the Rabbeinu b'Chayei tells us that when one davens from amidst his tzaros, there is a greater likelihood that his tefillos will be answered. This occurred in Mitzrayim, they shouted to Hashem from amidst their tzaros, and Hashem accepted their tefillos. As it states (Shemos 2:23) וַיָּנָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הַעֲבָדָה וַיַּעֲקֹב וַיָּעַל שׁוֹעֲתָם אֲלֵלָלִים מִן הַעֲבָדָה, "Bnei Yisrael sighed from the labor, and they cried out, and their cry ascended to Hashem from the labor."

The Or HaChaim explains that because they shouted from amidst their sorrow and suffering, Hashem answered their tefillos.

Sometimes people think, "I am going through such hardships, I don't have *yishuv hadaas*. I just can't focus on tefillah now." But the truth is exactly the opposite. If you are going through hardships, this can be the best time for tefillah because you can say a tefillah from the depths of your heart.

16. The sefiros are as follows: כתה, חכינה, בינה, חסד, נבורה, תפארת, נצח, הוה, יסוד, מלכות. Yesod, is the ninth.

with their kedushah, etc.), the result will be darkness. One feels darkness in his life and in his avodas Hashem. This explains why it was dark for the Mitzrim.¹⁷

During these days of Shovavim, it is good to make kabalos tovos to improve on areas of kedushah. The result will be light and joy.¹⁸

17. When a person is cautious with his kedushah, his life will be filled with light and joy. Nothing can quench a person's thirst for happiness and satisfaction as much as kedushah.

I heard the following mashal from a baal teshuvah. He said that he experienced the lesson from his own life story. The mashal is about a person who put together a puzzle, but one piece was missing. He didn't have the right piece to finish the puzzle, so he pushed in another piece. However, since it isn't the piece the puzzle needs, it doesn't fit right. Trying to push it in won't make it fit. It will protrude and won't truly complete the puzzle.

The nimshal is about a person who feels something is lacking in his life. He isn't satisfied. It is like there is a "hole" in his life, and he wants to find the piece, the approach, that will satisfy him. If he tries to fill the void with forbidden thoughts, sights, and the like, it can be compared to trying to complete the missing piece of a puzzle with the wrong piece! It won't solve the problem. The thirst and the lack will remain. It will even get worse. The solution is to fill himself with Torah and mitzvos. That always satisfies a person's needs.

18. Reb Yaakov Edelstein zt'l said that people once asked him to say a hesped for an irreligious Yid. He didn't know this person, so he inquired about him to hear about his life and his qualities. Most of the things he heard weren't matters worthy of mention at a hesped. But then he heard that he didn't smoke on Shabbos. His friends remembered that when they were together with him on Shabbos afternoon, he would wait until there were three stars before he lit his cigarette. He made this *kabbalah* when he was serving as a marine in the British Navy. (This was in the days when Eretz Yisrael was part of the British Mandate.) Once, they were at sea, and the ship capsized in the middle of the ocean. At that moment, the spark of his Jewish soul ignited, and he cried out, "Ribono Shel Olam, if I survive, I promise I won't smoke on Shabbos anymore." Immediately after he said these words, a British pilot noticed him, lowered a ladder, and rescued him. We learn from this story the strength and potential of a good *kabbalah*.

Reb Yaakov Edelstein zt'l said that the Minchas Chinuch (mitzvah 360) asks whether teshuvah helps without saying viduy. From the story, said Reb Yaakov Edelstein, we have proof that teshuvah helps without viduy. This man didn't say viduy; he just made a *kabbalah* to improve in one way, and Hashem performed a miracle for him and saved him.

We add that if a person is drowning in a sea of taavos or worries, or if a person is drowning in the sea of the yetzer hara, the counsel is that he should accept on himself a *kabbalah* tovah, something that he wouldn't generally do, and heaven will immediately throw him a rope to rescue him.

We heard a story from an honored and prestigious rav who took it upon himself to help a bachur return to the path of Torah. The bachur came from a good home, but he fell from level to level, until he was being mechalel Shabbos, r'l. The rav advised him that when he finishes a cigarette on Shabbos, he shouldn't extinguish it. He should let the cigarette blow out on its own, because extinguishing a cigarette is an aveirah on Shabbos (אבהה).

The bachur replied, "What will I gain from that? I am anyway a baal aveirah. I am not keeping Shabbos anyway!" They debated the matter, whether there is any gain from keeping this one mitzvah, although he transgresses others. Finally, the rav said, "If Reb Chaim Kanievsky will tell you that it is worthwhile for you not to extinguish the cigarette, will you listen to him?"

"Yes, I will", the bachur said.

They went to Reb Chaim's home. As soon as they entered, Reb Chaim lowered his eyes because it is forbidden to look at the face of a rasha, and the bachur was mechalel Shabbos. The rav said to Reb Chaim, "Please tell us: This bachur has fallen into a sad state of aveiros, and he smokes on Shabbos, r'l. Is there

Kabbalos towards improving one's ways don't necessarily need to be large. Often, it is better to take on a small *kabbalah*, and that will be sufficient.

Rashi (12:4) writes, "The time came to redeem the Jewish nation, but they didn't have mitzvos to merit to be saved... Hashem gave them two mitzvos: the blood of Pesach and the blood of milah, because they circumcised themselves that night... They were attached to avodah zarah, so Hashem told them, **נשטו דיכם מאיללים וקחו צאן של מצוה**, "Leave the avodah zarah and take a sheep for the mitzvah."

It would seem that two mitzvos are too few to take on, but it was enough in Hashem's eyes. We do the maximum we can, which is all Hashem asks of us.

The Sfas Emes explains that Hashem takes the few good deeds that we have, He magnifies them, and that saves us.

It states (12:23) **וְפָסַח הָעַל הַפְּתַח**, and the Targum explains that Hashem considered the doorway to be very large. The relatively

small deed became very large in Hashem's eyes, sufficient to save them. The Sfas Emes quotes this Targum (although I searched for it and didn't find it) and the Sfas Emes writes, "This teaches us for future generations, if a person opens a small opening, it becomes like a large wall [in Hashem's eyes], and you will merit your redemption."

An example of a relatively small *kabbalah* is to learn for three minutes without interruption. You think it is small, but it is a great deed in Hashem's eyes. There are *yeshivos* during Shovavim that learn for hours without interruption. In Slonim, there are two sedarim daily, five hours each, without interruption. (The Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim discusses the great purity that comes from studying five hours straight, without interruption.)

However, if at the moment, the most one can do is study for five minutes without interruption, be aware that it is incredibly precious to Hashem. Don't think it is a small deed, because, as the Chovos HaLevovos writes, "What is small to you, is great in Hashem's eyes."

any benefit for him to let the cigarette go out on its own, and not to extinguish it?"

Reb Chaim raised his eyes and answered, "Certainly, there is a benefit."

The bachur replied, "I accept on myself that I won't extinguish the cigarette on Shabbos anymore."

Reb Chaim's eyes lit up. He looked at the bachur and gave him a brachah with all his heart.

Take note of what happened here: When they came to Reb Chaim, Reb Chaim lowered his eyes because it is forbidden to look at the face of a rasha. However, when the bachur made a *kabbalah* to improve his ways, in one small way, Reb Chaim looked at him. With a *kabbalah* tovah, the bachur became a new person. (In the end, this bachur did teshuvah sheleimah. This one good deed led to many others.)