

# Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita

Mishpatim

Shekalim



# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Mishpatim - Shekalim

## Salvation from Shabbos

In the parshiyos of Beshalach, Yisro, and Mishpatim, we find advice on how to merit *refuah*.

In parashas Beshalach, it states (15:26), ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול ה' אלקיך... ושמרת כל חוקיו כל המחלה אשר שמתו במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני ה' רופאיך, "If you hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and do what is proper in His eyes, and listen closely to His commandments and observe all His statutes, all the sicknesses that I have visited upon Egypt I will not visit upon you, for I, Hashem, heal you."

Rebbe Itzikel of Skver *zt'l* said that this is a difficult remedy (שארפע רעזעפט) because one must first keep the entire Torah, and then he attains a *refuah*.

In parashas Yisro we learn that when the nation received the Torah, everyone was healed. But that is also a difficult prescription for a *refuah* because it entails the acceptance of the yoke of the entire Torah.

But in parashas Mishpatim, an easier method is taught. It states (21:19), רק שבתו יתן, ורפא ירפא, all one needs to do is שבתו יתן, to keep Shabbos, ורפא ירפא and he will have a *refuah*.

The Shem MiShmuel (*Shlach* 5677) writes in the name of his father, the Avnei Nezer *zt'l*, "Even if someone has an ill person in his home, if he can refrain from complaining and from thinking about his troubles on Shabbos, the sick person will certainly be healed." This is based on the Gemara (*Shabbos* 12.), "When one visits the sick on Shabbos he says, שבת היא מלזעוק ורפואה קרובה לבוא, 'Shabbos we don't shout, and the *refuah* is quick in coming,' and Rashi explains, "The merit of Shabbos can bring you compassion if you honor Shabbos by refraining from feeling *tzaar* on this day."

The Gemara discusses an ill person, however, the same applies to all kinds of troubles and problems. If one doesn't have *tzaar* on Shabbos, the *tzaar* will disappear.

The Eliyahu Rabba says that this is *midah kneged midah*. On Shabbos one is supposed to feel, כאילו כל מלאכתך עשויה, as if he has nothing to take care of, and everything is perfect in his life (Rashi, *Shemos* 20:9). When one thinks that way on Shabbos, it becomes so, and Hashem removes all *tzaar* from him.

Masuk m'Dvash (Reb Yitzchak Parchi 6) writes, "We saw with our own eyes people who had a *tzarah* before Shabbos, and on Shabbos, they forgot about their *tzarah* entirely, and were happy with Shabbos, as is proper to be on Shabbos. They didn't have any distress or worries on Shabbos because of their *tzaros*, and they merited to be saved from their troubles in miraculous ways."

In his later years, Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman came to live in Eretz Yisrael with his family. He traveled by ship with all his possessions. They docked in Haifa. It was close to Shabbos, and he couldn't take his bags with him. The officers told him, "If you leave your luggage here, everything will be taken away. You won't have anything."

Even though Reb Yaakov Yosef was well aware of the loss he would endure by leaving his belongings without supervision, he was very happy on Shabbos and didn't think about it.

Even after Shabbos was over, they didn't rush to the port at the earliest *zman* of Motzei Shabbos. Instead, they waited for the *zman* of Rabbeinu Tam, like they did every week, and then they went to the port.

Over there, they found a guard standing near their bags. "They told me to stand here," he told them. And so, everything was there;

nothing was missing. Because when you are happy on Shabbos, all troubles go away.

The Menoras HaMeor (אלנאקר"ה, ה"ב פ"ה) tells a story of a woman that had two children who fell into a deep pit on Shabbos. She waited until her husband came home from the beis knesses. When he arrived, they ate and drank, and when they finished the meal, she said, "If you want, I will tell you something."

"Go ahead."

She said, "For ten years, I was guarding two gold crowns. Now, the owners are asking for the crowns back. What should I do? Should I return them or not?"

"Return them."

She said, "Your two sons fell into a pit and died. Now honor Hashem and don't be *mechalel* Shabbos." (She meant, "Don't be sad on Shabbos." They were the two crowns that the Owner requested back, ten years after they were given to them.)

They weren't sad that Shabbos. When it turned dark, they went to the pit to take their children out and bury them. Lo and behold, their children were alive and well! Because they worked on not having tzaar on Shabbos, they merited this *nes*.

Shevet HaKahasi (vol.3 180) writes that Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* didn't put on new shoes on Shabbos. He first wore them on the weekdays so that they would be broken into a little before Shabbos. He didn't want to feel the pinch that comes with wearing new Shabbos shoes. We should also seek to avoid feeling any distress on Shabbos. Shabbos is (*Bamidbar* 10:10), יום שמחה תכם, a day of joy, and when we are happy on Shabbos, the *tzaros* will never return.

## Salvations on Shabbos Shekalim

We've seen that every Shabbos grants us salvations, and this is especially so on Shabbos Shekalim.

The גניי ישראל from Rebbe Yisrael of Chortkov *zt'l* writes, "Every Shabbos of the four *parshiyos* brings down bounty to the world. On parashas Shekalim, the bounty for parnassah and wealth comes down."

Similarly, the Ateres Yeshuah (*Moadim, Mishpatim, Shekalim*) writes, שבת שקלים מסוגל, להמשיכת פרנסה, "Shabbos Shekalim is *mesugal* for attaining parnassah."<sup>1</sup>

The Imrei Yosef of Spinka said that since the *shekalim* (which were donated to the Beis HaMikdash) covered the cost of the *korbanos* for the entire year, similarly, on this Shabbos, we prepare the *tefillos* for the entire year. This means this Shabbos is *mesugal* for *tefillah*.

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

Reb Meir spoke with the Imrei Yosef on *erev* Shabbos and expressed his distress that he doesn't have children and that his wife is ill. The Imrei Yosef told him to give a *pidyon* of one hundred gold coins, and he will have a *yeshuah*.

Reb Zanzil also wanted to speak to the Rebbe on *erev Shabbos*, to tell him that his sons were ill, but there wasn't time to do so. So at the Friday night *tish*, the Rebbe blessed Reb Zanzil that his children should have a *refuah sheleimah*. And the Rebbe added that on Shabbos Shekalim, one can request that

1. The Ateres Yeshuah concludes with a Rashi at the beginning of parashas Mishpatim, and this is how he reads Rashi's words: אמר לו הקב"ה למשה, לא תעלה על דעתך לומר, אשנה להם הפרק, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe, 'Don't think it is sufficient that you teach them Torah, alone. You have to be *mashpia* parnassah on them, too, because לך נאמר אשר תשים לפניהם, כשלחן הערוך ומוכן לאכול, אם אין קמח אין תורה, without parnassah, there is no Torah. לפני האדם, You must give them a set table, prepared to eat. You must bestow parnassah to Klal Yisrael."

all one's tefillos be answered (he told them the explanation we wrote above).

Needless to say, both brothers had their salvation and became devoted chassidim of the Imrei Yosef.

### Time for Change

In the Gemara, the translation of שקל is to take. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l said that on Shabbos Shekalim, the *zman* is *mesugal* for one to take himself with both hands and improve (*Imrei Yehudah*).

In other words, it is a time for change – a time to take himself in his hands and begin anew.<sup>2</sup>

Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer zt'l looked forward to this time of year when we read the four parshiyos. "I want to meet with the Eibeshter," he said (*Imrei Pinchas* 4:225).

This is as we say in the *yotzros* of *Mussaf* on Shabbos Shekalim, אור פניך עלינו אדון נשא, we request that Hashem shine the light of His

countenance upon us. It is a time when we can keviyachol 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 name (הוי"ה)."

In *Megillas Esther* it states (*Esther* 7:8), ופני המן הופו, "Haman's face was covered." The Alshich HaKadosh explains that the ancient law of Persia (and of many other countries) was that if a person sentenced to death saw 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 pardoned. As we said above, 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.

Furthermore, it states (30:13), זה יתנו כל העובר על הפקודים... The Yerushalmi writes that כל העובר על הפקודים means "all those who

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2. Reb Mordechai is a travel agent who travels often. On one of his travels, he had enough points to travel first class if he added to his ticket just one hundred shekels. So he decided to do that because he was curious to know what it felt like traveling first class.

Reb Mordechai isn't wealthy, but he felt like a millionaire during the flight. He had a comfortable seat (he kept playing with all the buttons, trying to find the perfect position) and sat among the wealthiest people on board.

This rich feeling began already in 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 curiosity, or maybe it was because he was traveling to America to be mezakeh Yidden with the mitzvah of *hachnasas kallah*, so he figured he should begin his mission on the plane. Whatever his motives, he waited for a time when the stewards didn't notice, and he slipped into the first-class cabin and looked around.

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

Reb Mordechai said that at that moment, he felt like a poor man. His balloon had popped. He was pretending to be wealthy, and now someone who knew him realized the truth: that he was a poor shlepper.

Reb Mordechai said that he realized then that it isn't sufficient to *pretend* to be wealthy. If you want to feel rich, you have to be wealthy. There needs to be a drastic increase in your bank account, or people will recognize that you are "just that shlepper."

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 don't change and remain the same, you will continue to be "just that shlepper."

transgressed Hashem's commands" (and sinned with the *egel*), with the *machatzis hashekel*, לכפר על נפשותיכם, they will have atonement. Similarly, we attain atonement on this Shabbos.

The Sfas Emes (*Shekalim* תרל"ג) explains that this atonement is also applicable in our times because we *desire* to give the *machatzis hashekel*, and that is sufficient to attain atonement.<sup>3</sup>

The Midresh (*Tanchuma Tisa* 3) states that Moshe said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam! When I die, no one will 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 raise their heads."

### Adar

We say (in *Modim*), וודה לך... ועל נסיד שבכל יום, "We will praise you... for the miracles that You do for us each day and for Your wonders and kindness, which are constant." Hashem performs miracles for us daily, and we can perceive Hashem's hashgachah pratis and kindness each day. However, we often lose sight of and don't recognize these matters. The month of Adar is an excellent time to acquire this awareness. The Meor Einayim teaches that אדר stands for א' דר, the Alef, (the אלוהי של Hashem) dwells. During Adar, we discover that Hashem dwells in this world and leads it with *hashgachah pratis*. The *avodah* of this

month is to keep our eyes open and to recognize the א' דר, Hashem Who is here, with us, saving us, helping us all the time.

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Adar* 1:8) explains that when one believes in hashgachah pratis, he will succeed in life, and will be wealthy. Therefore, Chazal (*Beitzah* 15:2) say, הרוצה אדר שיתקיימו נכסיו יטע בהן אדר, "If one is seeking to ensure that his property will remain with him, he should plant an *adar*." He should implant into his heart the emunah that everything is from Hashem.

The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* says that אדר is *roshei teivos* for רעוא דרעוין אשתכח, "The desire of all desires prevails." The expression רעוא דרעוין means a time when Hashem's love and desire for us are expressed and felt profoundly. For example, *shalosh seudos* is considered the peak and holiest time of Shabbos, and it is called רעוא דרעוין. This love and desire for us are revealed in this month.

The custom of the tzaddikim of Ziditchov was that they wouldn't say *tachanun* the entire month of Adar. The Yeshuos Yaakov *zy'a* (the Rav of Lemberg) met with one of the tzaddikim of Zidichov (Rebbe Eizik of Zidichov *zy'a*) and said, "Give me a source for this custom of not saying *tachanun*. And please, don't tell show a source from kabbalah or chassidus. I want a halachic source."

Rebbe Eizik Zidichover replied that it states (*Esther* 9:22), והחודש אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה, "The month that was transformed for them from grief to joy and from mourning to a yom tov."

So we see that the entire month became a yom tov, and we don't say *tachanun* on a holiday.<sup>4</sup>

3. The Sfas Emes (*Shekalim* 5633) writes, "Chazal say that we should read parashas Shekalim now, even though we can't bring a *korban*. It seems that our desire to bring *korbanos* is accepted, just like in the past, because the *korbanos* were accepted due to the yearning and the desires of the Jewish people.... This devotion and the yearning exist until today -perhaps it's even stronger because we want to bring *korbanos* again as we had in the past. This is the entire purpose of creation; to yearn for Hashem from amidst the darkness."

4. A Holocaust survivor passed away recently at the age of ninety-two. Her son, who is a tzaddik and

### Rosh Chodesh Adar – A Time for Tefillah

The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l taught that Rosh Chodesh Adar is a good time for tefillah. He learns this from the Chazal that says (*Beitzah* 16:), הרוצה שיתקיימו נכסיו יטע בהן אדר, "If one is seeking counsel how to ensure that his property will remain with him, he should plant an *adar*."

The Chozeh of Lublin says נכסיו, "his property" refers to tefillah for the following three reasons:

1) A person's primary property is (his good deeds) and his tefillos, as these merits remain with him for eternity.

2) נכסיו means concealed, and tefillah is concealed. The Gemara (*Brachos* 6:) says, "Tefillah stands in the highest places of the world [concealed from man's sight]."

3) Tefillah is also concealed because we say *Shemonah Esrei* silently, discreetly.

Therefore we see that נכסיו refers to tefillah, and Chazal are saying, הרוצה שיתקיימו נכסיו, if a person wants his tefillos to be answered, יטע בהן אדר; he should pray on Rosh Chodesh Adar. "His prayers will go up...and everything will become *chesed* and *rachamim*."

It is good to say Tehillim on Rosh Chodesh Adar.

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chassid and a close friend of mine, told me the story of her survival:

This woman and her older sister were born in Germany before World War II. When cruel decrees against Yidden became commonplace, their parents took their two daughters and escaped to France.

But the Holocaust followed them to France too, and they were detained in a concentration camp. The father was permitted to leave the concentration camp each morning to go to work. The mother and the two daughters remained behind in the camp.

Once, one of the sisters (recently *niftarah*) broke her leg and needed to go to the hospital. Her mother brought her two daughters to the front gate and, in broken French, told the guard they needed to go to the hospital.

The guard replied, "You and your young daughter can go, but there is no reason to take along your older daughter."

Using a drop of French and hand movements, she explained to the guard that she could hardly speak French and needed her older daughter to help her communicate with the doctors. The guard accepted the explanation and allowed them out.

The doctors at the hospital said that it was a very deep wound and that they needed to operate. They stayed overnight, and in the morning, the doctors told them that the operation wasn't successful.

She was a cripple all her life. The operation probably just made matters worse.

The mother carried her wounded daughter back to the concentration camp.

As they approached the concentration camp, they were shocked by the silence. Even more surprising, there was no guard at the front gate. They heard from the few people who remained that there was a deportation a day before, and everyone was sent to Auschwitz.

They were saved because they were in the hospital due to the broken leg, and their father was saved because he was at work.

The family immigrated to Eretz Yisrael, and the woman was eligible for reparations money from the Germans for her wounded leg, but she refused to receive money for that. She would say, "This foot is mine, and I won't sell it to the *resha'im*. This foot saved our lives."

We learn from this story that even when something terrible happens, trust that it is for our benefit. This story is an example of נסיד שבכל עת עמנו, Hashem's miracles that He performs for us. May we merit seeing them, always!

Reb Sariyah Dibletzky *zt'l* (*Davar Nechmad*) writes, "Reb Eliyahu Cohen and Reb Chaim Abulafiyah *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. It is proper that those who fear Hashem should gather to make this *tikkun*."

The rule regarding spiritual matters is that if you can't do everything, do as much as possible. So, for those who cannot say the entire *Tehillim* on Rosh Chodesh Adar, it would be good for them to say some chapters of *Tehillim*.

### Kedushah

The Kedushas Levi (*Shekalim* ד"ה טעם) writes that each month represents another tribe. For example, Adar corresponds to the tribe of Yosef. (This is the reason there are sometimes two Adars. It is because Yosef became two *shevatim*, Menasheh and Efraim.)

Adar represents Yosef, renowned for his *kedushah*, so Adar is an ideal time for attaining purity. The Midrash (*Koheles Rabba* 1:4) states:

*Apikorsim* held many religious debates with Reb Yehudah ben Nikosa. Once, Reb Yehudah told them, "Let's arrange one more debate, and that debate will determine who is right once and for all. Whoever wins can beat his opponent's head with a hammer." They agreed to those terms.

Reb Yehudah ben Nikosa won the debate and did to his opponents as they agreed.

Reb Yehudah's students told him, "Rebbe, Heaven helped you! You won!"

He replied, "Please daven for me because I used to be like a chest filled with precious gems, and now I was emptied out, and I'm filled with *ashes*." He meant that after hearing all their heresy, he felt that he was affected by them.

We say this in response to those who say, "I use the internet, but it doesn't affect me. If negative ideas influenced the Tana Reb Yehudah ben Nikosa, we could be sure that the internet isn't good for our *neshamos*. Unwillingly, we pick up on beliefs and lifestyles contrary to the Torah.

Baruch Hashem, Yidden are cautious, to the best of their abilities, and this is nothing less than miraculous. To live in this generation without internet use, or even with limited internet use, is remarkable and something we can be proud of.

Chazal (*Megillah* 2:) say, "The ם and the ן of the *luchos* stood with a miracle."<sup>5</sup> We can explain that the *mem* and the *samech* are closed from all sides, and they imply erecting boundaries to guard ourselves against foreign influences. Chazal tell us בנס היו עומדים, that [inset of] the *mem* and the *samech* were held up with a miracle. This hints that one can't be cautious on his own without Hashem's help. You need a miracle to succeed in this realm. And that is the story of our generation. There is a desire to be cautious, and to a large extent, we are being successful. This is the result of the Jewish people's desire for purity and the *siyata d'Shmaya* Hashem gives us.<sup>6</sup>

5. This is because the letters were engraved on the *luchos*, and when you carve a *samech* or a *mem*, the middle should fall out, and it won't appear like a *mem* or *samech*. The center remained suspended, and that was a miracle.

6. Immediately after Matan Torah, Hashem teaches Mishpatim, the laws of money matters. We aren't taught how to keep yom tov, or how to daven and say brachos, etc. The first lesson is Mishpatim, money issues. The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* asks why doesn't *Shulchan Aruch* follow that same order and similarly begin with *Choshen Mishpat*, which discusses money issues! Why does *Shulchan Aruch* start with *Orach Chaim*?

The Satmar Rebbe answers that compromise or mediation, פשרות, is a primary principle of *Choshen Mishpat*.

## Boundaries

This week's parashah (ch.24) retells the story of matan Torah, and it begins with the mitzvah of *prishah*. Boundaries were set to determine how close the nation was allowed near Har Sinai, and they were commanded not to go beyond this border.

The concept of boundaries is also discussed in last week's parashah, as it states

(19:12), והגבלת... השמרו לכם עלות בהר ונגע בקצהו, "You shall set boundaries... Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge..."

The boundaries were a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. An explanation to this may be that to keep the Torah, one must make boundaries for himself; one must know how far he may go, and here he must draw the line.<sup>7</sup>

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It states (*Choshen Mishpat* 12:2), "It's a mitzvah to tell the litigants, 'Do you want the *din* [the exact law] or do you want a compromise?' If they want a compromise, the court makes it for them... A court that always makes compromises is praised." The *poskim* explain that compromises are preferred because it increases peace. Each party feels he was understood and was given a fair share.

The Baal HaTurim says that מצוה שיעשה פשרה טרם יעשה משפט is *roshei teivos* for משפט is "It is a mitzvah [for the judge] to make a compromise, rather than to pass judgment."

If *Shulchan Aruch* began with *Choshen Mishpat*, people would think that they could make compromises in *Orach Chaim*, as well. Compromise is applicable exclusively for monetary matters. But in all other areas of the Torah, the exact laws need to be upheld. *Shulchan Aruch* begins, יתגבר כארי, "Rise like a lion..." This sets the tone of halachah. One must be like a lion, prepared to scrupulously keep all the mitzvos of the Torah without compromise.

Often large, ten-passenger taxis are waiting outside the airport in Eretz Yisrael. One taxi goes to Bnei Brak, another one to Yerushalayim, and so on. The taxi driver waits until he has ten passengers and then goes on his way, and another taxi comes and waits to be filled up.

Once, a member of our *chaburah* was in one of those taxis at the airport. There were nine people in the taxi, and the taxi driver wouldn't go to Yerushalayim before a tenth man came.

The tenth person was a woman, and the only place she could sit was next to this *yungerman*.

For the sake of *kedushah*, he didn't want to sit next to a woman, so he took out his suitcase and said he would wait for the next taxi.

It took forty-five minutes before the next taxi filled with people and finally set off towards Yerushalayim. And then, a traffic jam slowed them down. The traffic jam was caused by an accident that involved the taxi that the *yungerman* refused to take.

His life was saved in the merit of his *yiras Shamayim*. As it states (*Mishlei* 10:27), יראת ה' תוסיף ימים, "The fear of Hashem will increase days."

7. When the nation left Mitzrayim, Hashem led them along a longer route, so the nation wouldn't be tempted to return to Mitzrayim (see *Shemos* 13:17). The Shlah Hakadosh writes, "Recognize and understand how much a person must contemplate and make boundaries and fences for himself, so he doesn't sin. Behold, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself distanced the nation so the nation shouldn't return to Mitzrayim."

The Shlah adds that this is implied in the pasuk (*Yeshayah* 57:19), שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב, "Peace to the far and the close." This suggests that someone who stays רחוק, far from an *aveirah*, is קרוב, close to Hashem.

It states (*Shemos* 19:23), הגבל את ההר וקדשתו. This means, "Set boundaries for the mountain and sanctify it." But we can add a wonderful hint. הגבל means boundaries or borders. The Torah says, הגבל את ההר, and this means to look at the letters that border the letters of ה"ר. The bordering letters are קדו"ש (because the letter bordering before and after *heh* are ה and ו. And the letters bordering before and after *reish* are ק and ש, which spells קדוש.)

What would you do if you were on the roof of a skyscraper that doesn't have a gate around its perimeter? Would you go to the edge to look down? Most people wouldn't. They are afraid. They would keep quite a distance from the edge. This is how we should be regarding aveiros. Keep at a distance, so you won't come to committing 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 to be extreme and mocked this custom. But those mockers would stand far away from the edge of a roof. So, it all depends on what you are afraid of. If you are scared of *aveiros*, you will make boundaries so as not to fall.

Why are boundaries important? The following story will explain:

Reb Shmuel Minkas *zt'l* once saw an elderly woman holding a siddur with the commentary of his Rebbe, the Baal HaTanya, written in the margins. "Please sell me the siddur," he pleaded. "I will buy you another one. Anyway, you don't read the commentary."

She refused to sell it, not even for a lot of money. She explained, "Sometimes, a siddur becomes torn or frayed, and then people can't read the words. However, if this siddur gets frayed, it will be the commentaries that are torn, but the words of the siddur will remain intact."

Reb Shmuel Minkas repeated this story and said that this is the concept of 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, we are liable of *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* however told him not to go. This was over a hundred years ago when religious institutions and *yeshivos* weren't yet established in America. The chassid returned to his Rebbe several times, pleading that the Rebbe permit him to go to America, but the Rebbe refused.

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

The Rebbe answered with a *mashal*: A *talmid chacham* once saw an *am ha'aretz* holding a large siddur filled with secrets of Kabbalah. The *talmid chacham* said to 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 a few pages from the beginning of my siddur get ripped out, *chalilah*, I will still be left with *Adon Olam* and the rest of the siddur. But if I have your siddur, and the first page falls out, I've lost *Adon Olam*."

The Rebbe explained, "Over here, among *ehrlicher Yidden*, even if you might fall at times, the *Adon Olam* will remain with you, and you will remain religious. But I fear that if you go to America, the *Adon Olam* may drop out of your life."

This story helps us understand why it is wise to add more than the minimum requirement. When you add, even if you cut down a bit, you are still distant from *aveiros*.

Dr. Bick was a *maskil* (a follower of the Enlightenment movement), and he said to Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l*, "Why do you take the

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This is hinted in the words הגבל את ההר וקדשתו: Make a boundary around the laws of the Torah, וקדשתו, and you will be holy.

extreme route? Wouldn't it be better to compromise and follow the middle path? "

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

We were redeemed from Mitzrayim because of our boundaries. Chazal tell us that the Yidden in Mitzrayim didn't change their names, clothing, and language in order to retain their identity. It was their constant reminder that they weren't the same as the goyim.

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

The chassid came up with another solution. He wore the *shtreimel* throughout the week of *sheva brachos*. After the week was over, he continued wearing the *shtreimel* – even on weekdays. His wife told him 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.

There was a *chasan* who wasn't planning on wearing a *shtreimel* after his *chasunah*, and Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* asked him about that. The *chasan* replied, "Clothing doesn't mean anything to me. A *shtreimel* is a hat... They are the same to me. 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.' Yidden accepted the oral Torah, creating the bond between Hashem and the Jewish nation. But what is the Oral Torah

today? You might say it is the Mishnah and the Gemara, but these are already written. So, they are like the written Torah. Today, the *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 entirely falling away from *Yiddishkeit*."

Some people don't care enough to make boundaries for themselves, and automatically, at times, they commit *aveiros*. Sometimes they keep the Torah, and sometimes they don't. The Atzei HaChaim of Siget *zt'l* said about them, "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, other times not. And this can occur, *chalilah*, when people don't make boundaries.

The boundaries we make should be mixed with joy. Happiness is always very important. It isn't good when we consider boundaries as burdens.

Consider the following story:

Reb Shalom Shwadron's *zt'l mussar drashos* were spiced with humor, as he would comically mock destructive behaviors. Some people thought this to be *letzanus*, and told him it wasn't proper to speak in this manner.

Reb Shalom Shwadron wasn't certain whether they were correct, so he asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish said, "Give me an example of what you say at your *drashos*."

Reb Shalom Shwardon took a *shtender* and spoke exactly as he would before many

people. The Chazon Ish laughed and said, "You should always speak that way. With your humor, you will save Bnei Yisrael! In Lithuania, there were great *talmidei chachamim*, and they were outstanding *yirei Hashem*, too, nevertheless, many youths fell to Haskalah because the *maskilim* incorporated joy, while we didn't. We need a lot of joy today. We must serve Hashem with joy" (*Maasei Ish* vol.5 p.130).

### From Hashem

We will discuss three foundations of emunah:

- (1) Everything that happens to you is from Hashem.
- (2) Whatever people do to you is from Hashem.
- (3) Even what you do to yourself is from Hashem.

When people have this awareness, they lead happy lives because they know everything is for the good. They aren't angry at anyone and aren't upset with themselves because they know that even this is from Hashem.

It states in this week's parashah (21:13), והאלקים אנה לידו, "Hashem brought it upon his hand." This pasuk discusses someone who accidentally murdered his fellow man and must escape to one of the *arei miklat*. The Torah says clearly that Hashem caused it to happen.<sup>8</sup>

This isn't how people generally think. Instead, they blame others for the hardships they cause them, but the Torah tells us, black on white, והאלקים אנה לידו, it was destined from Above.

Similarly, it states in this week's parashah (21:18-19), וכי יריבן אנשים והכה איש את רעהו באבן או באגרופ... ורפא ירפא, "If men quarrel and one strikes his fellow with a stone or a fist... He shall provide for healing..."

ורפא ירפא means the one who hit his fellow man must pay the medical bills.

From the words (21:19), ורפא ירפא, the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 85.) says, מכאן שנתנה רשות, לרופא לרפאות, "This tells us that doctors are permitted to heal the ill."

Rashi explains that a doctor might say, "Hashem smote him; why should I heal him?" But the Torah tells the doctors that they don't have to make that calculation and are permitted to heal.

Now, let us think about this pasuk, ורפא ירפא. It refers to two people who were fighting, and one hurt his fellow man. So, who harmed him, Hashem or the person who smote him? Rashi writes that the doctor thought he shouldn't heal because Hashem smote.

So, we see that even what people do is also from Hashem. The Chofetz Chaim brings this lesson as proof that even what people bring upon others is ultimately from Hashem.

It states in this week's parashah (22:8), על זה Devarim Achadim (p.11) explains, אשר יאמר, כי הוא, that this person is responsible for what occurred. Or they say זה, this other person is guilty. The Torah corrects them and says, עד, האלקים יבא דבר שניהם, attribute what happened to Hashem. Instead of blaming others, recognize that it was *bashert*.<sup>9</sup>

8. Rashi explains that the person who died deserved to die because he previously purposely killed someone, but there weren't witnesses to convict him. And the person who killed him accidentally deserved to go to *galus* because another time he had killed someone by accident and there weren't witnesses to obligate him to go to *galus*. "Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings them both to the same place," so each receives what's due to him.

9. There are other sources in the Torah that teach us that even what people do, is all from Hashem.

The Chinuch (*Mitzvah* 241) writes, "One of the reasons for the mitzvah of לֹא תִקוּם (to not take revenge) is so people should take to heart that everything that happens to them – the good and the bad – was destined by Hashem. If someone harms you or causes you distress, believe that it is because of your *aveiros* and that Hashem decreed it. Don't take revenge; your fellow man isn't the cause of your suffering. The cause is your *aveiros*."

The Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* (הנהגות) writes, "It is good to remember, always, that everything is from Hashem, as Chazal (*Chulin* 7:) say, 'A person doesn't hurt his finger unless it was decreed in heaven.' Even when a person is hurt by a human being who has free will, this was also from Hashem. When a person lives with this emunah, it will be easy for him to overcome anger because he wholeheartedly believes that a human didn't hurt him."

Now, let's pay close attention to the following words that the Chozeh writes because it is a *chiddush*. He writes:

"And even when a person harms himself, it wasn't because of his negligence, etc. It was destined from above. Keep these thoughts in mind, and you will always remember Hashem."

People are upset with themselves when they make poor financial decisions and the

like. But the Chozeh reveals that even what he did to himself, by his own free choice, was decreed in heaven. So, don't beat yourself up with regret because this is precisely what was destined to be.<sup>10</sup>

### A Fiery Coin

*Midrash Tanchuma* (9) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu took a coin of fire from under His throne, He showed it to Moshe and said, זֶה יִתֶּנוּ, 'This is what they should give.'" We can explain that Moshe didn't have difficulty understanding what a *machatzis hashekel* is. Moshe's question was how it was possible for a half-coin to accomplish so much. How can such a small donation cause זְקִיפַת ראש, the heads of the Jewish nation to be raised?

Hashem showed Moshe a fiery coin to imply that 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 knesses ask in his *drashah*, "Why did Hashem show Moshe a מטבע של אש, a coin of fire? Hashem could have shown Moshe a 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*."<sup>11</sup>

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Yosef was sold to Mitzrayim, but he was never angry with his brothers for doing so because he believed it was designed by Hashem. Instead, Yosef told his brothers (*Bereishis* 45:8), ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אתי הנה כי האלקים, "And now, you did not send me here, but Hashem."

When Shimi ben Geira cursed Dovid HaMelech, Dovid said (*Shmuel* 2, 16:10), כי ה' אמר לו קלל את דוד ומי יאמר מדוע, עשיתה כן, "Hashem has [surely] said to him, 'Curse Dovid'; who then shall [have the right to] say, 'Why have you done so?'"

Tanya explains that Shimi was punished for being the *shaliach*, but what happened was destined by Hashem's will.

**10.** Once, Reb Michoel Ber Weismandl *zt'l* complained to Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitz (the Riyatz) *zt'l* that he could have saved thousands of people from the Holocaust, but evil people prevented him. The Lubavitzer Rebbe heard him out, and then he said, "And who did all of that?" This reminded Reb Michoel Ber that everything is from Hashem.

**11.** The Chidushei HaRim asked the Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* how this rav perceived this correct interpretation. The Kotzker Rebbe replied that the German Yidden excel in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, and therefore they can come to such explanations.

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 explains, "If a person wants to know whether Hashem enjoys his service, he should check to see if he has in his heart 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]. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, וּמֵרָאָה כְבוֹד ה', the sign to know whether he sees Hashem's honor and that Hashem is happy with his service, is, כאש אוכלת, if his heart is burning with *hislahavus* to serve Hashem."<sup>12</sup>

### Tests

The Divrei Shmuel had a gabbai named Reb Yisrael Zalman Shelovsky. One day, the Divrei Shmuel said to his gabbai, "I need two hundred rubles. Please bring me two hundred rubles." The gabbai was poor and didn't understand why the rebbe asked him to get him the money and not one of his wealthy chasidim. But the Rebbe's request was sacred to him, and he went to the

Rebbe's chasidim, told them of the rebbe's request, and eventually gathered the two hundred rubles that the rebbe requested.

Two years later, the Rebbe once again told Reb Shelovsky that he needed two hundred rubles. Once again, the gabbai collected that amount from the chasidim and gave the money to the Rebbe.

Two years later, this story happened again.

One day, Reb Shelovsky told the Rebbe that his daughter was about to get married, and he didn't have money for the chasunah. The Divrei Shmuel stood up, opened a safe, and took out six hundred rubles. "This is the money you collected and brought to me. You can have it for your daughter's chasunah."

The Divrei Shmuel explained, "I knew that you weren't able to put away money for your children's chasunos, so I asked you, three times, to give me two hundred ruble. Now you have money to marry off your daughter."

The Divrei Shmuel added that Hashem does the same. He wants us to be ready for the next world, so Hashem gives us small experiences of *yesurim* in this world, and

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Some explain that we give half of a shekel to teach us that Hashem wants us to do whatever we can, even if we can't finish the good deed. We do what we can, and Hashem completes the act for us.

**12.** Once upon a time, there was a very wealthy person. The only thing that matched his vast wealth was his stinginess. He often prided himself with his *yichus*, telling everyone that he was a descendant of the Magen Avraham.

Once, the Rav of the community spoke with this wealthy person and tried to convince him to give money to *tzedakah*. The Rav's passionate plea would have opened up anyone's heart, but the stingy man's heart remained cold and unmoved. Finally, the rav declared, "You aren't an *einikel* of the Magen Avraham!"

The man was upset, "Why do you say that I'm not a descendant of the Magen Avraham? Did you ever check my *yichus*? And besides, why is it your business? And what does it have to do with anything we spoke about until now?"

The rav replied, "Everyone who opens up the *Shulchan Aruch* knows that you can't learn *Magen Avraham* without the commentary *Machatzis HaShekel*. They go together. I tried for a half hour to get a half shekel out of you, but I failed. So, if there is no *machatzis hashekel*, I know the Magen Avraham is obviously also not here."

we come to the next world prepared and clean.

Note that the Divrei Shmuel asked his gabbai to bring him the money because he knew he would pass the test. Similarly, be aware that whenever Hashem tests you, that means He believes you can pass it. Hashem doesn't test us beyond our capabilities.

A student in the yeshiva of the Rebbe Reb Zusha received a message that his mother was just niftarah, and he should rush home to be at the levayah. The bachur cried, fainted, and he had no peace of mind. He wasn't capable of receiving this devastating message. Rebbe Zusha told him, "You don't have to go home. Your mother is alive." And indeed this was so.

A half a year later, once again a messenger came and said that his mother was niftarah. This time, the bachur accepted this bitter message with *yishuv hadaas*. Rebbe Zusha told him, "Go home for the levayah. This time it is true." And indeed, this time, it was true.

Rebbe Zusha explained that it wasn't ruach hakodesh. "It is just that when Hashem tests someone, he gives him the strength to stand up to the test. You were so bitter the first time; the test was beyond you, so I knew it couldn't be true. The second time, you could hear the sad news, and therefore I figured that it was true this time."

The "Yanuka" Rebbe of Karlin-Stolin (1869-1922) once saw that one of his wealthy chassidim was distressed and worried because he heard that a ship carrying his merchandise sunk in the sea. The Rebbe told him, "Don't worry. Your ship didn't sink."

The chassid calmed down, and later he heard that, indeed, a different ship had sunk, and not the one that was carrying his merchandise.

The Rebbe explained, "It wasn't ruach hakodesh. It is just that Hashem doesn't test someone beyond his abilities. I saw that you

couldn't manage this test, so I understood that it wasn't your ship that sunk."

This week's parashah discusses an *eved ivri* (a Jewish slave working for another Yid). When the yovel year arrives in the middle of his term, he is permitted to go free. Chazal tell us that in our times, there is no such thing as an *eved ivri* because there can't be an *eved ivri* without the opportunity to go free on yovel.

We can explain this because Hashem doesn't test us with tests beyond our ability. The Torah understands that for the sanity and well-being of the slave, he needs to hope for redemption. In our time, when yovel isn't a source of salvation, the *eved ivri* wouldn't be able to hope for freedom. The Torah says that he can't be a slave. Therefore, Hashem won't test the *eved ivri* with tests beyond his ability to pass.

### Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l*

The 25<sup>th</sup> of Shevat is the *yahrtzeit* of Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l*.

Returning from Reb Yisrael Salanter's *levayah*, his students calculated that until Moshiach comes, Reb Yisrael Salanter's *yahrtzeit* will always be during the week of parashas Mishpatim. They explained that Rebbe Yisrael Salanter's primary emphasis was to be cautious with *mishpatim*, with the laws of the Torah regarding money and *ben adam lechaveiro*. Thus, it is fitting that his *yahrtzeit* should always be the week we read about these halachos.

Reb Yisrael Salanter used to say, "Business ethics is the highest level possible. There is nothing greater."

A student asked Reb Yisrael, "Rebbe, in your opinion, who is greater, a Torah student who studies eighteen hours a day or a storeowner who does honest business?"

Reb Yisrael Salanter answered, "Surely the storeowner is on a higher level. However, since he is on such a high level, it would be

proper for such a person to study Torah eighteen hours a day..."

Once, Rebbe Yisrael washed his hands for bread, using a minimal amount of water. The students asked him why he did so. *Shulchan Aruch* (158:10) states, "Although it is sufficient to wash one's hands with a *revi'is*, it is preferable to wash with a lot of water. As Rav Chisda said, 'I wash with handfuls full of water, and I will receive handfuls full of goodness.'"

Reb Yisrael Salanter replied, "I don't want to become wealthy on account of a poor woman." He explained that a poor woman was responsible for drawing water for this household. Therefore, if he washed with a lot of water, it would require her to draw even more water.

This story is typical of Reb Yisrael's ways. In his time, people emphasized *yiras Shamayim* and stringency in keeping the mitzvos, but he noticed that when it came to *ben adam lechaveiro*, people were lax. He established the path of *mussar* to heighten the awareness that caring for the needs of others isn't less important than any other mitzvah in the Torah.

The following scene convinced Reb Yisrael that he must start the Mussar

movement. He was at a chuppah where one of the *mechutanim* had been a poor shoemaker. Someone came to him in the middle of the chuppah with a pair of shoes and asked, "Can you fix these for me?" This jealous person couldn't make peace with the turn of events that this shoemaker had become so wealthy so quickly, and now he was making a chasunah with a very wealthy family.

The man was so embarrassed, he died.

Reb Yisrael realized that he needed to raise people's awareness of respecting their fellow man and all areas of middos, so he began the Mussar movement.

Reb Yisrael once saw two children debating about who was taller. One of them pushed his friend off the curb and said, "You see? I'm taller." Reb Yisrael rebuked the child for doing this. You don't knock down your fellow man because you want to be taller.

People were talking about a recent niftar, saying he was a *tzaddik nistar*, a hidden tzaddik. Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said, "Perhaps he was a *nistar*, but then he wasn't a tzaddik. Because in this generation, if someone is a tzaddik, he must reveal himself so that he can help others."