

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Shlita*

Ki Seitzei



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Ki Seitzei

Battling the Yetzer Hara

We are now in Chodesh Elul, blowing the shofar and waging war against the yetzer hara. Like every war, we require strategies that will help us win this great battle.

Let's begin with understanding that the nature of this war is unlike any other war you know.

The goal of a war fought between countries is to conquer the enemy. When the opposing army is defeated, the war is over. But it isn't so with the war against the yetzer hara. When we win one battle, we are confronted with yet another war. It is a never-ending fight. Chazal (*Brachos* 61.) there call the yetzer hara "a fly" because, like a fly, after you banish it, it comes back again.

The beginning of this week's *parashah* (21:10) states, *כי תצא למלחמה*, "If you go out to war against your enemies..." and the *pasuk* alludes to the war we wage against the yetzer hara.¹ Take note that the *pasuk* doesn't state, *כי תצא לנצחון*, "When you go out to win," rather, the *pasuk* says when "you go out to war." The Tiferes Shlomo explains that this is because even when we win a battle, the war goes on. There is always another battle.

We quote the Tiferes Shlomo (beginning of this week's parasha):

"There are righteous people who battle against their yetzer hara and win, and a few days later, the yetzer hara returns, and they

must wage war with the yetzer hara once again! This confuses them, and they ask, 'What is this all about? I already had this war with the yetzer hara, and I succeeded!' They think they were finished with the yetzer hara, but the yetzer hara returns. They wonder what will be with them. The Torah discusses this situation and explains, *כי תצא למלחמה*, the reason you came down to this world, *למלחמה* is for war. This is your life's mission. For this, you were created." You cannot win the war once and for all and be at peace with the yetzer hara because then life wouldn't have a purpose. There are always new battles to be combated.

Although we try our best to win all wars, the nature of war is to lose sometimes. You win some, and you lose some. It is unrealistic to expect to be victorious every time.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe *zt'l* said, "A *potch* for a *potch*, the main thing is that **you** give the final *potch*." Sometimes the yetzer hara wins a battle, and sometimes you win. The main thing is that **you** should win in the end.²

Reb Yitzchok Hutner *zt'l* writes in a letter, "When we discuss the greatness of *tzaddikim*, we have a bad habit to begin at the end [of their lives] and discuss the great levels the *tzaddikim* reached. We skip the many years they struggled with their yetzer hara, and we think they were born *tzaddikim*. [For example], everyone praises the Chofetz Chaim's *shemiras halashon*, but who speaks about his struggles and ups and downs he

1. According to Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l*, the primary way to understand the *pasuk* is that it refers to the war we rage against the yetzer hara. It isn't solely a *drash*. This is because the Torah is eternal and applies to every generation. We don't rage *melchamos mitzvaah* in our times, so today, the *pasuk* primarily refers to when we go out to war against the yetzer hara.

2. In *Shacharis* we say, *המה כרעו ונפלו ואנחנו קמנו ונתעודד*, "They kneel and fall, but we rise and gain strength" (*Tehillim* 20). The *pasuk* implies that we also fall, but then we get up again.

encountered until he reached this level? This is just one example among a thousand. Leaving out this chapter of their lives creates a problem because when a *bachur* has a strong desire to grow in *avodas Hashem* and is confronted with a challenge or a downfall, he thinks he will never reach the levels of the tzaddikim who he wishes to emulate. He thinks that if he faces challenges, there is no hope for him. But that is ridiculous. Know, my friend, you will fall time and again, and there will be battles that you will lose. But in the end, you will emerge victorious and wear the crown of success on your head. The wisest of all men said, *שבעה יפול צדיק וקם*, 'A tzaddik falls seven times and rises.' The wise understand that the tzaddik rises *because* he fell seven times [and he kept lifting himself up again]. I beg you, don't think of tzaddikim as people who are at peace with their *yetzer tov*. Rather, when the *yetzer hara* is burning inside you, and you're struggling to overcome the *yetzer hara* those moments are when you are most similar to the *gedolim*, even more than when you are at peace with the *yetzer hara*."

Yeridah l'Tzorach Aliyah

A *bachur* complained to Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* (*rosh yeshiva* Kol Torah) that lately he fell from his high level and isn't studying like he used to.

Reb Shlomo Zalman told him a *meshal* of a person who brought expensive cloth to a tailor and asked him to turn it into a suit. The tailor began cutting the fabric at several angles.

"What are you doing?" the man shouted. "It's an expensive material. Why are you cutting it to pieces?"

Soon, he discovered that one cut turned out to be a pocket; another cut became a sleeve, and so on.

"Similarly," Reb Shlomo Zalman told the *bachur*, "we would want the path of growth in Torah to be an upward ascent, always

growing higher and higher, but it doesn't go that way. There needs to be ups and downs. There is no other way to grow in Torah."

This is based on the concept of *ירידה לצורך עליה*, that one must fall in order to reach higher levels. The descent is the path that leads to even higher levels.

When seeds are planted in the ground, they first rot and blossom only later. If they wouldn't rot, they would never grow. The Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* said that this represents the concept of falling to rise higher.

The Baal Shem Tov said that this is hinted at in the words (*Bamidbar* 13:20), *והתחזקתם*, make yourself strong and courageous. And when you find yourself falling, *ולקחתם*, take encouragement, *מפרי הארץ*, from fruit. Just as fruit seeds rot and then grow, you will rise from your fallen state and reach high levels.

In this way, the war against the *yetzer hara* differs from most wars. Generally, at war, when a side suffers a loss, it won't lead them to win the war. But when we battle the *yetzer hara* and fall and pick ourselves up again, we will reach even higher levels.

A moment of Success

In wars of this world (such as when one country battles with another), winning a single battle isn't so significant because only winning the war counts. The small successes in the middle of the war don't mean anything if it doesn't lead to victory. But this isn't how it is with our battle against the *yetzer hara*. Even a singular moment of success is worth celebrating.

Let's say a person has a moment of spiritual success, then he falls, and never picks himself up again. He doesn't lose that holy moment. It is significant. It was a moment of being with Hashem, and he will be rewarded for it. The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves *hischazkus*, when one strengthens himself to

do Hashem's will, even if it lasts only for a moment."¹³

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* writes, "One should rejoice immensely with every good deed he does for *avodas Hashem* because they are all priceless. He should decide in his heart that he won't sell it for all the money in the world. Even if it only lasts a moment, every word, thought, or deed will never be lost and is so valuable for him and perhaps for all Yisrael. Can there be a greater joy than carrying out the mission for what one was created? He should do whatever he can. He should seek to do more and more small deeds and great ones. As the saying goes, 'whatever one grabs at a sale, is worthwhile.'"

So, the Beis Aharon encourages us to rejoice with every good deed. Even if it stands alone, it is eternally valuable. In addition, this one good deed will *b'ezras Hashem* lead to many more.

Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* rebuked someone who thought he couldn't do *teshuvah*. He told him, "Rosh Hashanah, the *yetzer hara* becomes frightened when he hears the shofar because he thinks Yidden have done *teshuvah* and he is hearing the shofar of Moshiach. So, you see that the *yetzer hara* didn't give up on us. Although we never yet succeeded in doing proper *teshuvah* (and therefore, we are still in *galus*), the *yetzer hara* suspects that perhaps this year Klal Yisrael did *teshuvah*. So, if the *yetzer hara* believes in you, why don't you believe in yourself? Believe that you can do *teshuvah*."

There is always hope, and one good deed leads to the next.

Value Your Good Deeds

Reb Shlomo Karliner *zt'l* said, "The reason *yungerleit* don't grow in *avodas Hashem* is that they don't value their deeds." Instead, they compare their mitzvos to how *tzaddikim* (past or present) performed them and feel that their deeds are worthless.

But all our deeds are incredibly precious. The Arizal taught that a simple act that people do in the later generations can be as precious as the mitzvos the Tanaim performed. Although they performed mitzvos with the perfection that we can't even comprehend, Hashem measures each generation according to their tests. In our times, there is a lot of *tumah* in the world, making it extremely difficult to perform mitzvos. Therefore, each good deed means so much.

The Chofetz Chaim taught several *mashalim* to teach us the importance of our good deeds. We will list a few of them:

A baker complained that he doesn't earn enough money. He said, "After I deduct the cost of flour, sugar, firewood, etc. the profits are paltry. Furthermore, often people aren't satisfied with my breads. They complain that the oven was too hot and the breads burned, or that the bread is raw. As a result, some costumers don't return..."

Some years later, the baker was very happy with his *parnassah*. Someone asked him, "I remember you complaining about your *parnassah* a few years ago."

The baker replied, "Now is wartime, and there is a bread shortage. Everyone comes to me and pays triple the price for bread. No

3. Rebbe Gedalyah Moshe of Zvhil *zt'l* asked someone why he wasn't going to a certain *mussar drashah* that many people were attending. The man replied, "I know myself. Even if the speaker inspires me to do *teshuvah*, the *teshuvah* won't last for long. Soon afterwards, I will return to my old ways."

The Rebbe replied, "If someone swims up to a person drowning at sea, and says, 'I can save you for a half hour, but then you will fall back into the sea again,' would he accept the offer? Of course, he would. So why shouldn't you also seek to do *teshuvah*? It is worthwhile, even if it only lasts for a short while."

one complains about how the bread was baked. They are happy with what they get."

The Chofetz Chaim told this story to a *bachur* who felt disappointed with his spiritual level. The Chofetz Chaim explained to him that years ago, when there were great tzaddikim in the world, Heaven was picky. Only a perfect *avodas Hashem* was accepted. But today, there's a hunger in Heaven. They are waiting for good deeds. And when a mitzvah goes up to heaven, no matter how it appears, it is well-received and cherished. And the reward is enormous."

The Chofetz Chaim once reminisced about a time when there was so much money in the world that no one would bend down to pick up a copper coin. "But now people are poor, and they pick up copper coins." The Chofetz Chaim explained that when there are many tzaddikim, there is spiritual wealth, and only perfect deeds are accepted in heaven. But when only a few people serve Hashem, every good deed is welcomed and valued.

Yet, another mashal from the Chofetz Chaim:

A king was passing through his country's cities, and each city prepared for the king's arrival. Some cities conducted pompous parades in honor of the king, and some cleaned their streets and decorated the roads. But there was one city that had a terrible custom. When newcomers came to the town, they would throw stones at his carriage as he drove through the streets. The leaders of the cities gathered the people of that city and said, "In honor of the king's visit, preparations are going on in all cities of the king's kingdom. But we aren't going to ask too much from you. All we ask is that you don't throw stones."

The Chofetz Chaim explained that Hashem comes to visit our cities on Rosh Hashanah, and we must prepare ourselves for this great visit. In the generations of the avos and of the nevi'im, tana'im and amora'im, they prepared themselves

properly and went all out to honor Hashem, their King. But in our times, we don't ask for so much. All we ask is that we don't throw stones, that we avoid aveiros. For us, that is enough.

Reb Yankele of Pshevorsk *zt'l* from Belgium told me the following:

At the end of a Pesach Seder, 2:30 a.m., a scholarly son-in-law became very emotional when *Chad Gadya* was recited. His unlearned father-in-law watched his son-in-law's excitement and asked, "What is *Chad Gadya* all about?"

The son-in-law replied, "A father bought a goat for two *zuzim*. A cat ate it..." and told him the story.

The father-in-law didn't understand, so the son-in-law repeated the story. But the father-in-law still didn't understand. The son-in-law replied, "There are a lot of secrets in *Chad Gadya*."

The father-in-law agreed. "I always knew that *Chad Gadya* has a lot of secrets."

Now it was the son-in-law's turn to be impressed. "What secrets did you find in *Chad Gadya*?"

"I'm seventy years old, and you can't sell me *lokshen*. You can't fool me. A goat costs at least 100 *zuz*. Why was it sold for two *zuzim*? And why was it sold at 2:30 a.m.? Who does business at this unearthly hour? So, I understood that the goat was sold secretly on the black market. That market is open at 2:30 a.m., and in that market, one can buy a goat for two *zuz*."

The lesson is as follows: Some people feel dejected. They ask, "How can our mitzvos compare to those of tzaddikim generations ago? What can we accomplish with our paltry, imperfect deeds? However, just as at the black market, one can find amazing bargains. Similarly, when the world is dark, in a spiritual sense, every small deed accomplishes so much!

Tzaddikim tell us (some repeat it in the name of Reb Shlome Eiger *zt'l*) that **דובין אבא** refers to our Father in heaven. **אב דובין** means that our Father acquires us, as it states (*Avos* 6:10), "Hashem has five possessions in the world... one of them is Yisrael." When does Hashem acquire us? **בתרי זוי**, when we move slightly towards improvement. (**זוי** means to move.) For the few times we make a move in the right direction to do Hashem's will, Hashem acquires us and loves us.

How to Approach Avodas Hashem

When two countries are at war, military strategists can measure the strength of each country and assess which side has a better chance of winning the war. There are also computer models that can predict who will win the war.

But in the war against the yetzer hara, no computer program can predict the outcome because even small, simple deeds become difficult. If it weren't Hashem's command, they would be easy deeds to perform. But when it is a mitzvah, it suddenly becomes extremely difficult to do. A computer system would say, "Why won't they win the war? It isn't all that hard?" But the computer doesn't know how hard it is to serve Hashem.

The Chazon Ish gave an example of an esrog. Many Yidden try to buy a perfectly clean esrog, without even a *blatt fleck* (blotch), because this is a *hidur* (a more beautiful) esrog. Some people search for hours to find such an esrog. The Chazon Ish said, "If an esrog with a *blatt fleck* were considered more beautiful, one wouldn't be able to find an esrog with a *blatt fleck* without searching long and hard for it."

This is because whatever is a mitzvah becomes harder to do. For example, think about eating *melaveh malkah*. Who doesn't enjoy eating? But since it is a mitzvah, it is hard to do.

It is forbidden to sit down to a meal before davening *minchah* (as a precaution, not to forget to daven *minchah*)⁴. However, if one began eating before *minchah* (according to some opinions, this rule applies only if one started eating when it was still permitted to eat), he can continue the meal.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 9:) says, "When is it considered that he began the meal? When he opens his belt."

Before a meal, people used to untie their belts. If he did so, he may eat the meal and daven when he finishes.

The Gemara asks two questions:

- (1) Is it so hard to put the belt back on?
- (2) Let him daven without a belt!

The Gemara answers the second question: He can't daven without a belt because it states (*Amos* 4:12), **הכון לקראת אלקיך ישראל**, "Prepare yourself to meet your G-d, O Yisrael."

So, he needs a belt to daven. If he took the belt off for the meal, he may finish his meal and then put it back on and daven. But the Gemara doesn't answer the first question: Is it so hard to put the belt back on? (See *Tosfos*, who asks this question).

The Yid HaKadosh *zt'l* answers that after the Gemara established that it is a mitzvah to wear a belt to daven, we understand that it is hard to put on a belt. That is the nature of things: Whenever something is a mitzvah, it suddenly becomes difficult. It can be the easiest thing to do, but it is hard to do if it is a mitzvah.

Animals have interesting ways of catching their prey. The *sefarim* tell us of a particular snake that lies under a large tree and stares into the eyes of a bird perched high above. The snake can't climb the tree, but the bird doesn't know that and is afraid. They stare

4. There are many halachos and opinions on this topic, describing exactly when the halachah applies.

at each other until the bird is paralyzed from fear and falls directly into the snake's mouth.

Everything in this world can be used to learn lessons in avodas Hashem. Before discussing what can be learned from this snake, we will examine the method a certain fish uses to catch its prey. Reb Avraham Ginochovsky *zt'l* talked about a fish that spits black die into the water. The fish around it become confused, and then this fish can consume them.

Reb Avraham Ginochovsky explains that this fish uses the technique of fear. They cast fear on the fish around them, the fear paralyzes them, and now they can be easily captured.

The snake uses the same technique. The bird perched high on the tree is safe. And even if it wasn't, it can always fly away. But it becomes frightened by the snake's glare, and in a paralyzed state, it falls into the snake's mouth.

For avodas Hashem, we can't be afraid. Fear paralyzes us and prevents us from doing what we can easily accomplish. Therefore, trust that you can win the war against the yetzer hara, and you will succeed.⁵

Compassion

One of the mitzvos of this week's *parashah* is (22:10), לא תחרוש בשור וחמור יחדו, "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together." Rashi writes that this prohibition applies to all species. Two species may not be bound together while working.

The *Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos* and the *Baal HaTurim* explain that when the ox

chews its cud, the donkey will think it is eating. The donkey will be distressed that the ox is eating while it can't.

The Ibn Ezra says that the ox and donkey have different strengths, making it painful for them to plow together.

The *Chinuch* (550) has another explanation for the prohibition. He writes, "It is known that animals are greatly distressed when they are among other species. For example, birds of the same species flock together. [Why don't they mix with other birds? It is because they enjoy being with their own species and don't want to be with other birds.] It is worse when it comes to working. Animals don't like to work together with animals of another species."

This is the nature Hashem created in the world; therefore, the Torah forbids us to plow with an ox and donkey (or any other two species) together. We shouldn't cause animals distress and pain.

The *Chinuch* concludes, "The wise should learn from this a lesson in *mussar*, and shouldn't appoint two people of totally different natures, to work together. Such as a *rasha* and a *tzaddik* or to employ someone respectable with someone of a lower class. If the Torah prohibits working with animals of different species, it is certainly much harder for people with intelligence to work with people who are different from them."

We return to the *Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos* explanation. "An ox chews its cud, and the donkey will feel bad that the ox is eating while it can't."

What *mussar* can we learn from this?

5. Rebbe Mendel of Vorker *zt'l* said: Children play high-and-peek, and when a child hides, he shouts, "Ready." The child doesn't realize it, but by calling out "Ready," he helps the other children find him. They hear his voice and run to find him.

Hashem does the same. It states, ואני הסתר אסתיר, "I will hide Myself." This is when one goes through a hard time. When one is in such a situation it is like Hashem is shouting, "I'm hiding. Find me." And we know exactly where to find Him. He is there, in that situation.

Perhaps if you have something others don't, don't flaunt it before them, as this will cause them distress.

Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l advised, "If you have good children, don't speak about that before others because they might not have such good children, and this will cause them distress."

The similarity between the *Chinuch's* explanation and the *Daas Zekanim's* explanation is that they both explain the prohibition of לא תחרוש בשור וחמור יחדו to teach us to have sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Several other mitzvos in this week's *parashah* teach us to have sensitivity to the needs of others.

One example is (23:4-5), לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ה' גם דור עשירי לא יבא להם בקהל ה' עד עולם על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ומים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not marry into Hashem's nation. Even the tenth

generation shall never marry into the community of Hashem. This is because they did not greet you with bread and water on the way when you left Mitzrayim."

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (561) explains, "The Torah instructs us to hate Amon and Moav in our hearts because they are corrupt and cruel nations. They didn't offer bread and water to a large nation, weary from their travels, when they passed near their borders. Amon and Moav acted inhumanely and weren't concerned that other nations would discover their true bad nature. It is impossible for them to repent since their evil ways are ingrained in their essence. Such people aren't fitting to join the holy Jewish nation."

Some explain that the problem wasn't that they didn't provide bread and water because the Jewish nation didn't lack these staples, as they had *mann* and water from Miriam's well. The problem was על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם, that they didn't greet you with דבר, encouraging words.⁶ From this we see how

6. The tzaddik from Yerushalayim, Reb Zelig Braverman zt'l, made a *kabbalah* with his Rebbetzin to bake and distribute *challos* for free on *erev Shabbos* to the poor of Yerushalayim. Once, a very poor person came to his door late on Friday afternoon and asked for two *challos*. Reb Zelig replied, "I'm so sorry, but many people came today for *challos*. Nothing is left."

The man got very upset, and smacked Reb Zelig twice across his face. Reb Zelig immediately took the two *challos* that were on his table for his Shabbos meal and gave them to the poor man.

When the poor man left the house, the family asked Reb Zelig, "Why did you give away our *challos*? We need them for the *seudah*. And does he deserve to get anything after he slapped you?"

Reb Zelig explained that if this poor man slapped him, he probably needs the *challos* desperately.

Reb Zelig understood that the poor man's wife would be angry if he came home without *challos*, and there would be a serious *shalom bayis* problem in their home.

"As for us," Reb Zelig added, "we can manage this week with some matzos."

Then, Reb Zelig closed himself in his room, and from outside the door, he was heard saying, "Zelig, why did you need to be slapped twice before you learned that you must give away from your own to others?"

The father of a newborn baby wanted to name his child after his father, but his wife disagreed because a child with that name was niftar in their building three months before, and she feared that the name bears a bad omen. The husband explained to her that the name has nothing to do with the reason the child was niftar, and if they name the child with that name, it would be *kibud av*. But she was worried, so the father went to Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt'l for advice.

Reb Shlomo Zalman sided with the wife, that they shouldn't name the son with that name, but for a different reason. He explained, "I agree that the name doesn't bear bad tidings, but I have another reason

important it is always to offer a good word to your fellow man. It doesn't cost anything and goes a very long way.

From Above Heaven

In this week's *parashah* the Torah (25:19) writes, תמחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים, "Erase Amalek's memory from beneath the heavens..." The Tiferes Shmuel *zt'l* teaches an amazing idea:

Amalek says that things happen מתחת השמים, from under the heaven. They attribute everything to nature. They don't want to believe that Hashem, Above, arranges

everything. The Torah obligates us תמחה, to erase the notion that things occur *under the heaven* and by chance. Everything is destined from Hashem in Heaven.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* offered a similar commentary on the words (Eichah 3:66) ותשמידם ה' מתחת שמי ה', "Destroy them from under Hashem's heavens." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* explains that we must destroy the notion that things happen "under the heavens," and recognize that everything happens from Hashem.

It states in this week's *parashah* (*Ki Seitzei* 23:11), איש כי לא יהיה טהור מקרה לילה, and we can

you shouldn't use that name. You live in the same building with a family who lost a child with that name. Whenever they will hear you calling your son's name, they will remember their child, and this will cause them tremendous distress."

The lesson is that we must have other people's needs in mind.

Once, Reb Alter Shmuelewitz *zt'l* saw a young girl crying on the curb. "What's the matter?" he asked her.

"My friend said my dress isn't pretty," she pouted.

Reb Shmuelewitz said. "Tell your mother that I say you have a pretty dress."

The girl's face brightened, and she ran home to tell her mother.

Reb Shmuelewitz said to the person who was walking with him, "The Midrash says, 'Just as Hashem removes tears from all faces (as it states *Yeshayah* 25:8, דמעה מעל כל פנים, וימחה ה') similarly, you shall also remove tears from all faces.' I just did that by removing tears from this young girl's face."

One week, after immersing in the *mikvah* on Friday afternoon, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zy'a* asked his *gabai* Reb Shalom Fogel *z'l* to bring him cake and coffee. Reb Shalom Fogel *z'l* was surprised because the Rebbe never requested this before (he hardly ate at all).

Reb Shalom brought coffee and cake and the Rebbe said, "Bring it to So-and-So who is in the beis medresh. When I was in the *mikvah*, I heard him say, 'After a hot *mikvah* like this, all I am missing is a cup of hot coffee with a piece of cake,' and I want to grant him his wishes." Let's learn from this story to seek to fill other people's wishes and desires.

Reb Yaakov of Tolichan *z'l* composed many *nigunim* for Stoliner chassidim. Once, Rebbe Asher Stoliner *zy'a* requested, "Sing me one of your latest compositions."

Reb Yaakov sang a song he recently composed, but the Rebbe told him that he had a different song in mind. Reb Yaakov sang another song, but the Rebbe told him that this too wasn't the one he intended. Reb Yaakov Tolichaner said, "Apparently, the Rebbe has a particular song in mind. Please tell me which song the Rebbe wants to hear, and I will sing it."

The Rebbe replied, "Last night, 3:00 a.m., you came into the beis medresh and saw that the beis medresh wasn't heated. You had *rachmanus* on the scholars, so you went outside in the freezing snow and chopped wood for the furnace. As you worked, you sang. It was a beautiful song, and that's the song I want to hear."

It was a beautiful song because it was created while he compassionately did chessed for Yidden.

explain "איש כי לא יהיה טהור מקרה", "A person becomes impure because" מקרה, he says things happen by chance, and when problems crop up, he says, לילה, it is dark like night, and everything is bleak and bad. He is wrong on both counts: What happened wasn't a מקרה, a chance occurrence. Hashem destined it. And therefore, it isn't לילה, night and bad. It is always bright and *lichtig* for a Yid.

This week's *parashah* also discusses the prohibition of *ribbis* (23:21-22), lending or borrowing money with interest. Why is it forbidden? The Kli Yakar explains lending with interest causes people to cast away their trust in Hashem. By all other businesses, one raises his eyes to Hashem because he isn't certain whether he'll earn money or lose. However, when one lends money with interest, his income is set and certain. He's not afraid he might lose the money he lent since he took collateral. Thus, lending money with interest takes away one's *bitachon*. The one who borrows is also transgressing because he caused the lender to lose his *bitachon*. It is known that those who lend money with *ribbis* are generally stingy people, far from giving *tzedakah*, and that's because they lack *bitachon*. Nevertheless, it is permitted to lend money to goyim for *ribbis*. This is because gentiles are often thieves and difficult to deal with. Even when the gentiles are subject to the Jewish courts, they always

find ways to free themselves from their obligations. Even if collateral was given, you still aren't confident that you'll get your money back or will be paid the *ribbis*. Therefore, in these instances, the eyes of the lender are turned to Hashem to help him.

Let us remember that nothing happens "under the heavens," and always turn our eyes to Hashem.⁷

A Time for *Teshuvah*

The Arizal teaches that the end of each day, the end of each month, and the end of every year, are a time for retrospection and *teshuvah*. These are times to review our ways and see what needs improvement. Just as a storeowner looks over his books at the end of the day, the end of the month, and at the end of the year to know how his store is functioning, what is selling well and what isn't, etc., so, too, we need time to think over our deeds, and Elul, the end of the year, is an ideal time for this introspection.⁸

Yet, people are afraid to do this and be with themselves and their thoughts, lest they think of something unpleasant. So, they make sure always to be doing something. When they are by themselves, they listen to music or a shiur. They don't want to think. But thinking is essential because one might

7. The front line of World War Two was constantly moving from place to place, as the armies advanced. So, they always needed new locations for the troops to sleep at night. Therefore, the military would often take over the large homes to be used as army bases.

The Brisker Rav had a large home, and one day, they found a note on the door. It said, "Within a few days, we will take your home to use it as an army base. In exchange, for the meanwhile, you can go to the house at..." and it stated the address. It was in a different city.

The family panicked. "Who knows if Yidden live there? What will be with us?"

The Brisker Rav wasn't afraid. He said, "The letter on the door doesn't mean anything to me because they can't take away our home if it isn't Hashem's plan. Things don't happen here, below. Everything happens first Above."

Indeed, the army never took their home.

8. The Yid HaKadosh *zt'l* said that Elul isn't the end of the year, rather it is the beginning of the new year. Either way, Elul is a time for introspection and *teshuvah*

be going the wrong way and not even realize it.

In the new cities in Eretz Yisrael, there are traffic circles instead of traffic lights at intersections. The cars drive around the circle and then turn into the street. Someone explained that this is to help the populace be active at all times because the worst thing for people is to be alone with their thoughts. They would rather go around in circles than stop at a red light and risk thinking about themselves.

But at times, it's essential to stop and think, review one's deeds, and see what needs improvement. And sometimes, a small *kabbalah* is all that's needed to set one onto the right path.

Everything in this world can be used as a *mashal* for *avodas Hashem*. One of the somewhat recent wonders of technology is the GPS. Sometimes, a person takes a wrong turn. The GPS doesn't shout at him. It doesn't say, "Why didn't you listen to me?" It simply tells you to turn your car around and to go back.

This reminds us that *teshuvah* is always an option. It's never too late to turn around and get on the right path.

How do police know if someone is speeding on a highway? This is one of the older techniques: A cop parks his car near the highway and marks the time a car passes by. There's another police car parked ten minutes down the highway. If the driver is riding within the speed limit, he should get there in ten minutes. If he reaches the other policeman in five minutes, that's a sign that he was speeding.

So, what do wise drivers do when they see a police car ahead? They slow down and reach the other police car at the expected time.

This can be a lesson for Elul. The entire year we are rushing, and we don't check to see whether we are going in the right

direction. But when Elul arrives, we slow down and begin to think.

Living Reality

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* explains the *pasuk*, *כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך*. He explains, *כי תבנה בית חדש*, when you have a new idea how to earn money, perhaps a new investment, or a new business venture, etc., and you foresee yourself becoming wealthy, the Torah warns us, *ועשית מעקה לגגך*, make a fence around your mind. Do what you need to attain the wealth, do your *hishtadlus*, but don't fantasize about it. *כי יפול הנופל ממנו*, because the imagination itself may cause you to lose your potential wealth.

This is because if it was destined on Rosh Hashanah for you to earn a lot of money, and you are enjoying it with your imagination, that pleasure might take the place of the actual wealth that could have been yours. Therefore, it is good advice to do the *hishtadlus* you need to do, but don't dream about the money.

The Ben Ish Chai writes, "There is something that most people suffer from – Torah scholars and workmen, and lowly me among them. Often, it is destined for a person to become wealthy, but since he rejoices with the pleasures and wealth that may one day be his, this joy ruins his ability to receive it."

The Ben Ish Chai describes his lesson with the following story:

A Jewish merchant would go early every morning to the Arab market, buy large quantities of eggs and live poultry, and carry them back to the Jewish quarter, where he sold them for a marginal profit. One morning, he walked to the Jewish quarter with a thousand eggs balanced on his head and two bags filled with live poultry on his shoulders, and he decided that this time he won't sell the produce like he did every day.

He told himself, "I will bring it all home and put the chickens on the eggs. The eggs

will hatch, and I'll have a thousand chicks. But I won't sell the chicks. I will raise them until they lay eggs of their own. I won't sell those eggs either. I will put the eggs under the chickens, and they, too, will hatch. In a few months, I will have two hundred thousand chickens. I'll sell them for at least a *dinar* each and earn a profit of about two hundred thousand dinars. At that point, I'll change to a more lucrative business. I'll buy wool and sell it in London with a hundred percent markup..." He continued fantasizing about the wealth he would eventually have and the fields and houses he would buy. He reckoned that in just three years, he would be among the wealthiest people in the world.

He thought, "I will be appointed *rosh hakahal* (statesman) since I be the wealthiest person in the area. When the king comes to our city, I will be called upon to welcome the king." He imagined how he would bow his head when he greeted the king. But he forgot that he had a thousand eggs on his head! As he bowed, all the eggs fell to the ground, and the chickens fell into a pit. All his grand plans ended at that moment.

The Ben Ish Chai concludes, "We see from this story how much one can lose by excessively using his imagination. A person must know that these fantasies are from the Satan, to prevent the person from receiving all this goodness."

This is good counsel, worth keeping in mind. And as we said, it is hinted at in this week's *parashah*: *כי תבנה בית חדש*, when you have a new idea for *parnassah*, *ועשית מעקה לגגך*, curb your thoughts. Don't get carried away with your fantasies, *כי יפול הנופל ממנו*, because that can cause you to lose everything.

We will continue with the Ben Ish Chai's *mashal* to learn a lesson in teshuvah. When Elul comes, people have grand plans for the new year. "This year, I will never speak *lashon hara*, I will finish three *masechtos*, I will never get angry," and so on. Each person has his aspirations and hopes. However, generally, hopes and dreams don't

materialize. Like in the *mashal*, the eggs break, and the plans disappear.

A hint to this problem is in the *pasuk*, *מראשית השנה עד אחרית שנה*, the ה"א is written by the first *שנה* and not by the second. At the beginning of the year, we say *השנה*, this is going to be *the year*, the year that we will succeed in *avodas Hashem*. *אחרית שנה*, but at the end of the year, we find that it was a standard year and nothing spectacular.

Perhaps the solution is to make smaller plans and grow gradually. This has a better chance of success.

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* related a similar story:

There was a poor woman who found an egg. Her hungry children were happy because they would have something to eat. The mother gathered her children and told them, "We are not going to eat this egg. We will place it under our neighbor's chicken and let it hatch. We won't eat the chick. We will let the chick become a chicken, and it will lay its own eggs. We won't eat those eggs. Those eggs will become more chickens. Soon we will have many chickens and many eggs. We'll sell them for cattle. The cattle will have calves, and we will have many sheep and cows. We will sell them to buy land." She went on and on, and as she described to her children their future wealth, she waved her hands about, expressing her excitement. The egg fell, and all plans vanished at that moment.

The Sanzer Rebbe *zt'l* told this story to describe how people often make grand plans in Elul of how they will improve in the upcoming year, but nothing materializes from all their plans. They tell themselves that things will be different this year, but within a few weeks, they revert back to their same behaviors and habits.

Once, again, perhaps the counsel is to make smaller *kabbalos*. It might seem insignificant, but it isn't so. Small steps will bring you to very great heights.

Keep the Kabbalah Always

When did Dovid HaMelech wake up each morning? One *pasuk* states (*Tehillim* 119:62), חצות לילה אקום, that he awoke at midnight, and another *pasuk* states (119:147), קדמתי בנשף, "I awoke at daybreak." So when did he actually wake up?

The Gemara (*Brachos* 3:) answers this contradiction in a few ways.

But it seems that it can be answered very simply; it depended on when Dovid HaMelech went to sleep. When he had a *chasunah* late at night or some other obligation, and he went to sleep late, he awoke at daybreak. And when he went to sleep earlier, he woke up at midnight. The Gemara doesn't say this explanation to answer the contradiction of when Dovid awoke. Why not?

The answer is that a person needs to be firm with his kabbalos. If Dovid had a kabbalah to awaken at midnight, that was his daily routine, without excuses and exceptions. A *kabbalah* should always be kept.

The following story happened to the Perl family of Yerushalayim, who are renowned for their devotion to the mitzvah *hachnasas orchim*.

It was one evening when the mother of this household had just returned from a trip overseas. Exhausted, she was looking forward to a good night's sleep, but then her doorbell rang. The children looked through the peephole and they rushed to tell their mother that "the *veibel*," an older, bitter lady who often came to their home for a meal, was at the door. They told their mother that she shouldn't answer the door for her. "You're tired and the *veibel* will anyway not be satisfied with what you give her. She always complains that you don't serve her well enough."

But Mrs. Perl answered the door anyway. She wanted to show her children that a good

deed should be kept, always, under all circumstances. And she wanted to teach them the rule: "What you do for others, you do for yourself." The *Zohar* teaches, "When Hashem wants to do someone a favor, he sends him a poor person."

And Chazal says, "More than the wealthy do for the poor, the poor do for the wealthy," because in the merit of caring for the poor, you receive many *brachos*. "We will only gain by helping this poor woman," their mother assured them.

The elderly woman ate supper, and she took some food to her home for her breakfast.

The family was settling down to sleep, and the ten-year-old daughter came running to her mother. "There's a snake on your bed," she said, alarmed.

"It can't be a snake," the mother said. "Maybe it's a rat or perhaps a lizard. Snakes rarely get into houses."

"No, it's a snake. I'm certain."

"How do you know?"

She said that she saw pictures of snakes and was certain that it was a snake. The father wasn't home that night, as he was still in *chutz le'aretz*, so the twelve-year-old son was sent to the room to check. He returned panic-stricken. Yes, there was a large snake on the mother's bed.

They shut the bedroom door and placed a towel at its foot so that the snake couldn't crawl under the door. They called an exterminator, who caught the poisonous snake. Had the mother gone to sleep earlier that night, her life would be in danger. They saw that when you do for others, you do for yourself and that when Hashem wants to do you a favor, He sends a poor person to your home. They earned these benefits because they kept their *kabbalah* without making exceptions.

The King of Spain held Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel in high esteem and appointed him to be the treasurer of Spain. But some

people were jealous of the Abarbanel's success and his close friendship with the king. In particular, the foreign minister of Spain, a great *rasha*, was very jealous of the Abarbanel's status. He tried with all his might to destroy the king's appreciation for Reb Yitzchok. He told the king that the Abarbanel was stealing money from the treasury. "Did you ever wonder why Abarbanel is so wealthy, why he has a beautiful home and expensive assets? It is because he is stealing money from the treasury! Ask him how much money he has, and you will see that he will hem and haw and try to get out of giving a straight answer."

The king summoned Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel and said, "I want to know how much you own. I'll give you three days to appraise your assets, and then come back and tell me."

After three days, the Abarbanel came to the king and said, "I own 700,000 gold coins."

The foreign minister and his friends laughed and said to the king, "His home alone is worth more than a million gold coins. He is lying. He doesn't want to admit that he is stealing from you."

The foreign minister thought of another plan to increase the king's wrath on the Abarbanel. The Abarbanel knew secrets of the kingdom, which the king shared with him. He wasn't permitted to tell anyone the secrets other than a particular high-ranking official.

The foreign minister bribed the high-ranking official to reveal the sensitive information to him, and then the foreign minister spoke to the king about these secrets. "How do you know about these things? Who told you?"

The foreign minister lied, "Don Yitzchak Abarbanel told me."

The king was angry with the Abarbanel and decided to kill him. But he couldn't kill him in Spain, since the Abarbanel was very beloved by the public,⁹ and it would create a tumult and uproar. So, he handed the Abarbanel a sealed letter and told him to deliver it to the owner of a brick factory directly outside Spain. A fire burned in the factory's furnace all day long. The letter said, "Throw the bearer of this letter into the furnace immediately, without further ado."

Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, not knowing what was in the letter, took it from the king and set out with the high-ranking official to deliver it. En route, a Yid rushed to the Abarbanel and said, "I have an eight-day-old son, and the *mohel* didn't show up. Can you please come"?

Reb Yitzchok Abarbanel didn't have to think long to decide. He was on a mission for the king of Spain, but he now had the opportunity to serve the King of all Kings, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and he agreed to go and perform the bris. Reb Yitzchok Abarbanel was an expert *mohel* and never missed an opportunity to perform this great mitzvah. So he said to the high-ranking official, "Deliver this letter to the brick factory, and I will meet you there later tonight."

The high-ranking official didn't know what was written inside the letter, and when he delivered it, he was promptly thrown into the fire. Before his death, the official said, "I deserve this because I revealed the king's secrets."

Later that night, when Abarbanel arrived at the brick factory, they showed him the letter and told him the official's final words. Don Yitzchak Abarbanel thanked Hashem for saving him in the merit of the mitzvah of *milah*. From the high-ranking official's final words, he understood that the king suspected that he was the one who revealed the secrets.

9. One of the reasons Abarbanel was so beloved in Spain is because he lowered the taxes.

Abarbanel returned to the king and told the king everything that occurred. The king said, "I see that your G-d helps you. But there remains one issue that still bothers me. Why did you say you have 700,000 coins when we know you have so much more?"

Don Yitzchok Abarbanel answered, "The 700,000 coins are the amount that I gave to tzedakah. This is the amount I know for

certain that I have because the merit of tzedakah will remain with me forever. As for the rest of my wealth, I can't say that it is mine. The king can take it all away at any moment. So when the king asked me how much I own, I told him the amount I gave to charity because that is what I truly own."

The king praised him for his wise answer.