

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

Yisro





# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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## Torah Wellsprings - Yisro

### Hashgachah Pratis

Every Wednesday, a merchant from Ashdod comes to Bnei Brak to sell gluten-free pastries. His clientele consists of people who are either allergic to gluten or cannot eat gluten for some other reason. His prices are much lower than those of local bakeries that sell gluten-free foods.

Just a couple of weeks ago (Wednesday *parashas* (יארצ), someone came to the merchant to buy a specific type of gluten-free cookie, but the merchant told him that that item had sold out. The customer said that he traveled a long distance to buy this item for his wife, who needs gluten-free products. The merchant replied that he understood his disappointment, but there was nothing he could do about it.

As they were still speaking, another person came in, carrying two boxes of cookies. He said to the merchant that he bought these a week ago, but they weren't what he wanted. He thought he was buying regular cookies; he didn't realize that they were gluten-free. He demanded the right to return the boxes and get a refund. The merchant showed him that the box stated in large letters that they were gluten-free pastries, and that the brachah is *Shehakol*. There was no deceit; it wasn't a *מקח טעות*, and therefore, he wasn't required to take them back.

Just then, the disappointed customer jumped forward and said, "Hashem had you make this mistake last week for my sake; to help me. These are the exact cookies my wife asked me to buy. Give them to me, and I will pay you."

This story is an example of how Hashem leads the world with hashgachah pratis. The person who needed to buy the pastries was able to buy them, and the person who wanted to return the cookies got his money

back. If one of them had come to the store at a slightly different time, this wonder wouldn't have occurred.

A wealthy merchant from Volozhin earned his wealth selling wood. He would put the wood on a ship, which sailed down the Neman River, which passes through Kovno. The ship stopped at every city along the route, and he sold wood. Every time he did this route, he had to get permission from the governor of Kovno to allow him to pass the river that went through Kovno. One year, the governor didn't give permission, and the ship with the cargo stood at the entrance of Kovno, as they waited for the permit. During this time, the wealthy person had immense *tzaar* and worry.

Finally, after a long wait, the bureaucracy was cleared up, and permission was granted for the ship to pass through. While this occurred, the price of wood had gone up. The wealthy merchant was very happy. Not only could he go on his route to sell wood, but he would also make a lot more money, because the price of lumber went up. He went to Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* to tell him the hashgachah pratis that happened to him. Reb Chaim Volozhin told him, "You are a wealthy person, and therefore, you don't experience Hashem's hashgachah so often. The poor recognize Hashem's hashgachah every day, and sometimes a few times each day. They don't know how they will feed their children, and Hashem always helps them, and often, every day in a different manner.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner said that this is alluded to in the pasuk (Tehillim 138:6) *כִּי רָם ה' וְנִשְׁפָּל יִרְאֶה וְגִבּוֹה מִמֶּרְחֶק יִדָּע*, "For though Hashem is exalted, He sees the lowly; and the High one makes Himself known from afar." Reb Chaim Volozhiner explained that tall people can see things that are at a high place, better than someone small. For example, if an item is placed on a high shelf, tall people can see

it more easily than short people. However, when it comes to seeing Hashem, it is the opposite. This is the meaning of the pasuk (Tehillim 138:6) וְשָׁפַל יְרָאָהּ, Hashem is high, and those who are small recognize Him. They see Hashem better than those who are high. וְגִבּוֹהַּ מִמָּרְחָק יֵרָאֶה, this means those who are wealthy and high, they see Hashem solely from a distance. They don't have as much awareness of Hashem as those who are small.

Orchos HaRosh (יום א' כ"ו) writes, "Trust in Hashem with a full heart, and believe in His hashgachah pratis... Believe that Hashem's eyes see the entire earth and His eyes see all the ways of man, and he checks the hearts of man."

Then the Rosh elaborates on the pasuk, written at the beginning of the Aseres

HaDibros (20:2): אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, מִבְּיַת עֲבָדִים, "I am Hashem, your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." The Rosh explains that two *emunos* are discussed in this pasuk. One is the emunah in Hashem, as it states אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, and the second is emunah in hashgachah pratis, as it states אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עֲבָדִים. He writes, "Whoever doesn't believe in אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עֲבָדִים (that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim with hashgachah pratis) also doesn't believe in אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ."

Kad HaKemach (Bitachon) from Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes, "An aspect of mesirus nefesh is to think in one's mind that everything Hashem does is for the good, as Chazal say, 'Everything Hashem does is for the good,' and he should accept everything that occurs to him with love, and he should trust in Hashem, at all times."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Once, a person in Communist Russia was on his way to his job where he polished diamonds. Someone stopped him in front of a Beis HaKnesses and pleaded that he come inside. "It is my parents' yahrtzeit today, and we need your help to complete a minyan."

The man wanted to help a fellow Yid, and agreed to stay for a few moments. He explained that he couldn't stay long because he couldn't be late for work. It was dangerous to arrive late for work in Communist Russia.

He entered the Beis HaKnesses, only to discover that he wasn't the tenth man. Several others needed to be recruited. By the time a minyan gathered, the diamond polisher realized that if he stayed for the tefillah, he might be late for work. But he wanted to help, so he chose to take the risk. He didn't have the heart to leave and break the minyan.

When they finished davening, everyone was invited to enjoy some cake and vodka *l'iluy nishmas*, but at this point, the diamond polisher hastily excused himself and dashed out the door and raced to the diamond center. As he neared the entrance, he was met by an acquaintance. "Run away! Everyone inside was arrested!"

He escaped and managed to come to Eretz Yisrael with his diamonds.

This is a story of *hashgachah pratis* and shows how chesed and mitzvos protect a person from all evil.

Once, Reb Zalman Brizel zt'l was contemplating whether to go to a particular place and was weighing the pros and cons of going. In the end, he went, and he broke his foot on the way. He commented, "Now I know that I had to come here. It was destined that I break my foot, so I had to be here so that it could occur."

Instead of telling himself, "I shouldn't have gone. Look at what happened to me," he recognized that everything happens with *hashgachah pratis*.

2. The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 7:4) states, "In the future, Gan Eden will shout and say, 'Give me tzaddikim. I have no interest in the reshaim, as it states (Tehillim 31:7) שָׂנְאֵתִי הַשְּׁמָרִים הַבְּלִי שָׁוְא, "I hated those who await worthless vanities". Who do I want? Those who have bitachon, as it states (ibid.) וַאֲנִי אֵל ה' בְּטַחְתִּי, "I trust in Hashem."

We see from here that those who trust in Hashem are called Tzaddikim.

## Chinuch

When Yisro was just about to enter the Jewish camp in the desert, he sent a *shaliach* (a messenger) to Moshe Rabbeinu to tell him that he was coming, and asked Moshe Rabbeinu to come out to greet him. Yisro traveled with Moshe's wife, Tzipora, and two children, Gershom and Eliezer. Yisro's message to Moshe was as follows: (18:6) אָנִי וְהַתֵּנֶךְ יָתִירוֹ בָּא אֵלֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ עִמָּה, "I, your father-in-law Yisro, have come to you, with your wife and her sons with her."

Rashi explains that Yisro was saying, "If you don't want to come out in my honor, come out to honor your wife. If you don't want to come out for your wife's honor, come out for her two children." There is a concept that חַיִּיב אָדָם בְּכָבוֹד חֲמוּי, that a person must honor his father-in-law. Therefore, we understand why Yisro requested that Moshe come forth to honor him. He was the father-in-law, and he deserved respect. We also understand that Yisro requested that Moshe come forward to greet them, to honor his wife. As the Rambam (Hilchos Ishus 15:19) writes,

וְכָן צִוּוּ חֻקִּים שֶׁיְהִיָּה אָדָם מְכַבֵּד אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִגּוּפוֹ, "Chazal obligated that a person should honor his wife more than his self." Therefore, we understand that Yisro could ask Moshe to come forth for his wife's honor. But if these reasons weren't sufficient for Moshe to come forward to greet them, Yisro added that he should come in honor of his children, Gershom and Eliezer. We don't understand this final request, because a parent isn't obligated to honor his own children. What was Yisro referring to?

We can explain this based on the principle that children learn by example. When they see their father honoring his father-in-law and his wife, they will do the same when they are married. Yisro told Moshe, "If, for some reason, you don't want to come to me to honor me, or to honor your wife (although it seems you are obligated to honor us, according to halachah), nevertheless, I request that you honor us, so your children will learn by your example. Yisro said, "Come out for your children's sake", so they will learn from your actions. One of the foundations of chinuch is to teach children by being a good example.<sup>3</sup>

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3. When trains were first introduced in Poland, the Sfas Emes zt'l said that the train is made up of many cars, and they are all cold. But the first car has a furnace burning, producing heat that pulls all the other carts. This can be used as a mashal. It teaches us that one good Yid who has a fire burning in his heart for Hashem can draw along with him many other Yidden. He can lead them on the right path, and inspire them to strengthen their devoted to Hashem.

The same concept applies to chinuch. Some parents worry and say, "What will be with my children? They seem so cold and disinterested in avodas Hashem, r'l!" But if the father or mother have a fire in their hearts for Hashem, this will inspire their children as well, and ignite in their hearts a desire to serve Hashem.

At a pidyon ha'ben, the kohen asks the father, מאי בעית טפי, בכך בכורך או בחמשה סלעים דמחייבת לפדות בך, "What do you prefer? Your firstborn son or the five coins, with which the Torah obligates you to redeem your son?" The question is: Why does the kohen say this to the father? The father does not have a choice. He is obligated in this mitzvah, and there is nothing the father can do to exempt him from his obligation. (See Chut HaShani from the Chavas Yair, siman 92, who discusses this question.)

We can explain that the kohen is hinting to the father a lesson in chinuch, telling him that he should teach his children by setting a good example. The kohen is asking, "What is more important to you, money or mitzvos? Your children will sense what is important to you, and will be influenced to be the same."

This lesson is particularly important in our times. We are often challenged with the question מאי בעית טפי, "What do you want more?" A father must make the right decision that the chinuch of his children is more important to him than money. This means that even if he can earn money (or save money) by using the internet, he will not do so when it conflicts with his desire to raise ehrlichiher, Yiddishe children. He would prefer to lose money than to risk the future of his children, r'l.



Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh *zt'l* teaches that a parent should consider each of his children as though he is their only child. The amount of energy, thought, prayer, etc., parents would invest in their only child, this is the extent parents should extend for every child they have, even if they have many children. Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh says that this is alluded to in the pesukim (18:3-4) that tell the names of Moshe Rabbeinu's sons. It states, *שם האחד גרשם... ושם האחד אליעזר*, "The name of one was Gershom... and the name of one was Eliezer..." Each son is called *אחד*, one, because a parent should view each child as though he is an only child.<sup>4</sup>

The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 2:2) says, "When Moshe was tending to Yisro's cattle in the

desert, one goat ran away. Moshe ran after it until they reached a green pasture where there was a stream of water. Moshe caught up to the goat and said, 'I didn't know that you were thirsty. Now you're tired.' Moshe carried the goat on his shoulder until he came to the place where the other cattle were grazing. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'You have compassion on the cattle, therefore I swear that you will be the shepherd of My sheep, the Jewish nation...'

Rebbe Avraham of Stropkov *zt'l* explains that because Moshe cared for each sheep and for each goat, he merited being the shepherd of the Jewish nation, for a parent and a leader mustn't lose sight of the needs of each individual.<sup>5</sup>

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The Yeshuos Moshe of Vizhnitz *zt'l* would bring a hint to this concept from the pasuk (Bereishis 22:10) *וַיִּקַּח אֶת הַמִּצְעָקֶלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת בְּנוֹ*, and as Rashi writes, *הַמִּצְעָקֶלֶת* alludes to *parnassah*, to food. The Torah is warning us that parents shouldn't slaughter their children spiritually, *r'l*, due to their desire to earn *parnassah*.

4. Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh explains that the Torah could have written *ושם השני אליעזר*, "The name of the *second* was Eliezer." This is how the Torah presents the *korbanos Tamid*, as it states *את הכבש אחד תעשה בבקר*, "one sheep sacrifice in the morning, and the *second* sheep sacrifice in the afternoon." When discussing Moshe's children, they are both called *אחד*. This is because parents should view each child as "one", as if he were their only child. No child should be considered "second".

Someone approached a *rosh yeshiva* and said, "I want the best *bachur* of your yeshiva to marry my daughter. Please tell me: Who is the best *bachur*?"

The *rosh yeshiva* replied, "I have seventy best *bachurim*." There were seventy *bachurim* in the yeshiva, and the *rosh yeshiva* considered each *bachur* "the best one" in his own way.

In the *Hagadah shel Pesach* it states *ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול*, "The Torah speaks about four children: One is a *rasha*, one is a *chacham*, one is a *tam*, and one is a child who doesn't know how to ask." The *Hagadah* could have presented this passage more briefly: *כנגד ארבע בנים דברה תורה: חכם, רשע, תם, שאינו יודע לשאול*. Why does it elaborate and state *אחד* before each child? It's to remind us that each child is a one; an individual, unique in his own way.

5. The words *ושננתם לבניך* have two meanings. It can be translated, "You shall teach your children", and Chazal tell us that it can also be translated "You shall teach your students", because students are considered *בנים*, children.

The Brisker Rav *zt'l* explained that if you were to ask a teacher, "Which students are most on your mind?" the teacher would respond that the students who understand, cooperate, and behave are his best students.

Now ask parents, "Which child is most on your mind?" and they will say that it's the child who is struggling, doesn't understand well, has trouble behaving, etc. Parents will say that such children are always on their minds, because they try so hard to help them.

The Torah calls students *בניך*, your children, to teach *rebbeim* that they shouldn't only focus on their top students, and ignore the weaker ones. Their focus should also be on the weaker students, to help them, so

## Finding Your Individual Way

In *Koheles* it states, והלך בדרכ לבך, "Follow the way of your heart" (11:9). The Netziv (*Ha'amek Davar*, end of *parashas Shelach*) explains that this *pasuk* suggests that everyone find his personal way to serve Hashem. He writes, "People serve Hashem in different ways: Some toil in Torah all day long, others are occupied in *tefillah*, and a third group does *gemilus chassadim*, and all of these paths are *leshem Shamayim*. Even for Torah study, not all people should study the same way. Also, regarding mitzvos, people vary [in where they place their emphasis]. Therefore, the Gemara (*Shabbos* 118) teaches that the *Amoraim* would ask their friends, "Which mitzvah was your father most cautious with?" One said that his father was cautious with *tzitzis*, another said that his father was cautious with *Shabbos*. In *gemilus chasadim*, people aren't the same either. If one asks: Since there are so many ways to serve Hashem, which is the correct path? How should one

study Torah, keep the mitzvos, and do *chessed*? *Koheles* answers: הלך בדרכ לבך, see where your heart pulls you. Your heart will show you where your strengths are," and that is the path you should follow.

When Rav Meir Shapiro *zt'l* was young, he was the Rav of Sanik. One Shabbos, Reb Meir Shapiro was visiting his Rebbe, Rebbe Yisrael of Chortkov *zt'l*, and the Rebbe honored him to be the *chazan* for the *שבת מברכים* *benching* and for *mussaf*. After the *tefillah*, the Rebbe invited Reb Meir Shapiro to eat the Shabbos *seudah* with him.

After he finished the meal, *chassidim* gathered around him wanting to know what happened during the *seudah*. Reb Meir Shapiro told them the following:

"As soon as I came in, the Rebbe said to me, 'Ah! Reb Meir! Your *tefillah*! Your *rosh chodesh benching*! They were so beautiful.' The Rebbe repeated this several times during the meal. I said to the Rebbe, 'If the Rebbe

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they too can grow in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*.

A person was handed a keyring that held one hundred keys. He was told that one of the keys on the ring can open the lock on a specific door. He tried ninety-nine keys, but the door remained locked. He lost patience, grabbed an ax, and smashed open the door. This person is a fool. Why didn't he try that last key? Clearly, that was the key that would have opened the door.

The *nimshal* is that there's a key to each child's heart. If you tried many approaches, and they didn't open your child's heart to Torah, *emunah*, and to *middos tovos*, apparently you didn't use the right "key". Try another approach; perhaps this time, your child's heart will open. Perhaps the methods you tried until now work for other people's children, but not for yours. Don't do anything drastic, like breaking down a door. Be patient, keep searching until you find the right fit.

Sometimes, you should continue using the same approach of *chinuch* again and again, and in the end, you will succeed. Like a key that doesn't open the lock at the first try, but when you jiggle the key around, eventually it opens the lock.

My father *zt'l* was once in Los Angeles, at the home of Reb Eliezer Adler *z'l*. Rebbetzin Adler asked my father, "If your daughter were to ask you for money to go to the theatre, what would you do?"

My father didn't know what to say. He never encountered anything like that before. She said, "When I was growing up in Yerushalayim, my friends were going to the theatre, and they wanted I should go with them. So I asked my grandfather, Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l*, for money to go to the theater. My grandfather gave me money, and as I was about to leave the room, he called me back and said, 'You asked me for money for the theatre, and I gave it to you. But you should know that my heart will break if you go there.' I immediately told my grandfather that I would not go to the theatre... not then, and not ever."

Reb Shlomke showed his granddaughter love, caring, and respect, and this helped her make a wise decision. This was the "key" to open her heart and to redirect her ways.



enjoys my *tefillah* so much, perhaps I should leave Sanik and become the *chazan* here?"

"The Rebbe became serious and told me a story of Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli *zt'l*. Rebbe Zusha would go to *galus*, traveling from one place to another. One time, he came to the city where the *gaon* Reb Yusfa *zt'l* lived. Reb Zusha went to listen to Reb Yusfa's *shiur* because Reb Yusfa was a great *talmid chacham*, an expert in all parts of the Torah. After the *shiur*, Reb Zusha went over to Rav Yusfa to tell him how much he enjoyed the *shiur*. 'It was worth traveling the long distance from my home to come here, just to listen to this sweet *shiur*...'

Rav Yusfa said to Reb Zusha, "I understand why you were impressed with my *shiur*, but I can't figure out why I'm so impressed with you? At first glance, you look like a standard pauper who goes from city to city to collect money. But I perceive that the spirit of Hashem rests on you. You are certainly a great *talmid chacham*."

Reb Zusha answered, "Not at all. I'm an *am haa'retz*<sup>6</sup>.... Maybe it's because I know how to daven..."

Rav Yusfa replied, "Who doesn't know how to daven? The people who live here don't know how to daven?"

Reb Zusha replied, "They know how to daven, but I know how to daven before the Ribon HaOlamim [Master of the World]."

Rav Yusfa asked, "Maybe you can teach me how one davens before the Ribon HaOlamim?"

"I can teach you, but not in front of everyone. Let's go to a private place, and I'll teach you."

Reb Zusha taught Rav Yusfa the secrets of *tefillah*, and how to pray properly before Hashem. Rav Yusfa was very inspired,

"Perhaps I should leave my *rabbanus* and my yeshiva, so I can always daven properly?"

Reb Zusha told Rav Yusfa, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu created thousands of people in the world, and although everyone was created with the same two eyes, two ears, a nose, and a mouth, everyone still appears differently. Chazal tell us, 'Just as their faces differ, so are their minds different.' Why did Hashem do this? It's because Hashem wants each person to serve Him according to his own way, according to who he is, in accordance with his strengths and talents. Therefore, you should continue in your path of *avodas Hashem*, to teach Torah to Yidden, and I will continue along my path, the path of *tefillah*."

The Chortkover Rebbe finished this story and said to Reb Meir Shapiro, "Hashem wants you to teach Torah to Yidden. That's the portion Hashem chose for you. This is the reason he gave you talents, willpower, intelligence, and all other traits you need to succeed in your path. You should do your service and teach Torah to Yidden, and I will do my service, to daven to Hashem."

In this conversation, the Chortkover Rebbe was telling Reb Meir Shapiro that his portion is to teach Torah in a yeshiva, and he should continue to do so.

Shortly afterwards, Reb Meir Shapiro decided to open Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, where he could channel all his abilities to teach Torah to Yidden. He understood that this was his mission, and he invested all his energy to succeed on his own individual path.

When Reb Meir Shapiro was already *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he was offered a prestigious position in the Polish government, where he could potentially do a lot of *chessed* for the Yidden of Poland. He wrote a letter to his rebbe, the

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6. Reb Zusha said this out of humility, but he was a great *talmid chacham*. In his younger years, he was a *rav* of a city for several years.

Chortkover Rebbe, to ask his opinion on this matter. The Rebbe replied, "One can know what Hashem desires from him through the talents that Hashem gave him. I hear that you are a good speaker and that you are good at teaching students, so this is certainly what Hashem wants from you. On the other hand, the position you were offered is an important job because it's possible that you can do a lot of *chessed*. My advice is that you don't do anything to get this job. If they come after you and hire you, then it is a sign that this is what Heaven wants from you now."

### Taking the First Step

The sefarim teach that הקריאה מעורר הזמן, that what we read about in the Sefer Torah, arouses the matter to occur again. So, when we read about matan Torah, it means that matan Torah is happening. Therefore, this Shabbos is mesugal for making a kabbalah to receive, keep, and study the holy Torah.

But to receive the Torah, we should prepare for it. It states (19:3) וּמִשָּׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים, "Moshe ascended to Hashem, and Hashem called to him from the mountain..." The Or HaChaim says that Moshe had to take the first step. He had to go up to Hashem, and then Hashem spoke to him. Or HaChaim explains, ויש לך לדעת כי, "You must know that kedushah doesn't come unless one prepares for it."

Certainly, if a person in our generation wants to receive the Torah this Shabbos, he should prepare his heart and desires. It is a kal v'chomer. If Moshe needed preparation to receive the Torah, certainly we should prepare ourselves for matan Torah.

The parashah begins וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ, that Yisro heard, and Rashi writes שמועה שמע ובה, קריעת, "What did Yisro hear that it inspired him to come? He heard about Kriyas Yam Suf and the war against Amalek."

These two factors, the splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek, inspired Yisro

to join the Jewish nation. The question that many meforshim deal with is why specifically did these two matters inspire Yisro to come? Many other miracles occurred at this time, such as the ten makos and yetzias Mitzrayim. But these didn't bring Yisro to the Jewish nation, only specifically the splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek, and this needs an explanation.

Furthermore, we can ask that it seems that only one of these two matters wouldn't inspire Yisro to join the nation in the desert. If it were only the war against Amalek, or only kriyas Yam Suf, Yisro would have remained home. It was the combination of both episodes that inspired Yisro to come, and this needs explanation.

The Shefa Chaim (Klausenberg Rebbe) zt'l explains that at kriyas Yam Suf, Hashem told the Jewish nation that they shouldn't fight the war. (Shemos 14:14) ה' יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ שָׁמְטִים, "Hashem shall make war for you, and you shall remain silent." In contrast, when Amalek attacked, the Jewish nation was told that they should fight this war. As it states (Shemos 17:9) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר לָנוּ אַנְשִׁים וְצֵא הִלָּחֶם בְּעַמְּלֵק, "Moshe said to Yehoshua 'Choose people for us and go battle with Amalek.'" What is the difference? Why was the war against the Mitzrim held by Hashem alone, whereas in the war against Amalek, the Jewish nation had to participate?

The answer is that the goal of Pharaoh and the Mitzrim was to kill the Jewish nation or to bring them back into slavery. When the war is about gashmiyus matters, we can rely on Hakadosh Baruch Hu to fight our wars for us. However, when Amalek came to fight with the Jewish people, it was a war against their spirituality, as alluded to in the words (Devarim 25:18) אֲשֶׁר קִרְבָּ בְּדֶרֶךְ (see Rashi). They wanted to contaminate and spiritually ruin Bnei Yisrael. When this is the situation, it isn't proper to say "Hashem will fight my wars for me." When it comes to spirituality, Klal Yisrael must stand up and fight the war themselves.

Yisro heard about kriyas Yam Suf and the war against Amalek, and he thought to himself, "Why did the Jewish nation go out to war against Amalek, while for the war against Mitzrayim, Hashem told them that they shouldn't go?" He understood that when it comes to ruchniyus, one must be active. This isn't a place for relying on Hashem alone; whoever can do something must act. When Yisro understood this, he understood that if he wanted a spiritual life, if he wanted to live according to Hashem's will, he had to act. It wasn't the time to stay home and to trust that Hashem would somehow teach him what he has to do. Action on his part was required. This is the reason he came to join the Jewish nation.

The Satmar Rebbe zt'l told a mashal of two people at the foot of an escalator. One of them took just one more step than the other. The one who took the extra step put his foot on the escalator and went up to the next floor. The one who didn't take this step remained below.

The mashal teaches the importance of taking even just one step in the right direction. It seems small and insignificant, but it can be the difference between reaching much higher levels.

This idea is demanding and also encouraging. It is demanding because we discover the importance of seeking to improve. Every step of improvement is essential. It is also encouraging, because sometimes all it takes to reach new and higher levels is just one step in the right direction.

It states (Shemos 3:4, and see Sforno) וַיִּקְרָא ה' בִּי קוֹר, "Hashem saw that he turned aside to see; and Hashem called out to him from the bush." Here, too, Moshe took the first step. He wanted to understand why the bush was burning and not being consumed. He knew that it was a message from heaven, and he wanted to know what it meant. That is when Hashem called out to him. This is because man must

make the first step towards spirituality, and then Hashem helps him.

### ***Emunah Peshutah***

The highest level of emunah is *emunah peshutah*, to believe in Hashem with simplicity.

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l said that even after attaining all his lofty *madreigos*, he believes in Hashem as a young child believes in Hashem. When you tell children ideas of emunah (such as that Hashem sees us, guides us with *hashgachah pratis*, gave us the Torah, rewards those who keep the Torah, etc.), they swallow up these truths without questioning them. They don't debate, philosophize, or doubt. It is as true to them as everything else they know.

The Yeitev Lev zt'l says that this is the reason Yosef is called in Tanach ילד נער, and as it states (*Bereishis* 37:2), והוא נער את בני זלפה, and it states (*Bereishis* 37:30), והילד איננו. The words ילד and נער represent a youth, and this describes Yosef HaTzaddik's perfection in emunah. He believed in Hashem with the certainty of a child.

ילד is *roshei teivos* for יאמין לכל דבר, someone who believes everything. Whatever you tell a child, he believes it as fact and truth. It is therefore beneficial to speak to children about emunah.

We say in the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah (Yirmiyahu 31:19), הבן יקיר לי אפרים אם ילד שעשועים, "Efraim my favorite son, or a delightful child..." This pasuk tells of Hashem's special love for Bnei Yisrael. The word ילד is used, which represents יאמין לכל דבר (someone who believes everything) because this is the trait that makes us beloved to Hashem.

The mazal of *chodesh Shevat* is דלי (bucket) which is *roshei teivos* for יאמין לכל דבר. This is an ideal month to acquire this perfection and purity in *emunah peshutah*.

The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l said that *emunah peshutah* is the highest form of *emunah* because when the *emunah* is based on the intellect, the mind is limited, so automatically,



his *emunah* will be limited. But when one believes in Hashem with simplicity, this belief isn't dependent on any rationale; it isn't contingent on the mind's capacity and, therefore, is the highest form of *emunah*.<sup>7</sup>

It states (18:9), 'וַיִּשְׂמַח יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְיִשְׂרָאֵל', "Yisro rejoiced over all the good Hashem did for Yisrael." Rashi writes two translations for the word וַיִּשְׂמַח:

וַיִּשְׂמַח יִתְרוֹ זֶהוּ פְשׁוּטוֹ וּמְדַרְשׁוֹ נַעֲשָׂה בְּשָׂרוֹ חֲדוּדִין חֲדוּדִין, "מיצר על אבוד מצרים." "Yisro was happy. This is the simple translation. The *drash* is that his flesh became prickly because the deaths of the Mitzrim pained him."

I heard from a *talmid chacham* that Rashi hints that *emunah peshutah* results in happiness. Rashi writes, פְּשׁוּטוֹ, when one follows פְּשׁוּטוֹ, the simple approach of *emunah*, it results in happiness. וּמְדַרְשׁוֹ, but when one *darshens*, and asks questions on

Hashem's *hasghachah*, his flesh becomes prickly, and he hurts all over. He is left with questions about Hashem that disturb him.

The Chovos HaLevavos tells a *meshal* of blind people who were in a home, and kept bumping into the furniture. They complained, "Why did the *baal habayis* put us here? This place is a mess. He purposely placed obstacles in our path to harm us."

Sometime later, after a great doctor healed them, they were able to see. Now, they recognized that everything in the room, which they had thought was harmful and unfriendly, was there for their benefit.

This is what occurs when we acquire the bright light of *emunah*. We then recognize that everything happens *b'hashgachah pratis*, for our benefit.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Years ago, in Communist Russia, a Jewish couple was blessed with a child. The mother wanted her child to have a *bris milah*, but her husband refused because every Jewish ceremony in those days came with a risk of imprisonment.

She knew of a day in the near future that her husband was scheduled to travel, so she wrote a letter to the Ribnitzer Rebbe zt'l (known for his *mesirus nefesh* to perform *bris milah*) and requested that he come and circumcise her son.

The Rebbe arrived together with his friend, Reb Mendel Futerfass zt'l. It was very risky to perform the *mitzvah*, but they did the *mitzvah* with joy and *mesirus nefesh*.

After the *milah*, the child began to bleed profusely and needed medical care. They couldn't call a doctor because the doctor would report them to the KGB.

The Ribnitzer Rebbe went into a side room for a short time, and when he came out, Reb Mendel Futerfass said with relief, "You performed a miracle! The child stopped bleeding! What did you do there?"

The Rebbe replied, "I prayed. I said, 'Ribono shel Olam! We came here to do a great *mitzvah*. Protect us,' and Hashem heard my *tefillos*."

When Reb Mendel Futerfass would repeat this story, he would express his admiration of the Ribnitzer Rebbe's *emunah peshutah*. "I was so afraid, I couldn't think straight, but the Ribnitzer Rebbe knew that the solution was *tefillah*. With his *emunah peshutah*, he saved the life of the child and our lives."

8. Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa related the following parable:

Three people were locked up in a prison cell that had no windows. It was pitch dark inside, even during the daytime. The guards would bring them food daily, but eating in the dark was hard. To make matters worse, the guards brought them different eating utensils every day, complicating matters even more. Two of the prisoners always managed to figure out how to eat their meals, but the third prisoner wasn't too clever and wasn't managing. So, one of his cellmates took it upon himself to help him. Every day, during mealtime, this prisoner would describe to his cellmate what was on the plate and how to eat it.

### Take Action Immediately

It states (Koheles 9:10) כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות, בנחך עשה, "Whatever you can do with your might, do it."

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l says that בנחך means thoughts, chachmah (because חכמה spells כ"ה). So, the pasuk is telling us כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות, בנחך, if you have a good thought, an idea that can bring forth a kiddush Hashem or kindness to others, עשה, do it right away. Don't procrastinate.

Good thoughts come from Above, and if you don't act upon them right away, your inspiration will wane and vanish, and you will probably never get around to doing the good deed. So, if you have a good idea, it is a message from heaven. Act immediately. Capture the moment and the opportunity.

At the beginning of the parashah, Rashi writes, "What did Yisro hear that caused him to come? He heard about kriyas Yam Suf and *milchemes Amalek*."

What specifically about Kriyas Yam Suf and *milchemes Amalek* inspired Yisro to come to the desert to receive the Torah?

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l explains that, generally, before a person travels, he must close his businesses, sell his property, say goodbye to friends, and make other arrangements. One doesn't just pick up and go. So why did Yisro come so suddenly? We know that he rushed because he arrived before Shavuot! We understand that Kriyas

Yam Suf inspired him to join the Jewish nation, but why the rush?

The answer is that Yisro heard about *milchemes Amalek*. Yisro understood that Amalek could have only come by acting quickly, without thinking. Had Amalek taken some time to think things over, he would have realized that it was suicidal to battle the Jewish nation, to whom Hashem performed miracles, ten makos, and kriyas Yam Suf. Yisro realized that he must do the same by acting immediately. If he dallies and thinks things over, he will never come. He was inspired, so he had to act on his inspiration immediately.

The Yesod HaAvodah says that it is alluded to in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 111), שכל טוב, if you have a good thought, לכל עשיהם, bring it to action.

When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish nation, they replied, נעשה ונשמע. They didn't ask, "What is written in the Torah?" Instead, they jumped in and accepted the Torah. This is often the only way to excel in avodas Hashem.

### Bikur Cholim

The Rishonim discuss whether *bikur cholim* is a mitzvah from the Torah or a *mitzvah d'rabbanan*. Many sources imply that *bikur cholim* is a Torah obligation. If the basis for *bikur cholim* is chesed, then it is a mitzvah from the Torah, as it falls under the umbrella mitzvah of ואהבת לרעך כמוך, "Love your fellow man like yourself." Furthermore, it states

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The third prisoner never participated in these lessons. Instead, he spent his time drilling a little hole in the wall of the dark prison.

One day, the "instructor" confronted the one who drilled, "Why can't you help me out once in a while with teaching our cellmate how to eat? Why does it always have to be me?"

"I am helping our cellmate immensely," he replied. "I'm drilling a hole in the wall. When I succeed, there will be light in our cell, and this fellow will understand how to eat on his own."

The *nimshal* is about *emunah*. When there is *emunah*, life is bright, and there is happiness. The greatest favor you can do for yourself and others is to introduce the bright light of *emunah*. When there is *emunah*, everything becomes clear and joyful.

(Devarim 28:9), והלכת בדרכיו, "You shall go in His ways," and it states (Devarim 13:5), אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו, "After Hashem your G-d shall you follow," and Chazal explain this to mean that we should follow Hashem's ways by visiting the ill and performing other forms of chesed.

According to some *Rishonim*, the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* is expressed in *parashas Korach* (Bamidbar 16:29). Moshe said, ופקודת כל אדם יפקד עליהם, "If the destiny of all men has visited upon them." The Gemara (Nedarim 39:) explains, "If they die like all ill people, who lie on their beds and people come to visit them..." (ריא"ז הלכות נדרים).

Another popular source is in this week's parashah (18:20), והודעת להם את הדרך ילכו בה, "You shall make known to them the path on which they should go..." The Gemara (Bava Metzia 30:) says that this refers to visiting the ill.<sup>9</sup>

The Gemara (Nedarim 40:) relates that a student of Reb Akiva's yeshiva was ill, and the students of the yeshiva weren't coming to visit him, so Reb Akiva, himself, went to visit his student. Reb Akiva tidied up the room, washed the floors, and the sick student said, "Rebbe, you granted me life."

"Reb Akiva went out and taught his students, 'Whoever doesn't visit the sick, it is like murder, and whoever visits the sick brings him life.'"

The Seder HaYom writes, "*Bikur cholim* is the from the highest forms of *gemilus chasadim*, as Chazal (Nedarim 39:) write, '*Bikur cholim* has no limit (אין להם שיעור)'. Sometimes, with clever, encouraging, and kind words, one can revive a sick person and grant him

life. We have seen this happen many times. Sometimes a person visits the sick for an hour or two, and the ill person says, 'I feel like a new person. My *neshamah* came back to me,' and we see that the illness became lighter."

It states (Mishlei 18:14), רוח איש יכלכל מחלהו ורוח, נכאה מי ישאנה, "A man's spirit will sustain his sickness, but who can support a broken spirit." The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains that *ruach* means happiness. "When a person is happy, he can handle his illness... His joy will annul it. But when one is sad, who can carry it?" Therefore, part of the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* is to give the ill person hope and happiness.

The Rambam writes, "Tell an ill person happy stories that will gladden his heart. Tell him interesting news that will take his mind off his illness. Make him laugh, and the people caring for him laugh. When you choose someone to be with a sick person, choose someone who can make him happy because this is what is needed."

*Sodi Razyah* (attributed to the Rokeach) writes, "When one visits the sick, he should speak comforting and encouraging words." These encouraging words will bring joy and, at times, *refuah*, too.

The Gemara (Nedarim 40:) writes the many rewards of visiting and caring for the ill. Among them is that he will be saved from Gehinom, and is granted long life, protection from the yetzer hara, and is saved from afflictions. Everyone honors him, and he will have good friends who give him good counsel, and he will be saved from bad friends who give bad counsel.

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9. Every year, Baron Rothschild z'l would visit the Ksav Sofer zt'l at a vacation/health resort they both frequented. One year, the Ksav Sofer wasn't feeling well, and the Baron cut his visit short. The Ksav Sofer asked him why he wasn't staying longer.

The Baron replied, "Chazal call visiting the sick (18:20) ילכו, 'to go.' This is because when you visit the sick, you must know when to leave. Sometimes a visit is a burden on the ill person, and sometimes the ill person is embarrassed to be seen in his state. Therefore, the Torah says ילכו, that you have to know when to leave."

The Ksav Sofer often repeated this *vort* that he heard from Baron Rothschild.



The *meforshim* explain that these rewards are מדה כנגד מדה. For example, the Gemara says that visiting the sick saves one from afflictions. This reward is מדה כנגד מדה, measure per measure. He saved the ill person from afflictions; therefore, he is rewarded that he won't be afflicted.

We add that he will be saved from the ill person's illness. Just as he helped the ill person overcome that illness, Hashem will help him not to be afflicted with that illness.

### Everyone Must Learn Torah

Rashi (19:6). writes לא פחות ולא יותר, "Nothing less and nothing more." The Sar Shalom of Belz zy"a says that Rashi's words, לא פחות ולא יותר hints that no one is less than someone who doesn't study Torah, and no one is greater than a person who does study Torah."

The Beis Aharon zt'l would say that he can't look in the face of someone who didn't study a *daf* Gemara that day.

Rebbe Shlomke Zhviller never spoke negatively about Yidden, but he once spoke very degradingly against those who don't study Torah.

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy"a would say, "Someone who doesn't study Gemara is *"Nisht kein Yid und nisht kein mensch,"* not a Yid, and not even a human being.

It states (*Bereishis* 10:10), וְהָיָה רִאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ בָּבֶל, "His first kingdom was Bavel." Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l would say that this pasuk implies, "One should begin with Talmud Bavli." That is the basis of being a Yid.

In Shemonah Esrei we say, הָשִׁיבֵנו אֲבוֹנֵינוּ לְתוֹרַתְךָ וּקְרִבֵנוּ מִלְכּוֹ לְעִבּוּדֶיךָ וְהַחְזִירֵנוּ בְּתִשְׁבֻּהָ שְׁלִימָה לְפָנֶיךָ. In this brachah, we mention studying

Torah before doing teshuvah. Reb Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l explains that this teaches us to study Torah always, even when we feel unworthy and even when we have *aveiros*. If we are still before teshuvah, we should study Torah.

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos, Shavuuous* 5562) zt'l writes, "The Torah wasn't given to individuals, it was given to all of klal Yisrael, the sinners ['the *chelbenah*'] and the tzaddikim ['the *besamim*']. We received the Torah [on Har Sinai] after we had fallen to the forty-ninth gate of *tumah* [and this proves that Torah is for everyone, from the tzaddikim down to the lowliest Yidden]."

The *meforshim* ask why the *Aseres HaDibros* begin with אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim," instead of "I am Hashem...Who created heaven and earth." We can answer that we mention yetzias Mitzrayim to remember that just a short time before, we were at the 49th level of *tumah*. And with that awareness, no one will say that he isn't worthy of studying or practicing the Torah.

Yisro worshiped every *avodah zarah* that existed in his time and was also a high-ranking priest. Yet he came to the desert and received the Torah. This proves that regardless of one's past, one can receive the Torah. Rebbe Leibeile Eiger zy"a explains that this is why matan Torah is written in parashas *Yisro*. It reminds us that Torah is for everyone. No one should think Torah isn't for him.<sup>10</sup>

In his *drashah*, Reb Chaim Kreisworth zt'l said: Two people came to me for a *din Torah*. One was a wealthy diamond dealer, and the other was his sales agent. The agent claimed they agreed to a .06% commission, while the dealer argued that the agreement was .05%.

10. It states, וָאֵשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל כְּנָפֵי נְשָׁרִים וָאֵבִיא אֶתְכֶם עָלַי, "I lifted you on eagle's wings, and I brought you to Me" (19:4). A *nesher* is a non-kosher bird. The Imrei Emes zy"a explained that the pasuk is saying that even when a person is on a low spiritual level like a *nesher*, if he studies Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring him close [to Him].

Reb Chaim Kreiswirth noticed that some people listening to his *drashah* were laughing. They considered it absurd that a *din* Torah should be over .01%. Wealthy people shouldn't be bickering over such a small amount. Reb Chaim Kreiswirth told them to stop laughing because the sales were for a billion dollars. .01%, therefore, was a million dollars, a substantial amount, according to everyone's standards.

Reb Chaim concluded, "There are people who think that their Torah learning doesn't have value; they think that they don't learn *l'shmah*, etc. But the reward of Torah is so great that even if one only receives .01% of

the reward of Torah, it is also extremely valuable."<sup>11</sup>

Hashem promises the Jewish nation that if they receive the Torah (19:5), *והייתם לי סגולה*, *מכל העמים*, "You shall be for the most beloved treasure of all peoples."<sup>12</sup>

A *segulah* reminds us of the *nekudah* "segal," which is the formation of three dots (two on top and one beneath). The uniqueness of a *segal* is that even when it lies on its side, it remains a *segal*. Any way you turn it, it remains a *segal*. None of the other *nekudos* has this trait. Therefore, Hashem says, *והייתם לי סגולה*, you will be like a *segal*. This means, even if you fall, you will always remain the *am segulah*, a precious nation to Hashem.

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**11.** Hashem accepts the Torah of all Yidden, yet the more *l'shmah* and the more kedushah and taharah, the higher and the greater the Torah study.

The Chazon Ish said there are geniuses in our generation as there were in the past, yet we don't reach their levels. No one in our times is becoming a Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l, for example. This is because a great mind isn't enough. One needs kedushah and taharah, and in this aspect, we don't compare to the scholars of the past (*Maaseh Ish* vol.2:10).

**12.** The Or HaChaim HaKadosh explains that a *segulah* is something that can't be explained with logic. This is unlike a *refuah*, a cure that can be explained logically and scientifically.

The Or HaChaim gives some examples. One is that when a goy studies Torah or keeps Shabbos, he is *chayav misah* (deserves to die), yet when a Yid studies Torah or keeps Shabbos, it's the greatest deed. This is something that can't be understood logically because if the deed is good, it should be good when a goy does it, too! It is a *segulah*, and we can't explain it with logic.

Another example is the desire to do a mitzvah or an aveirah. When a Yid intends to do a mitzvah, he is rewarded as though he performed the mitzvah, and when he wants to do an aveirah ch"v, he isn't punished for his evil intentions. But for the goyim, the opposite is true. They are punished for their evil desires as though they committed the aveirah and aren't rewarded for their good wishes. Logically, we don't understand this rule, but it is a *segulah*, a rule that we accept without understanding.