

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Netzavim Vayeilech





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Torah Wellsprings

Netzavim - Vayeilech

Hashem Wants our *Teshuvah*

Reb Nachum Yassar zt'l (from the tzaddikim of Yerushalayim about one hundred years ago) had a son who strayed from the path of Torah. Reb Nachum never spoke about him because his distress was too great. But once he heard two chassidishe *yungerleit* discussing a *Rambam* in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (7:6): "*Teshuvah* brings close the people who were far away. Yesterday, this person was hated by Hashem, and today he is beloved and desired." The chassidim asked, "How can one's status change so quickly? Yesterday he was hated and an abomination, and today he is beloved and a close friend?"

Reb Nochum Yasser interrupted their conversation and told them, "You know about my son... Because of his sins, I feel very distant from him – I would say that I am even angry at him. But if my son came into the beis medresh right now and told me that he wants to do *teshuvah*, I will love him immensely. All my negative feelings towards him will evaporate in a moment, and I am a human being, with imperfect *middos*. So, you see that even for human beings, it is possible to change one's feelings from hatred to love in a moment. Certainly then, Hashem's feelings towards us can change in a moment. All this is accomplished with *teshuvah*."¹

1. This story has a happy ending. Once, Reb Nachum Yassar unburdened himself to Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller zt'l about his son

Let us take this a step further: Even when a father hates his child, deep in his heart, there are strong feelings of love, too. He is waiting when his child will return to him. Similarly, Hashem awaits our *teshuvah* because deep down, Hashem loves us. As the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said, he wishes he could love the greatest tzaddik as much as Hashem loves the greatest *rasha*.

To demonstrate Hashem's love for His children, read the following story that happened just a few weeks ago:

A *yungerman* was waiting for bus number 450 to bring him from

Yerushalayim to his home in Ashdod. But each 450 bus that came just passed by him without stopping. (Due to the coronavirus, the health ministry limited the bus capacity to 29 passengers. This leaves many people waiting for a bus for a long time.) After five busses passed by, the *yungerman* decided to go to the central bus station (which wasn't too far away) where bus number 438 was scheduled to leave for Ashdod.

Checking the time and the bus schedule, he realized that he might miss bus 438, too, so he took a taxi to the central bus station.

that fell off the *derech*. With a broken heart, Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller replied, "I also left a son in Russia..." who didn't observe the Torah and mitzvos in the Communist Regime. Rebbe Shlomke added, "But one day, my son's children and your son's children will do *teshuvah*, and they will marry each other."

And that is what happened. Their grandchildren did *teshuvah* and married each other, as Rebbe Shlomke predicted and foresaw with his *ruach hakodesh*.

In the central bus stations, two busses on two different routes leave from almost the same spot. One is bus 438, going to Ashdod, and another is bus 433 to Rishon l'Tzion, which is in the opposite direction. If you don't look carefully, 433 and 438 look almost the same. Due to the similar numbers, and to his haste to get home, the *yungerman* accidentally boarded bus 433 to Rishon l'Tzion.

At first, he didn't realize his error. He felt relieved that he was finally heading home (at least, he thought so), and he began making important phone calls. He was so engrossed in his phone calls that he didn't look out the window. If he had, he would realize that he was traveling in the wrong direction. When he finally realized his mistake, the bus was on the highway, and he asked the bus driver where he could get off to catch a bus to Ashdod. The bus driver told him to get off at the next stop. "You

can catch a bus to Ashdod there. But you must move quickly, because sometimes when I arrive at the bus stop, I see that the Ashdod bus is already there, on the other side of the street. So, go quickly, or you will miss it."

The bus stopped, and the *yungerman* quickly got off. There was traffic on the road, so that he couldn't cross immediately. He saw the Ashdod bus arrive, but there were still cars passing in front of him, and the traffic light was red. As much as he wanted to get home, he didn't want to risk his life. He finally reached the bus stop just as the Ashdod bus pulled away.

What should he do now? He didn't know, but the first thing he wanted to do is to buy a can of coke. He needed to boost his energy after such a trip.

He went into a store, and it was quite evident that the storekeeper wasn't

religious. "When is the *yahrtzeit*?" the storekeeper asked him."

"Which *yahrtzeit*?"

"The Belzer Rav's *yahrtzeit*."

"It's tonight!"

The storekeeper's eyes lit up with joy.

The *yungerman* realized that there must be some story here, so he asked him, "What connection do you have to the Belzer Rav?"

"My father wasn't religious. Nevertheless, every year he went to Har HaMenuchos to be at the Belzer Rav's *kever*. Sometimes, he took me along. Before my father was *niftar* (a few months ago) my father asked me to keep up the family tradition of going every year to the Belzer Rav's *kever*. My father didn't leave us money; the only inheritance he gave us was this request. I knew the *yahrtzeit* was

around this time, but I didn't know the exact date (כ"א אב). For the past two weeks, I hoped to find a religious Yid whom I could ask for the exact date, but I didn't find anyone until you came. Now I can fulfill my father's request, and go there tonight..."

Some people seem to be very far away (as the storekeeper in this story), but Hashem performs miracles to bring them closer – even if just a drop. A *yungerman* missed several busses, and then accidentally got on bus 433 headed to Rishon l'Tzion, instead of bus 438, which goes to Ashdod. He realized he was on the wrong route when he was right next to the store where this Yid worked so he could tell him about the Belzer Rav's *yahrtzeit*. Hashem had a plan to bring this yid closer to Him, so He helped him go the holy, Chasidic gathering by the Belzer Rav's *kever*.

This applies to us, too. Although, *baruch Hashem*,

we keep the Torah, there is still a long way to go until we serve Hashem as we should. It is always possible to climb higher; there are endless levels of perfection. Hashem performs miracles for us to help us come closer to Him.

Indeed, we should look back at our lives and recognize the miracles Hashem performed for us to help us grow in *avodas Hashem*. You should never think Hashem isn't interested in you due to your *aveiros*. Hashem is waiting for the return of His children.

Here is another quite similar story; it took place a few years ago:²

A *yungerman* from Kiryat Gat davened *shacharis* at *netz hachamah* and then boarded the first bus headed to Yerushalayim

to be *menachem avel* a very close friend. As expected, his friend's face lit up when he saw him, but before they could speak, his cellphone rang. "It's my father" he said to his friend, the *avel*. "I'll be right back," and he went to the side to answer the phone.

His father said he has a doctor's appointment in Petach Tikvah at noon. He asked his son if he could meet him there because he didn't want to be alone for the scheduled medical procedure.

The son looked at his watch. It was almost nine-thirty. "I think I can be there in time" he replied.

He went over to the *avel* and explained that an emergency came up, and he can't stay for long, as he initially planned. They spoke for a few moments;

2. This story was written in last week's Torah Wellsprings. We quote the story again because of the additions (mainly in the footnotes) and because it fits well into this week's discussion.

he was *menachem avel*, and then left. There wasn't much time. He had to catch two busses: one from Yerushalayim to Bnei Brak, and then another bus from Bnei Brak to Ramat Gan.

He was on the bus from Bnei Brak to Ramat Gan when his father called him. His father asked, "Where are you? It's already 12:30!"

"You know how it is with busses," the son explained. "You can never know how long things will take. But I'm on the bus to Ramat Gan; I'll be with you soon."

"It isn't necessary," the father said. "I just finished the medical procedure. I'm

on my way home. Thanks for trying to come."

It was a long morning, and now it was time to head home. He crossed the street to catch a bus back to Bnei Brak, and from there, he had to catch another bus to Kiryat Gat. The electronic table showed that the next bus would come in half an hour.

He felt down; half the day passed without success. He wanted to spend time with his friend, the *avel*, to be *menachem avel* properly, but he was there only for a brief moment. He tried to help his father, but he wasn't able to do that, either. He felt that he had wasted the morning.³

3. Actually, he didn't waste his time, because he tried to perform the mitzvos and our primary obligation is to try. The results aren't always in our hands.

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen proves this from the three *malachim* who came to Avraham Avinu's tent. This is the Torah's primary illustration of Avraham Avinu's excellence in the mitzvah *hachnasas orchim*. However, *malachim* don't need to eat. No real *hachnasas orchim* took place at this time. So, he is praised for his attempts, and not for the results.

Similarly, the Torah praises Avraham for *akeidas Yitzchak*. However, *akeidas Yitzchak* never happened, fully, because Yitzchak wasn't sacrificed. So why is the *akeidah* such an important event? This is Reb Tzaddok HaCohen's second proof that we aren't rewarded for our deeds and accomplishments, but rather for our attempts.

In the story mentioned above, the *yungerman* didn't actually do *kibud av ve'em* and he wasn't actually *menachem avel* like he wanted to, but he did his best, and that is all that Hashem requests from us. So, he didn't waste his time at all that morning.

At a *siyum*, we say: אנו עמלים והם עמלים שבר והם עמלים ואינם מקבלים, "We toil, and they toil. We toil and earn reward. They toil and they don't earn reward." The Chofetz Chaim notes that when a carpenter builds a table or when a cobbler makes a shoe, he is also paid for his toil. So why do we say that they don't get reward. The answer is, he is rewarded for his accomplishments, but not for his toil. The proof is, if he toils all day to build a table or to make shoes and it doesn't turn out good, he won't get any money at all. Whereas, when it comes to Torah study, we are rewarded for our toil. Even if there aren't results (because he still doesn't understand) he will be rewarded for toiling in Torah. Because our obligation is to try, and that is an even greater accomplishment than the output and the result.

The Midrash tells the following *mashal*:

A king hired someone to fill barrels with water. He stopped working when he saw that the barrels had holes in them, and all the water seeped out. A wise person told him, "The king told you to fill the barrels. Do so, and you will earn your pay. Why should you care if there are holes in the barrel?" The *nimshal* is for those who study Torah but forget their studies. That shouldn't prevent them from studying Torah. The King told them to study Torah, and He promised them a great reward. If they aren't able to remember, that's not their fault. Once again, we see that our attempts are our primary obligation.

This concept can also be seen by the virtue of giving *tzedakah* and helping the poor. It states (15:11) כִּי לֹא יִחְדַּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ. The Ksav Sofer zt'l explains that this means Hashem will not let there be

He went into a convenience store and requested to use the restroom. The storekeeper was a kind person and agreed.

The *yungerman* said, "Just one more thing: I have my talis and tefillin with me and I don't want to bring them into the restroom. Can I leave them with you for a moment?"

The storekeeper replied with his request: "Do you give me permission to put them on?"

"Of course, it will be my *zechus*, he answered"

When he came out of the bathroom, he saw the

storekeeper's tattooed arm wrapped with the *tefillin shel yad*, his bald head wore the *tefillin shel rosh*, and the talis was draped over his shoulders. The storeowner said, "My religious grandfather of blessed memory bought me tefillin for my bar mitzvah and he told me to wear them every day. I do that, at least most of the time. But today I woke up late and I had to rush to work. I didn't have time to put on tefillin. I prayed and I trusted in Hashem that somehow I would be able to keep this holy mitzvah today. And here you came, a religious man, bringing me tefillin! It isn't common that

poor people in Eretz Yisrael. If we don't help the poor, Hashem will. The question is, if Hashem will help the poor, why are people obligated to help them? Let Hashem help them Himself! Hashem says, *על כן אנכי מצוה לאמר פתח תפתח את ידך לאחריך לענייך ולאביונך בארץ* why do I command you to help the poor? *כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכה ה' אלקיך* so you can receive Hashem's blessings.

Because more than the results, Hashem wants to see our desire and our attempts. He wants that we should strive and try, with all our might, to do His will.

someone like yourself comes to my store, and it never happened before that one of you gave me tefillin. It's a miracle. I knew Hashem would help!"

This *yungerman* thought his entire morning was wasted. Every morning he learned in *kollel*, studying one page of *Shulchan Aruch* after the next one. But today, almost all he did was travel on busses! As the saying goes, מגולגלן זכות על, "Hashem gives the righteous people opportunities to do great mitzvos." It was destined for him to travel all this way to help a Yid put on tefillin and to bring him a drop closer to Hashem.

When you set out to do *teshuvah*, remember these stories. Remember that you aren't in the *teshuvah* process alone. Hashem is doing His share to help you come close to Him.

Tzaddikim learned lessons of *avodas Hashem* from modern inventions.

For example, one tzaddik said that we learn the importance of one minute from the train. Because if a person comes one minute late, he can miss the train. Another tzaddik said that a telephone teaches us that it is indeed possible for a person to have a conversation with Hashem, even if we don't see Him. We added that we can learn from a cell phone that even when there seems that there is no connection at all – because a cell phone isn't connected to a wire – we can speak to Hashem.

Now, we add to the list a few lessons that we can learn from a relatively recent invention, the GPS.

(1) When a person doesn't know which way to go, the GPS will direct him until he reaches his destination. Similarly, there are times when we don't know what to do. Hashem sends us hints to direct us.

(2) Even if you didn't listen to the GPS's directions

several times, the GPS doesn't give up on you, and it doesn't lose patience. We can learn a lesson in *chinuch*. We shouldn't become angry with our children who err, and who won't listen to our helpful advice. We should patiently teach them what they should do now, to get back to the right way.

(3) Finally, the GPS reminds us that *teshuvah* is always an option. Even if one was driving the wrong way for many years, he can always turn around and find his way to his destination.

Hashem's Presence

When the Imrei Emes arrived at the Kenesiyah HaGedolah, Vienna, Elul, ה'תרפ"ו, he remained outside the hall. His *gabaim* explained to the organizers that the Rebbe disapproved of the *mechitzah*. The women were on the balcony that surrounded four sides of the hall, but there weren't

any curtains. Until this was fixed, the Gerer Rebbe would not attend.

Some of the rabbanim heard about this and said, "According to halachah, the *mechitzah* is good enough because it is one floor above us. There is no need to fix anything."

The rabbanim decided to ask the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*, who was also present, and they agreed that they would follow his ruling. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "According to halachah, the *mechitzah* is kosher. But since some request that the *mechitzah* be improved, we should do so."

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* explained, "When Hashem is with us, we have nothing to fear. As it states (*Tehillim* 23), גם כי אֶךְ בְּנֵי צָלְמוֹת לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי, אחת עמודי, "Even when I go in the valley of death, I am not afraid... because You are with me.' However, when Hashem's presence isn't with us, *chalilah*, we are in great danger.

Hashem leaves us when there isn't *tznius*. As it states (*Devarim* 23:15), כי ה' אלקיך, מתהלך בקרב מחנהך להצילך ולתת אויבך לפניך והיה מחנהך קדוש ולא יראה בך ערות דבר ושב מאחריך, 'For Hashem is going in your camp to save you and to deliver your enemies before you. Your camp must be holy, and there should not be seen anything profane, for then the *Shechinah* will leave you.' It is for our benefit to be *machmir* in matters of *kedushah* and *tznius*. It will grant us a higher level of protection and *siyata dishmaya*."

This story was repeated often by Reb Avraham Kalmanovitz *zt'l*, who was at that Kenesiyah HaGedolah.

Reb Avraham
Kalmanovitz's son, Reb

Shraga Moshe *zt'l*, said that this story teaches us that there are various levels of *kedushah* and corresponding is the extent that Hashem's presence is with us. It isn't that Hashem is either present or He isn't. Instead, He can be very present, or He can be slightly present, depending on the degree of *kedushah* in Klal Yisrael. Because the *mechitzah* of the hall was technically kosher, Hashem's presence would surely be there. Nevertheless, the Chofetz Chaim said that if they upgrade the level of *tznius*, that will grant them a greater manifestation of Hashem's presence, and together with it, a higher level of protection and *siyata dishmaya*.⁴

4. There was a yeshiva in Beitar for *bachurim* who were slightly off the path. The staff worked with the *bachurim*, quite successfully, and taught them to be simple *ehrlicher Yidden*, despite the struggles and hang-ups the *bachurim* were going through.

One windy evening, one of the *magidei shiurim* of the yeshiva was

taking a walk with one of his students, as he tried to influence him to stop using the internet.

"Rebbe," the *bachur* replied, "I only visit good sites. I'm careful."

As they spoke, two people walked towards them. One wore a hat, the other one was only wearing a yarmulke on his head. A strong gust of wind blew the hat off one of them, and the *kappel* off the other, and they both went scrambling to pick them up. The *magid shiur* said, "What you see is an example of what I'm teaching you: The one who wore a yarmulke and a hat remained with his head covered. The other, who only had one cover on his head, remained without anything. So, you see that if you do more, you will remain protected. But if you do the bare minimum, you might end up with nothing."

A chassid living in Poland wanted to move to America. He heard that the streets of America were paved with gold, and the thought of earning a comfortable *parnassah* there appealed to him. But he wouldn't go without permission from his Rebbe, the Trisker Magid. The chassid asked permission from the Rebbe several times, but the Rebbe's response was always "no." He didn't want him to go.

The chassid asked, "What's wrong with America? I have family living there, and they all encourage me to come. Many good Yidden, and even rabbanim, live there. It's gradually becoming a Jewish place to live. I'm aware that there are major tests in America, and some Yidden are throwing away their Yiddishkeit, but that is happening in Poland too. The *yetzer hara* is here, just like he is there. So why does the Rebbe discourage me from going to America?"

The Rebbe answered with a *mashal*:

There was an ignorant person who davened from a large siddur that included many commentaries. To daven Shemonah Esrei, he had to turn fifty pages, because only a few words were on each page, and around it was commentary. The siddur began with a long introduction, to explain the depth of *tefillah* according to kabbalah. It was a very rare siddur, but for the ignorant person, it didn't seem to serve any purpose that a regular siddur couldn't

Reb Elchanan Wasserman *zt'l* said the following in the name of the Chofetz Chaim:

Hashem is our guardian, as we say, שומר עמו ישראל, "Who guards over His nation, Yisrael." There are different

types of *shomrim* (see *Bava Metzia* 93). One is a *shomer chinam*, someone who watches over something as a favor, without receiving payment. Hashem is such a *shomer* (א שומר חנם) for no one pays Hashem for protecting us. One of the halachos of

accomplish for him.

"Let's change siddurim" a Torah scholar once told him. "I will give you my simple siddur. It will be easier for you to use. You won't need to turn the pages so often. And I can benefit from the commentaries of your siddur."

The simple, unlearned man refused to exchange siddurim.

"But why not?" the scholar asked. "An exchange seems to be a win-win situation for both of us."

The unlearned man replied, "It often happens that the first pages of a siddur fall out. If a few pages of my large siddur fall out, I will still have *Adon Olam*. But if I use your siddur, and a few pages fall out, I might lose *Adon Olam*!"

The *nimshal* is that in Poland, where there were established yeshivos and *kehilos*, even if the *yetzer hara* comes to a person and he falls away somewhat from Yiddishkeit, the *Adon Olam* remains. He doesn't fall too far, and he can come back again. In America (in those years) there weren't yet yeshivos and established *kehilos*. If one begins to fall, he is likely to lose the *Adon Olam* too.

This story reminds us that when it comes to *emunah* and *kedushah*, it is often better to do more than what one is absolutely obligated. It is a protection against losing the *Adon Olam* and from losing one's *yiras shamayim*.

a *shomer chinam* is that at any moment, he may back out and say that he doesn't want to watch the object anymore.

Nevertheless, Hashem, with His compassion, doesn't stop guarding us. He loyally remains שומר ישראל the guardian over the Jewish nation. However, when there is ערות דבר ושם מאחרך a lack of *kedushah*, Hashem leaves us, and He stops watching over us, *chalilah*.

In a war, we blow trumpets. As it states (*Bamidbar* 10:9), וְכִי תִבְאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאַרְצְכֶם עַל הָעָר הָעָר אֲתֹכֶם וְהִרְעַתֶם בַּחֲצֹצֶרֶת "If a war comes to your land... blow trumpets and you will be remembered before Hashem..." The *Zohar* says that this is the reason we blow shofar on Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah we are at war against the prosecuting *malachim* who don't want us to be inscribed for a good year. We blow shofar, so that Hashem will

remember us and grant us a good year.

As we wrote above, we succeed at war when Hashem is with us. As it states (*Devarim* 23:15), כִּי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ מֵתְהַלֵּךְ בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ לְהַצִּילְךָ וּלְהַתּוֹת אוֹיְבֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה מַחֲנֶיךָ קֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה בְּךָ עֲרוּת דָּבָר וְשָׁם יִשְׁכַּן ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ, 'For Hashem is going in your camp to save you and to deliver your enemies before you. Your camp must be holy and there should not be seen anything profane, for then the *Shechinah* will leave you.'

The Sfas Emes (*Ki Seitzeh* (תר"ם) quotes this *pasuk*, and he writes that this also applies to our success in our war on Rosh Hashanah. We will succeed and we will be inscribed for a good year when Hashem's presence is with us.

The Sfas Emes notes that the *roshei teivos* of (ibid.) לְהַצִּילְךָ וּלְהַתּוֹת אוֹיְבֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ, "to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you" is אֱלֹהִים. This is because our success in the war of Rosh Hashanah is dependent on

our preparation and teshuvah in Elul.⁵

Approximately seventy years ago, Reb Menachem Eisenbach *zt'l* ran a wholesale Judaica business. He didn't have a phone (few people in Eretz Yisrael had phones in those days) and he didn't own a car, so he walked to the Judaica stores in Yerushalayim, to take orders and then he would return, once again by foot, to fill their orders. He ran a fine, lucrative business.

There was one store which gave him a lot of business. It was located on Rechov Yaffo, but the *tznius*

on that street wasn't as it should be. Reb Menachem Eisenbach walked down Rechov Yaffo with his head down, not looking out of his four cubits. However, the test was difficult, and one day he told the Judaica storeowner of Rechov Yaffo that he wouldn't be coming to him anymore.

He lost a lot of business because of this, but he was still earning enough to get by.

Reb Menachem Eisenbach was very close to the Minchas Yitzchak *zt'l*, the rav of Yerushalayim. (He would go to his house almost every day to fix things

5. The following is the Sfas Emes's words:

"It is certain that Bnei Yisrael need help from Heaven, and according to the amount we come close to Hashem, so will He help us. We need to prepare ourselves to welcome Hashem's *Shechinah*. And just as Bnei Yisrael prepares themselves during these days with their *teshuvah*, Hashem reveals holy lights into their hearts... As it states (*Yeshayah* 42:8), וְכָבוֹדִי לֹא אֶתֶן, "I will not give My honor to the *kelipos*" whose *roshei teivos* spell אֱלִיל, because these days Hashem removes the *kelipos*, the concealment, and Hashem's holiness is revealed."

that required repair). He asked the Minchas Yitzchak whether he did the right thing for cutting off ties with that store. He said, "Hashem gave me *parnassah*, was I correct for giving it away? For now, I have enough to get by, but my children are getting older, and soon I will be making *chasunos* for them. Perhaps I shouldn't have cut my contacts so hastily?"

The Minchas Yitzchak replied, "If you would have asked me beforehand, I don't know whether I would advise you to do so. But now that you've done it, I will daven for you."

The Minchas Yitzchak's family relates that the Minchas Yitzchak was very impressed by Reb Menachem Eisenbach's *mesirus nefesh* in this matter.

It was *mesirus nefesh* for *kedushah*.

Reb Nissan Piltchik *zt'l* raised a chassidic family in America, a rare accomplishment close to a hundred years ago. Reb Moshe Wolfson *shlita* asked him in which merit Hashem blessed him to raise such a family.

Reb Nissan answered, "Maybe it's because my wife and I would clean the bathrooms in the *beis medresh*."⁶

"No, it must be for something else."

"Perhaps it is because I was a chassid of four Stoliner Rebbes?"

Reb Wolfson sought some more: "What other merit did you have?"

Reb Pilchik replied that his mother was a widow,

6. Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* spoke about two of his chassidim who merited *ruach hakadosh* because they used to clean the bathrooms (outhouses) before *Shacharis*.

and to help support the family, he worked as a door-to-door salesman. Once, he was going door-to-door in an apartment building, and a woman took the merchandise he was selling into her house instead of speaking to him in the doorway. Reb Pilchik realized that this was a test, so he left the merchandise with her and fled.

He said that he felt very close to Hashem because he passed this difficult test. Being a Stoliner chassid, he knew that one of the ways to praise Hashem is by dancing. So, he went to one of the tallest buildings in Manhattan and danced on the rooftop, because he was so happy that he passed this test, and that he was feeling so close to Hashem.

Reb Wolfson said, "It's because of this."

The Joy of Learning Torah

Reb Avraham
Genichovsky *zt'l* (*rosh*

yeshivas Tchebin) came to the home of a *gadol*, who had recently fallen ill, to perform the mitzvah *bikur cholim*. The *gadol* told him that he had already recovered, and he was feeling well. Reb Avraham expressed his happiness that the illness had passed so quickly, and he told him the following story:

The *rebbe* *tzin* of the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* once told her husband, "Why don't you take better care of your health? You hardly eat or sleep. How can you survive like that?"

The Chidushei HaRim replied, "Your father chose me to marry you because I'm quicker than most people. I can learn in two hours what others spend an entire day learning. But it isn't only in Torah that I'm so quick. My eating and sleeping are also quick. I can sleep for a short time, and I'm as rested as someone who slept a full night. I can eat a drop and be as satisfied as someone

who ate a three-course meal."

After telling this story, Reb Avraham Genichovsky said, "I remembered this story because you are similar. Most people who catch your illness need a couple of weeks to recover, but you overcame the illness in a couple of days."

The *gadol* replied with his own story:

The *rebbetzin* of the Shoel u'Meishiv was a very wise and clever woman. She ran a carpet and embroidery business. Once, someone tricked her and she lost a lot of money. She was very upset about it and told her husband about the loss. A short while afterward, she saw her husband learning Torah again, totally tranquil and joyous. She asked, "Doesn't it bother you that we lost so much money? How can you learn Torah as if nothing happened?"

The Shoel u'Meishiv replied, "Why did your father choose me to be his son-in-law? It's because what others study in two weeks, I can study in a day. I'm also able to forget quicker than others. What others forget after a few weeks I can forget after a few seconds. In a few weeks from now, you will forget about the loss. I'm the same, it just happens faster for me."

Reb Avraham Genichovsky left the *gadol's* home and he said to the people who were with him, "The story that the *gadol* told me carries a greater lesson than the story I told him, because his story is also a lesson in *middos*. The Shaul u'Meishiv told his wife that he can forget quicker than most people, but that it wasn't the main reason the loss didn't bother him so much. The main reason was that when one enjoys the sweetness of Torah, nothing in the world bothers him. The sweetness

of the Torah takes away all troubles and worries. But he didn't tell that to his wife, because she couldn't understand the immense pleasure that he derives from learning Torah. Therefore, he spoke to his wife in a way that she was able to understand."

Reb Avraham Genichovsky explained some more: "When someone tells you his problems, it's wrong to reply, 'That bothers you?! It's nothing!' Perhaps it's nothing for you, but it isn't nothing to him. You have to answer him according to the way he sees things."

We repeated this story to remind us of the joy of Torah study. When one experiences this joy, nothing bothers him. As the Divrei Shmuel of Slonim *zt'l* once said, "When I have a problem and I'm feeling down, I learn a *daf* Gemara and I'm happy again. If the problem is greater, I learn two *daf* Gemara. And if my

problems are very great, I learn three *blatt* Gemara. Because after learning three *daf* Gemara, there isn't a problem in the world that can bother me."

Fortunate are those who experience the sweetness that can be found in the Torah. As the Or HaChaim HaKadosh (*Devarim* 26:10) writes, שאם היו בני אדם מרגישין במתיקות ועריבות טוב התורה היו משתגעים ומתלהטים אחריה ולא יחשב בעיניהם מלא עולם כסף וזהב, למאומה כי התורה כוללת כל הטובות שבעולם, "If people experienced the sweetness and the good that's in Torah they would pursue it passionately and madly. A world filled with gold and silver would mean nothing to them, because the Torah contains all the good of the world."

The Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (*Rabba* 5) asks, "Which merit did Yaakov Avinu have that he lived his entire life without distress and a *yetzer hara*?"

The answer is "Yaakov learned in the beis medresh all his life – from his youth

until his older years⁷ – and he was an expert in all areas of Torah... In this merit, he lived without distress and a *yetzer hara*."

Reb Shmuel Vosner *zt'l* asks, why does the Tana d'Bei Eliyahu write that Yaakov Avinu lived without distress? it seems that he had a very difficult life. As he told Pharaoh (*Bereishis* 47:9), מעט ורעים היו ימי שני, "The days of my life were few and bad." See also Rashi (*Bereishis* 43) who writes that Yaakov said, "I never had respite: I endured צרת לבן, צרת עשו, צרת רחל, צרת דינה, צרת יוסף, צרת שמעון, צרת בנימין from the episodes with Lavan, Eisav, Rachel, Dinah, Yosef, Shimon, and Binyamin." So why does the Midrash say that Yaakov had a stress-free life, without *tzaros*, when we know that there were many?

Reb Vosner *zt'l* replies, Yaakov Avinu certainly had a very hard life. Few people suffered as much as he did. Yet, Yaakov didn't feel his pain, because he was an איש תם יושב אהלים. He studied Torah in the beis medresh, and the joy and sweetness of Torah removes all distress and *tzar*.

Chazal (*Megillah* 17.) say, היה יעקב בבית עבר מוצמן עשרה שנה, "Yaakov was *concealed* in the beis medresh of Ever for fourteen years."

Similarly, Rashi (*Bereishis* 28:9) writes, הא למדת שאחר שקבל, הברכות נטמן בבית עבר י"ד שנים, "The *pasuk* teaches us that after Yaakov received the *brachos* he *hid* in Ever's beis medresh for fourteen years." The word הַטְמִין, which means concealed or hid describes Yaakov Avinu's devotion to Torah, when he studied in yeshiva.

7. The Tana d'Bei Eliyahu proves that Yaakov was always in beis medresh from the *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 25:27), ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים, "Yaakov was a wholesome person who sat in the tents of Torah."

It was like he was hidden, for he was totally immersed in Torah. One wouldn't find him on the street because his only interest was knowing Torah.

As Chazal (*Brachos* 63:) say, "Torah exists only with those who kill themselves over the Torah. As it states (*Bamidbar* 19:14), **זאת תורתם... אדם כי** ⁸ **ימות באהל**. With this dedication, Yaakov Avinu studied Torah, and therefore, if he ever had a moment of distress, it was quickly banished with the joy of Torah.

The *rebbeztin* of Rebbe Mordechai Dov of Hornesteiple *zt'l* was the daughter of Rebbe Chaim of Sanz *zt'l*. They lived under the oppressive regime of the Czar of

Russia. One Pesach they visited Rebbe Chaim of Sanz. Before returning to Russia, the Hornesteipler Rebbetzin said to her father, "It is so hard to live in Russia under the czar. It's as bad as it was in Pharaoh's time, when the Yidden lived in Mitzrayim."

Her father, the Divrei Chaim, corrected her. "Life isn't as bad as it was under Pharaoh because in Mitzrayim, they didn't have the Torah yet. Now we have the Torah, and with Torah, everything is different. The joy of Torah causes all troubles to become bearable. As Dovid HaMelech says (*Tehillim* 119), **לולי תורתך שעשעי או אבדתי בעיני**, "If it weren't for Your Torah,

8. The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* said that when it is your set time for learning Torah you should pretend like you're dead. A dead person can't speak with anyone, and he can't take care of errands, etc. Similarly, when you are about to learn Torah, turn off your cell phone, and make yourself unavailable for any need, other than for studying Torah.

my pleasure, I would be lost in my afflictions."⁹

Elul

Reb Chaim Vital writes, "The primary time for *teshuvah* is Elul...for then your *tefillos* are heard and the gates of *teshuvah* are open. As it states, וְדַרְשׁוּ ה' בְּרִמְצָאוֹ, 'search for Hashem when He is near.' As the *roshei teivos* of אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי, 'I am to my friend and my friend is to me' spell אֵלּוּל, because Hakadosh Baruch

Hu becomes a יָדִיד וְאֶהוּב, a beloved friend to the person who does *teshuvah*."

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Igra d'Kalah*) writes that the *roshei teivos* of (Shemos 6:7) וּלְקַחְתִּי אֹתְכֶם לִי לְעָם "I will take you to be My nation" spell אֵלּוּל because in this month, Hashem makes us His nation, due to our *teshuvah*.

The Ramban writes, "The mazal of Elul is *besulah*, a virgin, to express Hashem's love to the Jewish nation." The Alter of Kelm

9. A wealthy *yungerman* told me that he would do anything to change places with a *kollel yungerman*, who enjoys the words of Torah. When he was a *bachur* in yeshiva, he didn't learn well, and therefore he lacks a foundation in Torah, and it is hard for him to learn now, as well. He told me that his *mashgiach* always tried to convince him to study Torah, but he didn't take his counsel seriously. Once, the *mashgiach* told him, "I'm not only asking you to learn Torah so you can get Olam HaBa. I'm concerned about your Olam HaZeh, too. How will you have Olam HaZeh without Torah?"

The *yungerman* told me that at the time, in his heart, he laughed at the *mashgiach*. His father was wealthy and soon he would get married and join the family business. He wasn't worried about having a good Olam HaZeh. However, he says that now he knows that the *mashgiach* was correct. The best Olam HaZeh is known to those who learn Torah.

quotes this Ramban and adds, "Hashem chose this month to have them prepare their hearts for their Father in heaven. He loves them so much when they return to Him."

The Maharil writes that on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, we shouldn't make Kiddush early, when it is still daytime, because why should we want to bring in the judgment early? In other words, the awesome days of judgment is not something we want to bring before we absolutely must.

Bederech remez, we can say that the Maharil is implying that it's Elul, and we don't want to lose a moment of it. Why should we want to bring Rosh Hashanah in early and lose a moment of Elul?

The Divrei Chaim concludes one of his *teshuvos* (*Yorah Deiah* vol.1, 33) as follows, "But there is no time to be *mefalpel* (delve deeply) in this *sugyah* right

now because now it's time to check the corners of our hearts..."

The Ben Ish Chai writes at the end of a letter, "I am writing this in Elul, when every minute is precious to me like a month of the rest of the year."

Tefillah in Elul

The 30 days of Elul followed by ten days of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah are the 40 days that Moshe Rabbeinu prayed and attained atonement for the Jewish nation after they sinned with the *egel*. Therefore, these days were established as days for *teshuvah* and *tefillah* in all generations.

The Chesed l'Avraham (Radamosk) *zt'l* writes that the *roshei teivos* of the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 8:5), *למתי אעתיר לך ולעבדך*, "When shall I pray for you and your slaves..." spell *אלול*, hinting that Elul is a month for *tefillah*.

Throughout the year, we work so hard to earn parnassah. Yet, as we know, it isn't the work that brings us our parnassah, it's Hashem's blessing. With that awareness in mind, we should certainly set time for Tehillim and for tefillos during Elul, especially now that the days of Selichos are approaching, because tefillah is the primary hishtadlus for parnassah.

One must do his hishtadlus for parnassah, as it states *וברכתך בכל אשר תעשה*, "I will bless everything you do." This means a person must do, and then Hashem sends His blessing. Nevertheless, the Maor v'Shemesh writes that tefillah is also called doing. As Chazal say, *עקימת שפתיו הוי' בעשה*, "Moving the lips is also called doing." Thus, a person can pray, and that will be his hishtadlus for parnassah.

Chazal (Brachos 60.) tell us that after a child is formed, either as a male or

as a female, it is impossible to pray to change the reality. However, during the first forty days of a pregnancy, the child isn't formed yet, and the parents can daven that the child be a boy. The Shaar HaMelech (Shaar 1 ch.5) says that this hints to the forty days of Elul up until Yom Kippur. It isn't yet determined what will be in the upcoming year – the verdict wasn't passed yet – and tefillos can make a difference.

The Shaarei Teshuvah (581) writes "I saw rabbanim who were always studying halachah, but during Elul, they would study a little bit less to say tefillos."

The navi says that Chanah prayed for children, and we learn laws of tefillah from the way she prayed (see Brachos 31). One of her requests was that Hashem should give her a son who is like Moshe and Aharon. Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt'l would often discuss this Gemara, expressing that it shows us

that there is no limit to how much one can ask for. Chanah could have thought, "I have nothing, so any good child - no matter how he is - will be a great salvation for me." But she didn't limit her requests. She asked for a child like Moshe and like Aharon, and it was given to her. As it states (Tehillim 99:6) מִשֶּׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכֹהֲנָיו וְשִׁמְשׁוֹאֵל בְּקוֹרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ "Moshe, and Aharon among his kohanim, and Shmuel when he calls Hashem's name, they call Hashem and He answers them." Similarly, when we pray these days, let us think big. Ask for a lot because Hashem can give it.

Tzaddikim said that for tefillah one needs to believe (1) Hashem can help (2) Hashem wants to help. (3) Even my tefillah can make a difference. This is especially so in the month of Elul, the month when Hashem's compassion manifests itself.

Reb Shalom Ber of Lubavitz zt'l said that Elul is the season for saying Tehillim.

Reb Chaim Palagi zt'l says that the three ideal times for Tehillim are Shabbos, yom tov, and rosh chodesh. An even greater time for Tehillim is Elul. This is hinted in the first word of Tehillim: אשרי which is roshei teivos for אלוּל, שַׁבָּת, ראש חודש, יום טוב. The Gemara (Brachos 10.) states, "Every chapter [of Tehillim] that was beloved to Dovid, he began and he ended it with אשרי."

The Vilna Gaon writes, חודש אלוּל כולו רחמים, "The month of Elul is purely *rachamim*." Perhaps we can explain this as follows: Chazal tell us that, initially, Hashem wanted to create the world with *midas hadin*, strict justice. He saw the world couldn't exist that way, so he added to the world the attribute of *rachamim*. Thus, most of the year is a combination of *rachamim* and *din*, harsh justice and

compassion. However, as the Vilna Gaon tells us, Elul is only *rachamim*. There is no *din* at all.

Throughout the year, we don't read *pesukim* of Tanach at night. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zt'l taught that Elul is an exception because one may say *Tehillim* at night in Elul. Perhaps the explanation is that throughout the year we don't read *pesukim* at night because it is a time of *din* (as the Arizal explains). However, in Elul there is no *din* at all, therefore we can read the *pesukim* at night too.

The poskim recommend that each day of Elul we should say ten chapters of *Tehillim*. That way, the entire sefer *Tehillim* is completed twice by Rosh Hashanah. Reb Meir Shapiro zt'l, rosh yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, asked the bachurim of his yeshiva that in addition to the ten chapters that are said daily in Elul, they should also say chapter 613, for this

chapter has many requests for success in Torah and avodas Hashem.

The custom in most communities is to say לרור ה' אורי during Elul (and until Shmini Atzeres). The Arizal's siddur writes that if one does so, "He is guaranteed that he will live that year with goodness and pleasure. If there is a *gezeirah* (harsh decree) from heaven, it will be annulled. All prosecuting malachim are removed... and he will receive a good judgment."

Some communities have the custom to say *Tehillim* קמ"ג because it says there the pasuk אל תבא במשפט את עבדך כי לא יצדק לפניך כל ה' "Don't judge me according to the rules of judgment, because [if You will judge that way] no one will come out virtuous."

Some say chapter נ"א, the chapter on teshuvah. Some communities say the entire *Tehillim* on the Shabbosos of Elul, and the custom in Belz is to say the entire

Tehillim on the first day of Selichos.

The point is that these are special days, and the Tehillim said in these days accomplishes a lot, enabling us to do teshuvah and to merit a good, new year.

Selichos

We are about to begin the Selichos, and the holy sefarim say that is when the ימים נוראים begin.

The Beis Aharon zt'l taught, we don't say *selichos*. We should request *selichos* (forgiveness). Because it isn't solely the words, but the regret and the pleading for forgiveness.

The Belzer Rav zt'l told Reb Yosef Shterbitzer z'l, the *chazzan* for the first day of *selichos*: "Before you begin, I want to teach you the *kavanos* for *Selichos*. When you come to the *amud*, have one thing in mind: to daven loudly. הויער, הויער (loud! loud! loud!) This will rouse the

congregation to say *Selichos* with *kavanah* and with *hislahavus*. Don't be afraid to become hoarse, because if you become hoarse, someone else will take your place." Because the essence of *Selichos* isn't about reading the words, but rather to be inspired and to beseech Hashem for forgiveness.

The days of selichos are also meant for introspection. The Mishnah Berurah (581:5) writes "We say *Selichos* for at least four days before Rosh Hashanah because *korbanos* are checked for four days before they are sacrificed... and on Rosh Hashanah one should consider himself as though he is a sacrifice. Therefore, during these four days, one checks himself for all blemishes of sin."

The first day of selichos has special importance.

The custom of Belz is to say the entire Tehillim on the first day of selichos,

and to say it בְּרוּךְ עִם, with a large community. Once, towards the end of Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l life, he was weak, and his gaba'im wanted that he shouldn't go to the beis medresh to say Tehillim on the first day of Selichos. Rebbe Yissachar Dov wouldn't hear of it. He wanted to be in the beis medresh with the chassidim, and to say the entire Tehillim. Afterward, he said to the gaba'im, "How did you consider preventing me from the great hisorerus of the יְהִי רַצוֹן after Tehillim."

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said that his avodah on the first day of selichos is with more koach (יָדָע) than his avodah on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l lived in Tel Aviv for some time. Once, a yid from Tel Aviv said to Rebbe Moshe Mordechai, "Let me tell you a story that happened with your

grandfather and with my grandfather. My grandfather was a baal agalah, a wagon driver. Your grandfather, Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l, was walking by foot from Lublin to Lelov (after he spent some time with his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin) because Rebbe Dovid was poor and he couldn't afford hiring someone to drive him to his home. My grandfather asked him where he's going. When he heard that he is lives in Lelov, he said, 'I live near Lelov. Come on the wagon and travel with me.'

"When they came to Lelov, Rebbe Dovid thanked him and said, 'I have a beis medresh in Lelov. Come there for the first night of selichos.'

"My grandfather thought, 'I did him a favor and now he wants me to do him another favor - to help him have a minyan for selichos.' He wasn't planning on going to the selichos.

"The first night of selichos arrived, and Rebbe Dovid went into the beis medresh to see whether the baal agalah arrived, but he wasn't there, so he went back into his room. This happened a few times that night. In the meanwhile, the baal agalah was at home, and he thought to himself, 'Rebbe Dovid of Lelov is a holy man, after all. Maybe I should go to his beis medresh in Lelov.'

"The baal agalah arrived, and this time, when Rebbe Dovid looked around the beis medresh he saw him he began the selichos. After the selichos Rebbe Dovid gave him the following brachah: 'This year, you

did me a favor, and I wanted to repay you and bless you with success and with everything that's good. Therefore, I asked that you come on the first night of selichos because this is a very holy and special time for the brachos to take effect. Now, I bless you that you and your descendants should have immense wealth and long live.'"

The man (the grandson of the baal agalah) who told the story concluded, "His brachos were effective because from then until today, there is an abundance of wealth and longevity in my family, generation after generation."