

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Emor

Concealed Good

The Chasan Sofer *zt'l* explains that we sometimes think that bad things happen to us. But later, we look back and discover how good that incident really was.

For example, the Gemara (*Nidah* 31.) relates a story about a merchant rushing to catch a ship to do business overseas. As he was running to the boat, he accidentally stepped on a thorn. The pain in his foot slowed him down, and by the time he arrived at the port, the boat had already set sail. He was very upset. "If it weren't for the thorn, I would have caught the boat," he said, disappointed.

Later, he found out that the ship sunk. Now, he praised Hashem for His kindness. He praised

Hashem for placing the thorn in his path and thereby saving his life.

It is easy to praise Hashem in retrospect. Our job is to praise Hashem when things look bad. We must believe that, even then, everything that happens to us is by Hashem's merciful providence and for our good.

The Chasan Sofer says that this is alluded to in this week's *parashah* when the *korban todah*, the *korban* of thanksgiving is discussed. It states (22:29-30), וכי תזבחו זבח תודה לה'... ביום, והוא יאכל לא תותירו ממנו עד בוקר, "When you sacrifice the *korban todah*... eat it that very day. Don't leave it over until morning". The pasuk hints that ביום ההוא, praise Hashem the same day that something happens to you, even

before you know why that occurrence is for your benefit. לא תותירו ממנו עד בוקר, don't wait until tomorrow to praise Hashem. *B'ezras Hashem*, tomorrow, you will understand why it was good for you. But don't wait until then. Praise Hashem now.

This week's *parashah* also discusses the mitzvah of omer (23:10), to bring a minchah offering from the first barley crops to the Beis HaMikdash. The Maharal (*Or Chodosh, Esther, 6:11*) explains that this sacrifice is a reminder that crops grow by Hashem's *hashgachah pratis*, and not by nature.

Chazal (*Megillah 16.*) say that Mordechai taught the laws of the *omer* to his students, and Haman understood that this means he won't be able to destroy Bnei Yisrael. Haman said, "Your handful of *omer* pushed away my ten thousand coins [which I offered to Achashveirosh to destroy Bnei Yisrael]."

How did Haman know that this particular mitzvah would prevent him from destroying Bnei Yisrael?

The Maharal explains that the mitzvah of *omer* reminds us that everything happens by Hashem's will. Even nature is controlled by Hashem. When Bnei Yisrael recognize this, nothing bad can happen to them. Haman's evil decrees will be overturned because Hashem will reveal to us that it is indeed, He Who is behind everything that occurs in the world.

There is an orphan boy who lives in the north of Eretz Yisrael who enjoys listening to the music of a particular singer. He invited that singer to his bar mitzvah. He couldn't pay for the singer, but he requested that he come anyway.

The singer wanted that the bar mitzvah *bochur* should enjoy this momentous day, and he had compassion for the

orphan because his father wouldn't be present, so he came to the *seudah*.

When the singer saw the *bachur's* big smile when he arrived, he decided to stay longer than he originally planned. He was there for two hours, singing and entertaining the guests.

The next day, the singer was notified that the bar mitzvah *bachur* was just tested positive for Covid-19. All the guests had to be quarantined.

When the singer started feeling unwell, he realized that he had caught the virus from the bar mitzvah *bachur*.

This would mean at least ten days at home, without work. The singer regretted that he did the *chesed*, to help the bar mitzvah *bochur* because he ended up with a significant loss.

Three weeks later, an organization in America invited this singer to sing

at an orphanage that was staging bar mitzvos for several orphans. They said that they heard that he sang at a bar mitzvah in the northern part of Eretz Yisrael and that he did an excellent job at making the boy feel good, so they want him to sing for them.

They would pay a large sum, but they had a condition: They will only hire him if he already had the corona.

So, he discovered that his problem was for his benefit. Earlier, he regretted attending the bar mitzvah, but now he knows that because he attended the bar mitzvah, he landed this lucrative job.

Overcoming Anger

When one knows everything is from Hashem, he will never get angry because he understands that everything happens exactly as it should.

Rebbe Refael of Barshid *zt'l* yearned to wear a *talis katan* made from wool that grew in Eretz Yisrael.¹

When someone from his neighborhood was about to travel to Eretz Yisrael, Reb Refael asked him to bring back a bolt of wool so he could make *tzitzis*.

Reb Refael of Barshid was very joyous when the cloth finally arrived.

He brought the garment to a tailor and asked the tailor to make a hole in the middle of the cloth, so he could wear it.

But the tailor cut the cloth when the sheet was folded over! And now there were two holes in the cloth.

Reb Refael said, "This garment *needs* two holes: One for my head and the

other so that Refael won't get angry."

He understood that Hashem was testing him with anger, and this awareness helped him pass the test.

A chassid of the Imrei Chaim once invited the Imrei Chaim to the *bris milah* of his son. "Please come early," the father requested. "We want to perform the *bris* early in the morning."

Generally, the Rebbe davened in his *yeshiva*, but that morning he davened at an earlier *minyán* so that he could get to the *bris* on time.

But the *bris* wasn't on time; the *mohel* was late.

As they waited for the *mohel*, the Imrei Chaim told the story of Reb Refael of Barshid, who said that the

1. This is an example of the yearning for Eretz Yisrael of the past, which isn't as common today, partially because it is so easy to get items from Eretz Yisrael, so it lost its novelty in people's eyes.

garment needed two holes: one to put his head through, and one to test him. The Imrei Chaim added, "Similarly, the bris had to be late, to test my patience."

The Imrei Chaim's *zt'l* Friday night *tish* would go for seven or eight hours. One Friday night, after an eight-hour-long *tish*, the Rebbe was walking home. It was a typical wintry night in Bnei Brak: The winds were blowing fiercely, and rain was pouring down. When the Imrei Chaim reached his home, he found the front door locked. The *gabbai* had the keys, but for some reason, the *gabbai* was late, and the Imrei Chaim had to wait for him.

While the Rebbe waited in the rain, surrounded with a few of his followers, he repeated the story of Reb Refael of Bershid. The Imrei Chaim added, "My front door has to be locked, and I must wait in the rain; so that I don't get angry."

Then the Imrei Chaim said, "This level is *kodesh kadoshim*. How does one reach such levels? When I think about this story, it affects me more than when I hear stories of the miracles the great Rebbes performed."

Focus on the Good

Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* once showed his students a blank sheet of paper with a black dot on it. "What do you see?" he asked them.

They said they see a dark spot.

Reb Eliyahu Dessler replied, "Why don't you tell me that you see all the white that goes around the dark dot? Because that is how people are: they focus on the smallest thing that isn't good and lose sight of all the good that surrounds them."

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover *zt'l* and the Bardichover Rav's son, Reb Yisrael of Pиков *zt'l*, were

once collecting money for *pidyon shevuyim*. One winter night they slept in a poor man's home. The roof was broken, and icicles were hanging down. When the *baal habayis* turned on the oven, the icicles began melting, and they dripped onto Reb Yisrael's bed. These accommodations disturbed Reb Yisrael immensely.

Rebbe Moshe Leib told him that he should focus on the good. He said, "I have thirteen reasons to be happy: (1) My right side doesn't hurt me, so I can lie on my right side. (2) My left side doesn't hurt either, so I can sleep on my left side. (3) My back doesn't hurt..." He counted thirteen reasons why he was happy, and then they danced from joy. (*Maamar Mordechai* vol.2 p.117).

A husband once came home at the end of a long day and said to his wife, "What did you do all day? The sink is filled with dirty dishes!" She didn't reply.

The next day, the dishes were piled even higher in the sink. "What did you do all day?"

Again, she remained silent.

The next day was worse. The dishes from lunch were still on the table; she didn't even bother piling them on top of all the other dirty dishes in the sink. The children were dishevelled, and they were fighting with each other. The three-year-old was using her crayons set to decorate the dining room wall. The husband hopped over the clutter in the kitchen to see what his wife prepared for supper, but the pots and oven were empty.

He found his wife reading a book, totally oblivious to what was happening in the home.

"What did you do all day?" he asked.

"Today, I did nothing," she replied.

She decided to do nothing that day, so her husband would recognize what she does every day. The husband didn't realize how much effort is required to keep the house running smoothly. The husband's error was that he focused on what his wife *wasn't doing*, and he didn't think about all that his wife did do.

Similarly, some people focus on what they lack, and they have complaints on Hashem. Instead, focus on all the good you have, and praise Hashem for His kindness.

There is also a story about a guest who said, "This house smells horrid!"

The host said, "That's because you're sitting right next to the garbage. Go somewhere else, and you will see that the house smells beautiful from my wife's freshly baked cake."

When you focus on the bad, you will find it

overwhelmingly disturbing. But when you focus on the good, you will be very happy with your life.

There are, unfortunately, four fresh widows living in close proximity to each other. Sarah's husband was *niftar* from the *machlah* (cancer). Rivkah's husband was *niftar* from Covid-19. Rachel's husband passed away from a heart attack, and Leah's husband was the latest to leave the world. He was *niftar* from Covid-19.

Many women were in Leah's home to be menachem *avel*, and Leah told them, "I was punished, Hashem smote me. But I feel consoled that my portion is better than my three neighbors, my partners in sorrow. Let's begin with my neighbor Sarah. She has two single children in her home! *Nebach*, this *almanah* will have to marry them off all by herself. I thank Hashem that my husband and I brought all our children to

the *chuppah*. We even merited to see the son of our youngest child. We were at the *shalom zachor* and at the bris.

"Now, I have another neighbor, Rivkah. Her husband was *niftar* just weeks before their youngest daughter was married. I heard that everyone cried at that wedding. It's a pity. But my husband and I married off all our children, happily.

In my neighbor Rachel's home, it is also pathetic, because her husband was *niftar* suddenly, from a heart attack. There was no warning; the family didn't have time to prepare themselves. But my husband was ill for two weeks before he left us. We had time to say goodbye; we had time to prepare ourselves for what came to be..."

The women in the room were amazed that Leah could find the good in her life, even at a time like that.

They came to console Leah, and now they felt that Leah consoled them, as she taught them the correct way of looking at life.

And then, another woman came into the room to be *menachem avel*. It was the widow Sarah. The women made room for her so that she could sit directly in front of Leah. They wanted to hear what she would say.

Sarah said, "Leah, I feel so bad for you. I have at least two children at home, so I'm not alone. But what will be with you? All you have in your home is silence. How can I console you?"

Then Rivkah came in. She sat down next to Sarah, and she said to Leah, "I feel your pain. Baruch Hashem, when my husband passed away, we had an upcoming *chasunah*. The *simchah* kept us busy and our minds off our sorrow. The joy was condolence for our bitter hearts. But what will be

with you? How can I console you?"

Then the *almanah* Rachel came in, and she sat next to her neighbors. She said, "I don't know how you managed. You suffered in agony for two weeks when your husband was ill, not knowing what the future will bring. Baruch Hashem, we didn't have that problem because my husband died suddenly."

The other women in the room realized that they had just seen greatness. Each of the four widows focused on the good in their life.

A *yungerman* once came to a tzaddik in Yerushalayim and said, "I just had a baby..." He wanted to tell the tzaddik whether it was a boy or a girl, but the tzaddik interrupted him.

"Mazal Tov!" the tzaddik shouted as he enthusiastically pumped the young man's hand. "Does the child have all ten

fingers on his hands and feet...? And how is the child's breathing and his overall health? Is everything good?" And after hearing that all was good, he asked, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

In this way, he taught the *yungerman* to thank Hashem for all of His kindness, and to focus on the smallest details of chesed Hashem does for us.

There was once a *bachur* who suffered from phobias. He thought everyone was out to harm him. His father brought him to Reb Avraham Ginochovsky *zt'l*. Reb Ginochovsky said to the *bachur*, "We eat *marror*, bitterness, just once a year: at the Seder. All other times, we focus on all the good we have, and then we will be happy.

Praising Hashem is a *Segulah* for more Kindness

Someone once wrote a letter to the Lubavitcher

Rebbe *zt'l*, complaining that his house was too small, and that he didn't have enough room for his many children. The problem was that he couldn't afford to buy a larger home.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote back, "I received your letter, and I'm delighted to hear the good news that you found your *bashert*, the wife that is fitting for you, and that you got married... I'm overjoyed to hear that you have a *bechor*, a first-born son. And then Hashem gave you a daughter, another son, and another daughter. And they are all healthy, following the ways of the Torah! You should know that many people don't share all the good that you are enjoying. I also understand from your letter that you are living in your own home, while so many other couples are still living in rented apartments, as you know."

On the side of the letter, the Rebbe added, "And in regard to your problem that your home is too small and you can't afford to buy a larger one, if you will praise Hashem for all the kindness He gives you, and if you dance from joy for all of the above, Hashem will give you a larger house..."

When we recognize the good, it creates a vessel, enabling us to receive even more kindness from Hashem.

Once Reb Zusha of Hanipoli was dancing a *mitzvoah tantz* at a *chasunah* and he remembered that Chazal say כלה דא אידי שכינתא, that the *kallah* represents the *Shechinah*. The realization that he was *keviyachol* dancing with the *Shechinah* inspired him immensely. He ran into the forest, and meditated on deep, holy thoughts for three days. But after three days without food, he was weak and hungry. He said, "Ribono Shel Olam, I thank

you for my appetite." A miracle occurred, and one of his teeth provided him with nourishment,² which sustained him.

Why did Reb Zusha thank Hashem for his appetite?

The Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l* explains that Rebbe Zusha thought to himself, "There are wealthy people who become ill, lose their appetite, and then have to pay a lot of money to regain their health and appetite. Baruch Hashem, I have an appetite. In fact, I'm very hungry. I am so fortunate to have an appetite! I'm just missing the slice of bread. How much does a slice of bread cost?" With this thought in mind, he felt like the wealthiest person in the world. And

since he was praising Hashem for His kindness, this drew down more of Hashem's kindness, and he had his salvation, beyond the rules of nature. His tooth provided him with the nourishment he needed.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe once heard his daughter moaning, and he told her this *mashal*:

There was a wealthy man who never praised Hashem for what he had. He was always complaining about what he lacked. Hashem said, "You're complaining because you think life is bad? We'll show you what a bad life is," and the man lost all of his money, and he had to go door to door, begging for food.

2. There was another time that this miracle occurred. Rebbe Zusha was visiting a city, and he didn't want to ask anyone for financial aid or for food (and no one in the city was worthy to have the merit to give food to Rebbe Zusha). A miracle occurred, and milk and honey came forth from his teeth. This sustained him, until someone gave him food.

Now he had something else to complain about: his poverty. He was moaning and crying, and Heaven said, "You think your life is bad? We'll show you what's bad," and he became ill with *tzaraas*. Now, no one let him in their homes because they were afraid of catching the disease.

He complained some more, because not only was he poor, but he also couldn't even go to people's homes to satiate his hunger. Heaven said, "You think your life is bad? We will show you what a bad life is," and he became a hunchback, which made it difficult for him to eat.

When he reached this very low level, he said, "At least I'm alive. Baruch Hashem I'm alive." This was about the first time in his life that he sincerely praised Hashem.

Heaven said, "You think your life is good, we'll show you what's really good," and his hunched

back straightened out. He praised Hashem for that, and Heaven said, "You think this is good? We'll show you what's really good," and he was healed from his leprosy. He couldn't stop praising Hashem, and Heaven said, "You think this is good? You will be shown what's good." Someone lent him a lot of money so that he could reopen his business. He became wealthy like before, and this time, he never forgot to praise Hashem.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe told his daughter that she must not complain and moan because when one moans, things become worse, and when one praises Hashem, Hashem bestows even more kindness on him.

Torah, Tefillah, and Parnassah

We all have a conflict of interests because we want to work and earn *parnassah*,

and we want to devote as much time as we can to learning Torah and for *avodas Hashem*. How does one juggle both objectives at once?

According to Reb Shimon bar Yochai, one doesn't have to work at all. As Reb Shimon bar Yochai said (*Brachos* 35), "Could it be that one will plow in the plowing season, plant in the planting season, reap in the reaping season, etc.? When will he have time to learn Torah? Rather, when Yidden do Hashem's will, the goyim will do their work for them" So, according to Reb Shimon, the ideal life is just to study Torah all day and night.

Reb Yishmael disagrees. He says that one should combine learning Torah with earning a living.

The Gemara says, "Many did like Reb Yishmael recommended and succeeded. Many did like Reb Shimon recommended but failed."

Therefore, most people follow Reb Yishmael's path. But be aware that Reb Yishmael's approach isn't easy, either. To succeed in Reb Yishmael's way, one needs a strong dose of *bitachon*, and one must believe that the time he sets for Torah and tefillah will not detract from his *parnassah*.³

3. The Alter of Nevarduk *zt'l* told the following *meshal*:

Someone wanted a good vacation so he checked into a five-star hotel with all the luxurious amenities. It was time for dinner, so he went all the way down to the kitchen, filled up his plate, and brought it up to his room. He got his meal, but his efforts were unnecessary. If he would have some patience, the food would come right to his room. The same thing happens when people do unnecessary *hishtadlus* for making *parnassah*. They will get their *parnassah*, but they could have gotten the same with far easier means.

On market day, all merchants want to be in the marketplace the moment the market opens.

However, the Yesod HaAvodah zt'l (the first Rebbe of Slonim) advised his chassidim to begin their day with Torah and tefillah and told them to *purposely* come late to the marketplace.

He wanted them to realize that *parnassah* comes from Hashem and that coming late to the market won't detract from their *parnassah*.

Regarding the *manna*, it states (*Shemos* 16:18), ולא העדיף, ולא המרבה והמועט לא החסיר, those

who collected a lot of *manna* ended up having the same amount as those who collected a small measure of *manna*. This is because each person receives the amount Hashem has destined for him. "Similarly," the Yesod HaAvodah told his chassidim, "you will get the amount Hashem destined for you. Coming to the market early or coming late won't change the total of your earnings."¹⁴

Reb Mordechai of Chernobyl asked a simple merchant to tell him what his daily schedule looked like. The merchant replied that he goes to the market

The Alter of Nevarduk compared unnecessary *hishtadlus* to a person riding a train, and he pushes the walls of the train with his hands to help the train go quicker. Obviously, this will not accomplish anything. So too, doing unnecessary *hishtadlus* doesn't increase the results.

4. Perhaps we aren't on the level of *bitachon* to come late to work. Nevertheless, it is important to know the truth: *parnassah* comes from Hashem. It is not dependent on the amount of work we do. Therefore, if once in a while you come late to work, believe that you will still earn the amount that is destined for you.

early in the morning and davens *Shacharis* later in the day.

Reb Mordechai told him that it isn't correct to do so. "You should daven first and then go to the market."

"Rebbe," the simple merchant said, "I see the Rebbe doesn't understand how the market works. Most business transactions happen early in the morning. If I daven first, I will miss that."

The Rebbe spoke with the merchant at length,

explaining to him that he could rely on Hashem to give *parnassah* even if he davens first.⁵

Logically, it is hard for us to recognize that it should be so. Logic dictates that if you miss the beginning of the market, you will earn less. Reb Morechai's and the Yesod HaAvodah's ideas seem impractical. But we have *emunah* that *parnassah* is from Hashem, and therefore, the *parnassah* won't be lessened by coming late to the marketplace.⁶

5. Rebbe Mordechai Chernobyler *zt'l* also taught that if the door of your shop opens to a side street, it isn't proper to open another door to face the main road. He must trust that Hashem will support him, even when the entrance isn't off the main road.

6. I heard the following story first hand, but these stories happen all the time to many people in various ways:

Someone walked into a real estate office with a description of the type of house he was looking to buy. The agent said, "Give me your e-mail address, and when something comes up, I'll send you the information by e-mail."

"I don't have e-mail," the man said.

"You don't have an iPhone?" the agent asked, incredulous.

"No. I follow the advice of my rabbanim, and all I have is a regular phone."

"So I'll send you an SMS without the file."

"My phone doesn't read SMS messages either. If you could phone me that would be great..."

The broker became impatient. "I have many clients. I don't have time to call everyone when an offer comes up. I send out a group e-mail to all my clients. I'm sorry, but without an e-mail, I really can't help you..."

The man gave him a slip of paper and said, "This is my phone number. Perhaps you will find time to call me." The broker took the slip of paper, and tossed it into his desk drawer.

The man left the office thinking the broker will never call him.

But the following morning – a Thursday – when he was eating breakfast with his family, he received a phone call from the real estate agent. "I have something for you. It's exactly what you're looking for. Go there right away and see if you like it."

He liked it. On Friday, the sale was finalized.

Elated, he called the real estate agent to thank him. He asked, "Why did you think to call me? From the way you spoke a couple of days ago, I thought I would never hear from you again."

The broker said, "I wasn't planning on calling you. When this house went up for sale, I attached the information to the group e-mail that I send to all my clients and clicked send, but it didn't go. Apparently, something was wrong with my e-mail. I still had your phone number, so I decided to call you."

On Sunday, the e-mail finally went through. It was a very good deal, and many people were interested, but the house was already sold.

The moral of this story is awareness that everything comes from Hashem, and the more you bring Hashem's presence into your endeavors, the better your chances are for success. This man thought he would lose out because he doesn't have an iPhone,

Actually, spending time davening and learning each day will increase your *parnassah*.

There's a businessman who needs to be in his office at 9:00 a.m. Every morning, he awakens before daybreak, so he has time to study Torah and daven well before he takes the one-hour drive to his office.

One morning, he awoke to a bright sun and chirping birds. He knew he was late. Looked at the clock confirmed his fears. It was a quarter to eight.

He davened *shacharis* in about five minutes, grabbed breakfast, and rushed to his car.

But when he arrived at his office, he realized that in his haste, he forgot to take along the keys to his office. He had to drive

home, pick up his keys, and then drive back again.

He thought that by rushing through the tefillah he would earn more, but he only lost.

Reb Ezra Barzel explained that even if he didn't forget his keys, he lost out. Because the keys for *parnassah* come from tefillah, and that morning, he didn't take tefillah seriously.

Some people rush out of shul immediately after hearing *kedushah*. They are rushing to their jobs. But they are leaving before they receive the keys for their *parnassah*. They aren't gaining anything.

In some siddurim, the words ירדת השפע, "the descending of the bounty" is written before, אשרי, למנוחה, ובה לציון. This is because when we daven Shemonah

computer, etc., but this was exactly what helped him get the house he desired.

Esrei we ask Hashem for bounty and success. Hashem grants us our requests when we say אשרי למנוחה ובה לציון, because, as the kabbalah *sefarim* tell us, that is the time of ירידת השפע. Those who leave early won't receive it. They asked for many things during *Shemonah Esrei*, but they didn't stay in beis medresh long enough to get them.

It is like going to the bank to withdraw cash, and as the banker is preparing the money, you leave. That is what happens when we leave too early, before the end of the tefillah.

Reb Anshil Shwartz of Chaifa *zt'l* would daven *Shacharis* every day for many. And then he would spend a long time saying Tehillim and other tefillos. He came to his store around two in the afternoon.

Someone once asked him, "Reb Anshil, what will be with your customers?"

Reb Anshil replied, "They aren't waiting in the sun."

Reb Anshil was financially well-off. He attributed his success to his devotion to tefillah.⁷

7. A non-religious Yid was once in Yeshivas Kfar Chassidim when they were davening *Minchah*. Afterwards, people asked him for his impressions. He replied, "I saw *bachurim* swaying back and forth, but there was this elderly man, standing near the front wall, and it appeared that he was truly speaking to some-One." That man was Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l*.

People said similar things about the *tefillos* of Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l*. People had the impression that if they disturbed him in the middle of his *tefillos*, he would respond, "Don't you see I'm in the middle of speaking with some-One."

Another common problem in tefillah is coming late. When people are saying *כי בא סוס*, they pop in (and they leave by *ותשאני רוח*).

There was once a wealthy person who always came late to *Shacharis*. The rav of the beis medresh spoke with him and expressed the importance of coming to the tefillah on time. The wealthy man replied, "If you knew what level I'm on, you would thank me for coming to the beis medresh, altogether."

The rav saw that this man wasn't ready to accept rebuke, so he didn't press the issue. (As Chazal say, "Just as there is a mitzvah to say something that will be listened to, there's a mitzvah that one shouldn't say something that won't be listened to.")

One day, there was a fire in the wealthy man's business, and he lost a lot of money. The next day, he told the rav, "The loss happened because I come late to minyan."

"How do you know?"

"The fire department came to put out the fire just a few minutes too late. If they came a few minutes earlier, they would be able to control the fire. This is my punishment for coming late to tefillah ..."

Reb Zev Kahn *shlita*, the *mashgiach* of Meor HaTalmud, Rechovot, tells that his mother lived in Copenhagen until the ripe old age of 101, and she wasn't the only centenarian of her community. Many people of the Jewish community of Copenhagen lived long. The community members attributed this because they were careful to come on time to *tefillah*.

Once, leaders of the Copenhagen community were in Eretz Yisrael, speaking with Reb Shmuel Wosner *zt'l*, and they told him about how the Yidden of Copenhagen live very long and that they think that it is because they all come on time to the tefillah.

Reb Wosner replied, "I was born in Vienna, and there too, people lived long. People wondered about this because it had nothing to do with the climate and the like because the non-Jews of Vienna weren't living so long. But then someone died at seventy years old, which was young for the community. That person didn't come to the minyan on time. That is when they realized that the long life that most of the community enjoyed was due to their caution to come to minyan on time."⁸

The following story happened in Poland, approximately a hundred

years ago. Someone who didn't have children came to the Sfas Emes *zt'l* and told him, "My friends recommend that my wife and I travel to another country, where there is an expert fertility doctor. But this is very costly since we will have to pay a lot of money to the doctor, and room and board there is also expensive. Should we go there?"

The Sfas Emes told him that it wasn't necessary. "You can stay where you live, and Hashem will help you."

The chassid didn't have any doubts: Hashem will help; the Rebbe promised.

8. A source to this concept is *Megillah* (27:), which states that the students of Reb Preidah asked him why he merited to live long. He replied, *מימי לא קדמני אדם לביהמ"ד*, "No one ever came to beis medresh before me."

The Remak says that *שיבה* is *roshei teivos* *בשעת התפילה*, "Silence is beautiful during *tefillah*." And the reward for being silent by the *tefillah* is *שיבה*, a long life. We can also say that *שיבה* is *roshei teivos* for *שעת התפילה יהיה בדיוקנות*, one should come exactly on time to *tefillah*. The reward is *שיבה*, long life

But his wife didn't share his confidence.

A few months later, and she was still barren, she took on a new job, and she was saving up money for the specialist. She stored the money she earned in a small, old oven that they never used.

One day, in the winter, the husband was home by himself (his wife was out at work), and he decided that it didn't make sense to light the large oven for just one person. "The small oven is good enough."

He didn't know that his wife stored all her earnings in that oven.

The wife came home from work and heard the sweet singing of her husband's learning, and she saw all her hard-earned savings burning up in the oven.

Her plan to travel wasn't relevant anymore, so she turned her eyes to heaven. She davened to Hashem,

she trusted in Him, and they merited their salvation and had a child.

As we say in *tachanun* (Monday and Thursday), יַעֲנֵנוּ וְלֹא הוֹנֵחַ לָנוּ, all our hard work didn't give us our salvation. But when we davened to Hashem, we merit *yeshuos*.

Time

Time is extremely precious.

Reb Yonoson Eibshitz *zt'l* said that he is confident that a dying person is prepared to give up all his wealth if that will grant him even just one more day of life. That's how precious time is!

One of the Karliner *tzaddikim* said that if Heaven would allow a dead person to stand up and daven one *tefillah* in this world, he would certainly daven properly.

Moments before the Vilna Gaon was *niftar*, he cried into his *talis kattan*. He said, "In the merit of

tzitzis, a mitzvah that costs just a few pennies, one merits to greet the *Shechinah*. When I leave this world, I won't have this mitzvah anymore."

Now that we are alive, and we are able to daven, wear *tzitzis*, perform the mitzvos, how happy we should be!

We must recognize the great privilege of time that is in our hands, and to use it well.

Another great benefit of time is that it gives structure to our lives. When time is limitless and disregarded, people tend to be lazy and procrastinate. But there are clocks in our lives, we have deadlines, and these time limitations help people accomplish what they need to do.

However, time can also have a dark side. That is when time becomes so important to you that you end up rushing to finish

before you fully completing your job. Also, rushing can cause a person to lose his peace of mind.

We will give some examples.

When was the last time you spent time thinking about Hashem's beautiful creation or examples of Hashem's *hashgachah pratis* in your life? If it was long ago, and you don't even remember thinking about these matters anymore, it is because we feel that we don't have time to think about these matters. So much goes on in our lives, that we don't have time and peace of mind to *think*.

Are you able to delve into a Gemara until you understand it well? Are you able to think about the translation of the words in the tefillah and put all your heart into its words? If you aren't able to do this, it is probably because you feel

rushed. There is no time. You have too much to do.⁹

Shidduchim is also an area that rushing isn't recommended. But then again, procrastinating is also not correct. So time limits have a positive and negative side, there are two sides to the coin, and it is a challenge to achieve the proper balance.

About the negative side to rushing, the Baal Shem Tov zt'l said *ואבדתם מהרה*, "Eradicate the rushing." Similarly, his grandson, Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh zt'l would say, *א איד טאר זיך נישט יאגען*, "A Yid mustn't rush." Allow yourself time to appreciate the world, to enjoy Torah and tefillah, and to find pleasure in your life.¹⁰

9. Someone told his friends that he saw Hashem in his dreams. His friends told him, "That doesn't mean it was real, because a person naturally dreams about what he is thinking during the daytime. You are always learning Torah and davening. You are always thinking about Hashem, so you thought you saw Hashem in your dreams."

He replied, "It isn't so. I don't think about Hashem during the day. In fact, I am so busy davening and learning, I don't have time to think about Hashem."

10. Consider the following story:

Two people went to a rav for a *din Torah* that involves a very large sum of money. After hearing the details of the case, the rav replied that he needs some time to review the matter. They explained to him that it was very important for them to know the answer as quickly as possible. They both had urgent business decisions to make, and their decision would be based, largely, on the outcome of this *din Torah*. The rav told them that by Friday he will have an answer. He told them that he will send them a fax detailing his halachic ruling, and the reasoning behind it.

Thursday night, the rav spent many hours writing up the *teshuva* (responsa), because it was important for him to keep his word, and he knew that they were waiting for his answer. He said he would send his answer on Friday, and he wanted to do so. In this *teshuva*, he ruled that one of the litigants would need to pay a lot of money to the other.

Friday morning, after *shacharis*, he rushed home to send the fax. He put his responsa in the fax machine, but it wasn't working. The rav thought, "Why did it have to happen now, when I so badly need to send it?" But then he reminded himself that everything happens from Hashem, and therefore it is for the good.

He called a handy neighbor to his home, and after the neighbor worked on the fax machine for some time, he got it working.

But then, before the rav could send the fax, a wire ripped. He'd have to go to the hardware store to buy another wire.

By the time the fax was finally in working condition, it was after *chatzos*, midday. This rav had a *kabbalah* that he doesn't do any work on Friday, after midday. He felt terrible that he wasn't able to keep his word, but after thinking it over, he decided that he should keep his *kabbalah*, and not send the fax after *chatzos* on Friday. "They will have to wait until after Shabbos," he told himself.

Motzei Shabbos, the sad news came that on Shabbos morning, one of the litigants – the one who would have to pay a lot of money – was *niftar* from a heart attack.

Now the rav understood why Hashem made that the fax shouldn't work. If the fax had been in working order, and if the fax was sent on erev Shabbos, the rav would feel that he was responsible for this man's death. He would think that his *psak* caused the heart attack. Hashem arranged it that the fax won't work until after *chatzos*, the rav kept his *kabbalah*, and he was saved from needing to carry a terrible guilty conscience.

Several times, on that Friday, the rav was anxious. His conscious repeatedly said, "I gave them my word that I will send them the *psak* on Friday, and it is important for them. They have big business

Serving Hashem with *Mesirus Nefesh*

Two hundred years ago, the law in Hungary was that only someone certified by the government could perform a bris milah. Once, a rav who was uncertified performed a bris milah for a *ger tzedek* in Pressburg, Hungary. Generally, such things could remain undercover and unknown, but the bleeding didn't stop, and the man's life was in danger. But how could he go to the doctor? The doctor would find out that an uncertified mohel performed the bris milah. The entire Jewish community could be punished severely for allowing this. On the other hand, if the *ger tzedek* would

die, the government would investigate the cause of his death, and the community might be exiled or worse.

The *mohel* ran to the Chasam Sofer *zy"ta* and asked him for advice.

The Chasam Sofer replied that the *mohel* and the *ger tzedek* should go to the Danube River and commit suicide there. This was the only solution for the community's safety.

The *ger tzedek* and the *mohel* immediately accepted the Chasam Sofer's ruling, and after the *mohel* said his final good-byes to his family, he traveled with the *ger tzedek* to the Danube River, to save the Jewish community.

decisions to make, and they are relying on me. I must send it out." But he couldn't, and with tremendous effort he remained calm and trusted that it had to be that way.

If he had panicked and been anxious due to his time limit, he would probably break his kabbalah and send the fax on Friday afternoon. And then he would be left with the terrible feeling that he inadvertently caused someone's death.

They arrived at the river bank, and were about to jump inside, when an old man approached them. "Where are you going?"

"Nowhere in particular." The *mohel* didn't want to reveal his true intentions.

"No, tell me. Where are you going?"

After asking several times, the *mohel* decided that he would reveal the truth. He told him about the *ger tzedek's* bris, the bleeding, the community's peril, and the Chasam Sofer's *psak*.

"I have medicine that stops bleeding," the old man said. He applied the medicine, and the hemorrhaging stopped.

"You saved our lives," the *mohel* said. "How can we repay you? At least, come with us on our wagon, and we will drive you back to the city..." but the man disappeared. That was when they realized that they had met Eliyahu

HaNavi. The *Malach HaBris* had come to save them.

The *mohel* went to the Chasam Sofer and said, "If you were going to send us Eliyahu HaNavi, why didn't you send him to us immediately? Our hearts melted from fear when we thought we had to die."

The Chasam Sofer answered, "It isn't a simple matter to meet with Eliyahu HaNavi. To merit seeing Eliyahu HaNavi, you first need *mesirus nefesh*."

It is possible to reach high levels and even see Eliyahu HaNavi, but it all begins with toil, with *mesirus nefesh*. One must be ready to do anything, and everything for Hashem's honor, and then great things can happen to him.

Rebbe Mordechai of Rachmistrifka *zt'l* (who lived in Yerushalayim) inherited the *succah* walls of his illustrious great-grandfather (of generations before) Rebbe Nochum of

Chernobyl *zt'l*. A wealthy man traveled from *chutz le'aretz* to Yerushalayim to convince the Rebbe to sell him the *sukkah*. He was prepared to pay a fortune for them, but Rebbe Mordechai Rachmistrifka refused because he cherished these hallowed walls, which were once owned and used by this great tzaddik.

But once, a child in the Rebbe's neighborhood became dangerously ill, and needed firewood to stay warm. Rebbe Mordechai of Rachmistrifka chopped his precious walls into splinters and sent them to the family, so they could heat their home and save the child's life. This is an example of doing Hashem's will, and helping one's fellow man with *mesirus nefesh*.

The Romans wanted to murder Reb Shimon bar Yochai, therefore he lived secluded in a cave for thirteen years, together with his son, Reb Elazar.

They learned Torah in the cave, by day and night, with *mesirus nefesh*, amidst great difficulty. We sing, שם קנית הודך והדרך, "There you acquired your glory." It was precisely in that cave that Reb Shimon reached his unprecedented heights. It was a life of *mesirus nefesh* and hardships that brought him to the highest levels.

When one makes a *kabbalah tovah*, he should keep it even when this requires *mesirus nefesh*.

A man named Shimon attended a weight-loss clinic that taught people tips on healthy eating and dieting. Being the *gabai* of a large Beis Midrash, Shimon was in the kitchen *erev Shavuous*, cutting cheesecakes for the *kiddush* that would be held Shavuos morning. He was tempted to eat from the cakes. He felt that he couldn't control himself, so he called up his mentor from the clinic to hear some tips that could help him pass the test. The mentor gave Shimon some

ideas and encouraged him to remain firm.

At the next meeting, the mentor praised Shimon in front of everyone present for passing the test. While the mentor praised Shimon, he was simultaneously praising himself because he was implying that his tips were helpful since they helped Shimon overcome temptation.

Shimon corrected him, "Your tips didn't help me. The Torah did."

He explained, "I ate a small piece of meat. After that, I didn't want to eat the cheesecakes anymore."

No one would consider eating cheese after eating meat. Similarly, we should consider it impossible to transgress the *kabbalos* and boundaries we set for ourselves.

After his *chasunah*, the Pnei Menachem made a *kabbalah* that he wouldn't speak after saying *kriyas Shma she'al hamittah*. Once,

his older brother, the Beis Yisrael *zy" a* (who was then the Gerer Rebbe) called for him. The Pnei Menachem didn't want to speak since he had already said the Shema, but when the Rebbe calls, one must answer. So, he decided to go to his brother, the Rebbe, and hopefully, he wouldn't need to speak. If the Rebbe would ask him something, however, he knew that he must answer.

The Rebbe asked him a question, and the Pnei Menachem answered. But now he had a problem because he transgressed his *kabbalah*. He spoke after saying the Shema.

He found a solution. That night, he didn't go to sleep. In this manner, he didn't speak after saying *kriyas Shma she'al hamittah*, because he never went to sleep.

This is an example of the determination and the *mesirus nefesh* we should have with our *kabbalos*.

The Purity of Torah

It states in this week's parashah (23:15) וספרתם לכם. The Or HaChaim explains that the Torah is saying, "Count the omer, and your *neshamos* will shine like ספיר, sapphire stone."

We are now in the days of *sefiras ha'omer*; days that are *mesugal* for attaining purity. As we say in the tefillah following *sefiras ha'omer*, that we count the omer, כדי לטהרנו מקליפותינו, ומטומאותינו, "so we will be purified from *klipos* and from *tumah*." This purity prepares us for Shavuos when we will receive the Torah.

But it isn't only *sefiras ha'omer* that purifies us. During these days, we purify ourselves by studying Torah.

The last words of the Rebbe of Kotzk zy" a were, "Whoever devotes himself to Torah, I guarantee [that everything will be good for him], in this world and in the next. But those who

want to be righteous without immersing themselves in Torah, they will fall into a deep abyss."

The Gemara says, "This is the source for *techiyas hameisim* from the Torah..." (*Sanhedrin* 91). The Chidushei HaRim zy" a explains the words literally: "*Techiyas hameisim* comes from the Torah." With studying Torah one can reach high levels, and he can even make *techiyas hameisim*.

Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz zy" a pointed to a wall and said to his grandson, Reb Moshe hy' d, "With a *daf* of Gemara, one is able to purify his eyesight until he is able to see through a brick wall."

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt' l asks, the halachah states that on Purim one may read the megillah for others; and similarly, on Rosh Hashanah one can blow shofar for others. So why does the halachah require that everyone count the omer by himself? Why can't

one person count the *omer* for others?

Reb Shlomo Zalman answers: By *sefiras ha'omer*, we purify ourselves by studying Torah. Everyone

must study Torah for himself to get this purity. It is impossible to study Torah for another person. To represent this idea, everyone must also count *sefiras ha'omer* for himself.¹¹

11. Halachah forbids us to eat matzah on *erev Pesach*. The reason is that this helps us eat the matzah at the Seder with appetite. Many have the custom is to refrain from eating matzah two weeks or thirty days before Pesach, to increase their appetite for the matzah, so we can perform the mitzvah of matzah with desire and love.

Bederech tzachus, a *bachur* asked, why don't we do the same on Shavuos? On Shavuos, we receive the Torah. Wouldn't it be a good idea to stop studying Torah a few weeks before Shavuos, so we will receive the Torah on Shavuos with desire?

But the answer is Torah becomes beloved specifically through learning it. The more one studies Torah, the more he loves it. Taking breaks from studying Torah will not increase your love for Torah, it will only diminish the passion. Therefore, the preparation for Shavuos is to study Torah.