

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Pinchas



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Torah Wellsprings

Pinchas

The Holidays

This week's *parashah* discusses the korbanos that are brought on the *Yom Tov*, Shabbos, and Rosh Chodesh. These days are the highlights of the year, the spiritual pillars of the year, and therefore, we should strive to make these days special.

There is a saying among Stoliner chassidim, "Six days a week you rest up, and on Shabbos, you work." We can accomplish a lot on a regular weekday. Each moment of life is precious. But Shabbos and *Yom Tov* are especially *mesugal* for spiritual growth and salvation.

Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller *zt'l* says, "One hour on Shabbos is like five hundred hours of the weekday." The Ben Ish Chai is more generous. He says an hour

on Shabbos is like a thousand weekday hours. The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* says that an hour of *avodas Hashem* on Rosh Chodesh makes the entire month holy like Rosh Chodesh because the body (of the month) follows the head.

The Meor Einayim discusses how the *yomim tovim* are the body of the year: Rosh Hashanah is the head, Yom Kippur is the *neshamah*, Succos and Pesach are two arms, Shavuos is the body, and Chanukah and Purim are the two legs.

In short, the holidays are precious gifts for Bnei Yisrael, and fortunate are those who put effort into making them happy and uplifting days.

Some people invest all their efforts in serving Hashem during the

weekdays because that's when they have *chavrusos* and set times for learning. When Shabbos and Yom Tov comes around, they take a break, and they sleep

and waste time. They have turned around their priorities because these special days are the most optimal days for performing Hashem's service.¹

1. The Dubno Magid *zt'l* tells the following story:

A large city was situated on the border between two countries, and each country claimed sovereignty over this city. The city passed hands between the two countries several times, depending on who won the latest battle.

After many years of fighting and a lot of bloodshed, the governments of the two countries decided that they will hold one final battle, and whoever wins that battle will own the city, forever.

Additionally, they decided that this time they won't send out their armies to battle, as they did in the past. This time, only one warrior from each country will come to the battlefield. The mighty warriors will wrestle, and the one who throws his opponent into the pit wins.

The day of the duel arrived, and the kings of both countries and many spectators came to watch this decisive battle and to encourage their representative.

At the start, one of the warriors was far more successful; it seemed that he would win. His countrymen cheered him on as the warrior dragged his opponent towards the pit. But suddenly, when they were near the pit, the other warrior jumped up from the ground, overpowered his opponent, and threw him into the pit.

At the victory celebration, the king said to the soldier, "It appeared that your opponent was stronger than you. We were so worried. We were certain you would lose. How did you end up winning?"

"I could have put up a good battle at the beginning, but I didn't

Reb Eliyahu Dessler zt'l (Michtav MiEliyahu, Elul - Tishrei) gave the following analogy:

A wealthy person and a poor person came to a doctor. They both had the same illness. The doctor advised the rich man to go to a health spa/resort with hot mineral springs. "Every day, bathe in the water until you are cured."

The doctor knew that the poor man couldn't afford the expensive resort, so the doctor advised him to buy mineral water, to heat it up, and to dab the healing waters on his body. He won't be bathing in the waters, but that is the best he can do.

The *nimshal* is that Shabbos and the *yomim tovim* are like purifying waters. The wise and the spiritually wealthy immerse themselves totally in the holiness of these days, with Torah, tefillah, joy, and good deeds. The spiritually poor just dab themselves with the pure waters - they do mitzvos here and there - but they aren't immersed.

Chazal say, "Whoever is greater, he has a greater yetzer hara." Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt'l taught that this idea also applies to days of the year. On the more important days of the year - such as on Shabbos and *Yom Tov* - we have a

want to. I was saving my strength for the decisive moment when we were near the pit. I allowed him to drag me all the way to the pit, because I wanted to exhaust him. When we were near the pit, he was exhausted, and I was strong, and it was easy for me to throw him into the pit."

This story is a reminder that we must be strong and fight the battles that are most important. We can't allow ourselves to be exhausted on Shabbos and *yom tov*. Those are the moments of the primary battle.

greater *yetzer hara*. Therefore, many people find it hard to serve Hashem on these days. But if we invest efforts, we can earn the wonderful presents that Hashem gives us with the fifty Shabbosim of the year and with the holidays.

A ship docked, and its passengers walked down the gangplank and the pier, carrying their packages. Among the passengers were wealthy people, lugging suitcases filled with money and merchandise that they earned overseas. Polish thieves found a way to steal their bags by

placing a coin on the pier. When the wealthy person saw the coin on the ground, he didn't suspect anything and put down his valise to pick up the coin. At that moment, the thieves grabbed the suitcase and ran away.

The lure of earning a small coin caused them to lose so much more.

Polish thieves also used the following scheme: One thief would come into a store, shoplift, and run out of the store with the stolen goods. The store owner would chase after him leaving the store empty. An accomplice entered the unattended store and emptied the cash register. Once again, the system was to get people focused on something relatively minor, and then thieves would take much more.

The cunning *yetzer hara* does the same. He gets people distracted by some small, insignificant matter, and thereby they cause people to lose out on something much more valuable.

For example, the *yetzer hara* might say to a person on a holiday, "Did you do this mitzvah according to all opinions? Maybe it wasn't good enough?" The person starts to feel anxious, thereby losing out on the joy of the holiday.

Or the yetzer hara reminds the person of an *aveirah* he committed in the past or some life problem he is struggling with. He becomes occupied with the melancholy thoughts, he gains something small, and he loses the joy of the holiday.

The Chofetz Chaim told the following *mashal*:

A poor person once asked a wealthy person for *tzedakah*. The rich man replied, "Meet me in my office, and I will help you."

But the poor person didn't show up.

The next day the poor person asked for *tzedakah*, again.

"Come to my office later today and I will give you," but, once again, the poor person didn't show up.

The same happens on Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, and *yom tov*. Hashem grants us many *brachos*, but we must be there to accept

the *brachos*. Being there means to daven well, learn Torah, and to be occupied with the spirit of these days. Be there and receive the blessings Hashem gives us.

Lashon Hara

Some may argue that *lashon hara* is the worst *aveirah* of the Torah. As the Gemara (*Yoma* 9:) writes, שקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות ע"ז גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים, the *aveirah* of baseless hatred [and *lashon hara*] is equivalent to the three cardinal *aveiros* of idolatry, adultery, and murder."

And the Ohr HaChaim (*Vayikra* 14:9) writes, "Nothing distances a person from Hashem as *lashon hara* does."

Yet, people do not consider it to be so severe. In people's minds, *lashon hara* is from the minor *aveiros*.

If someone purposely gave you non-kosher food

to eat, you would be angry at that person forever. You would never forgive him. But when someone speaks *lashon hara* to you, you forgive him. He can do it so many times, and you don't hate him because of it. The Chofetz Chaim discusses this and shows how people don't take this *aveirah* seriously.

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* explains that every mitzvah has a *mazal*. From all the mitzvos, *lashon hara* has the worst *mazal*, because it isn't considered so grave in people's eyes.

A sign of *tzaraas* is a white hair in the wound (see *Vayikra* 13:10). White generally represents purity, but by *tzaraas*, white indicates *tumah*. This tells us that when one is white and righteous in all his ways if he isn't cautious with his speech, he is *tamei*.

It is appropriate to discuss the severity of *lashon hara* at this time of year when we find

ourselves once again in the Three Weeks because the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed due to *lashon hara*.

Tips for Caution

A primary tip to be cautious with *lashon hara* is to study about it. Reb Yehudah Segal *zt'l*, *rosh yeshiva* of Manchester, said that everyone who accepted upon himself to learn two halachos a day from the *sefer Chofetz Chaim* saw salvations.

Similarly, the Imrei Emes writes in a letter (Yerushalayim, 1937, to his chassidim in Poland), "There are so many *tzaros* in the world...and we believe in what Chazal tell us that the *galus* is because of *lashon hara* and *sinas chinam*. Therefore, I request that we be cautious with these matters. I recommend that you study, at least twice a week, from the *sefarim Chofetz Chaim* and *Shemiras HaLashon*. I testify before

heaven and earth that after I went through these *sefarim* I felt it made me a better person. Even those who are perfect with their *middos* will also gain from studying these *sefarim*. I think that this is implied in the Midrash that the רוכל, traveling merchant, [was telling people to be cautious from *lashon hara*, and he] said to Reb Yanai לאו אנת לאו אנתי, 'You and people like yourself don't need my remedy. Nevertheless, Reb Yanai insisted that he wanted to hear the remedy. This tells us that everyone needs to hear these lessons.'

The Gemara (*Taanis* 8.) states, "In the future, all animals will come to the snake, and they will ask, 'A lion pounces and eats, a wolf tears up other animals and eats them, but what pleasure do you get?' [You bite and poison, and you don't eat the victim. What's the purpose?]

The snake replies (*Iyov* 36:33), אין יתרון לבעל הלשון, that also someone who speaks

lashon hara doesn't get any pleasure, but he does so anyway. I also bite without pleasure."

There is no joy in speaking *lashon hara*. There is no gain at all. You think that if you relate a juicy scoop, you will feel fulfilled and that you will be happy, but you almost always feel foolish and terrible afterward. Think about this, and you won't want to speak *lashon hara*.

When one has *tzaraas*, he wants to scratch his wounds. He thinks he will feel better and happier afterward, but scratching only irritates the wounds, and then they hurt even more. The same is with *lashon hara*. You think speaking it will make you happy, but the opposite generally occurs.

Another thought that will prevent you from speaking *lashon hara* is realizing that when you speak *lashon hara*, people think you are a fool. You want to show people how

smart you are, but you will accomplish that better by being silent.

Chazal (*Shabbos* 53.) say that donkeys are always cold – even in the summer. Once, a donkey found the fur loin skins in the forest, which hunters had left there. The donkey dressed itself in the fur skin and felt its bones warming up.

Meanwhile, all the animals in the forest were terrified of the donkey because it was dressed in lion fur, but its height was that of a donkey, which are taller than lions. They were afraid that they might fall prey to this strange animal.

The animals gathered to seek counsel.

The fox said, "I want to test something."

From a distance, the fox threw pebbles at the donkey, and the donkey

began to bray. The animals realized that it was a donkey, and it became the animals' lunch.

Had the donkey remained silent, the animals would be afraid of it. But when it spoke, it lost its prestige and greatness in the animals' eyes.

Similarly, if you want people to respect you, honor others. As Chazal say, אִיזְהוּ מְכֻבָּד הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרוּיָהּ, "Who deserves honor? Someone who honors others." If you slander and speak derogatory about others, people won't respect you.

If you knew how much you suffer from speaking and listening to lashon hara, you would be inspired to refrain.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 16:2) tells that a merchant² was going from

2. A peddler doesn't permit people to buy on credit, because he travels from place to place, and he isn't always around to collect the debt. The Chofetz Chaim (*Shaar HaZechirah* 6) says that the Midrash

city to city, announcing, "Who wants to buy a medicine that grants life?"

Reb Yanai heard the announcement from his home, and he came out and asked the merchant to sell him the medicine. The merchant replied, לאו אנת צריך, ליה ולא דמותך, "You don't need this remedy, neither do the people who are like you."

Reb Yanai insisted that he sell him the remedy. The merchant took out a *Tehillim* and read, מי האיש החפץ חיים אוהב ימים לראות טוב נצור לשונך מרע ושפתך מדבר מרמה, "Who is the person who desires life, who loves

days, to see good? Protect your tongue from speaking evil and guard your lips against speaking untruths." This was his remedy for health and long life: to be cautious with the speech.

Reb Yanai told the merchant that there's another source. As Shlomo HaMelech (*Mishlei* 21:23) teaches, שומר פיו ולשונו שומר מצרות נפשו, "The person who guards his lips and tongue, he guards his soul from *tzaros* (troubles)."

Reb Yanai added, "I've been saying this *pasuk* my entire life, and I didn't know its simple meaning

tells us that he was a peddler, so we can know that the punishments for speaking *lashon hara* comes immediately. Like a peddler, the payment is on the spot.

We saw that by Miryam. She was punished immediately after she spoke *lashon hara* (see *Bamidbar* 12:10).

And, when one is cautious with his speech, and he refrains from *lashon hara*, his reward will come to him immediately. As we know, מדה טובה מרובה, the reward is always in a greater measure than the extent of the punishment. Thus if the punishment comes immediately, the reward for guarding one's speech will also be immediate.

until the merchant came and taught me."

What did the peddler tell Reb Yanai that Reb Yanai didn't know previously? The *pasuk* seems to be straightforward enough: If you guard your speech, you will live long.

The Dubna Magid *zt'l* (*Kochav m'Yaakov, Haftarah, Tazria*) uses a *mashal* to answer:

Someone was having heart pains, and the doctor told him that he must be cautious not to become angry.

The patient replied, "If I wanted to hear *mussar*, I would have gone to my rav. I came to you because I want to hear medical advice."

The doctor explained, "I'm giving you medical advice. For your health's sake, you must be cautious with anger."

This is what Reb Yanai discovered. He thought the

pasuk was discussing the reward for guarding one's tongue. One is rewarded with a good life in this world and in the next. The peddler told him that medically speaking and emotionally, it is wise to guard your tongue. Because when one speaks *lashon hara*, he becomes upset, and he often becomes angry. His life isn't good. By guarding your speech, you will live better and longer.

Lashon Hara's Arrows

I met a seventy-year-old bachelor in Meron who is an alcoholic. He comes from a respected Yerushalmi family, but his life was shattered. He told me his story:

He was engaged to be married when he was in his high twenties, which was late considering the community he came from, and his fiancé was of a similar age. Two weeks before the *chasunah*, a

relative of the *kallah* told her, "I learned with your *chasan* in yeshiva. I just don't understand; you waited all this time to get married to *him*?"

She picked up on the condescending tones, and one thing led to the next until she decided that she doesn't want to marry him.

When the *chasan* heard that the *shidduch* was off, he packed a few belongings and moved to Meron. He's been there ever since, drowning his problems with his constant drinking.

All of this was the result of one word of *lashon hara*.

The following is another story that shows what a word of *lashon hara* can cause:

There's a young man who is slightly slow and somewhat "different," but apparently, his wife and in-laws are not so bright either, and they didn't realize it. They were pleased with him.

One *erev Shabbos*, the father-in-law came to a bus stop, seeking someone traveling to the area where his daughter and son-in-law lived so that he could send them a package.

He found a *bachur* waiting for a bus to that city, and the father-in-law described his son-in-law to the *bachur*, so he would know where he should deliver the package. The *bachur* replied, "Oh, that *meshugener* (insane person)? I know him. No problem."

Just one word of *lashon hara*, and it caused so much harm.

The father-in-law didn't want his daughter to be married to a *meshugener*, and he convinced her to demand a divorce.

Once, the Chofetz Chaim's front door was left open, and a cow walked in and began to do damage. After the cow was led out of the house and things calmed down, the Chofetz

Chaim said to his rebbetzin and his family, "What lesson can we learn from what happened? In a practical sense, we must keep the front door closed, so a cow won't come in again. And if the door is open and a cow comes in, we must be careful that the cow doesn't break anything. And this is a lesson for *shemiras halashon*: We should keep the entrance of our mouths closed and avoid speaking *lashon hara*. And when we speak, we must be extremely cautious that we don't harm anyone with our speech."

Chazal (*Bava Basra* 34:) writes, כל דאליים גבר.³ The

Rebbe of Zemigrad *zt'l* translates these words as follows:

כל דאליים is a mute. whoever acts as if he is mute when it comes to speaking *lashon hara*, גבר, this person is a man, an אדם, as a human being should be. As it states (*Chulin* 89.), מה אומנתו של אדם, בעולם הזה יעשה עצמו כאליים, "What is man's profession in this world? He should pretend that he's a mute."

Let us become an אדם, a human being, and avoid speaking *lashon hara*, which harms people needlessly.⁴

3. Literally, the words means, "The stronger man wins." Because there are financial disputes that are unresolvable. The court permits the litigants to compete for possession, and "The stronger man wins."

4. Reb Yosef Meir Zeidel *zt'l* tells that when he was at the age of *shidduchim*, living in Kalish, someone put out a rumor that he is engaged to a certain girl from Kalish. Understandably, the girl and Reb Yosef Meir were very embarrassed. It was a false rumor, without any trace of truth.

Eventually, Reb Yosef Meir was engaged to marry another girl (the

Parnassah and Success

The *Sefer HaKamah* says that *tzaraas* exists in our generation, only it has a different appearance. In these days, *tzaraas* is poverty.

In contrast, guarding one's speech is *mesugal* for *parnassah*.

The Chofetz Chaim (*Shemiras HaLashon* vol.2 ch.7) writes, "When I think about it, I am shocked: To earn

parnassah, people seek *segulos* and they go to *tzaddikim* to receive *brachos*. However, all *segulos* and *brachos* won't help them if they speak *lashon hara* because speaking *lashon hara* brings curses and not blessings. As it states in the Torah (*Devarim* 27:24), ארור מכה רעהו, בסתר, 'Cursed are those who smite their fellow man in concealment' [and this refers to speaking *lashon*

daughter of Reb Zalman Eisner *hy'd*). Six years passed and they didn't bear children. Reb Yosef Meir had a brother-in-law who was also a brother-in-law to the girl who suffered this embarrassment six years earlier. This brother-in-law advised Reb Yosef Meir to ask the woman for forgiveness. "Maybe her *hakpadah* (that she doesn't forgive) is what is preventing you from bearing children."

"But I didn't put create the rumor!" Reb Yosef Meir said. "And I was also humiliated from the rumor, just as she was."

"I know, but nevertheless I recommend that you ask her forgiveness."

Reb Yosef Meir went with his brother-in-law to the woman to ask forgiveness. Reb Yosef Meir stood downstairs, before the front door, and she stood by the window upstairs. Reb Yosef Meir asked forgiveness, and she replied that she forgives.

Reb Yosef Meir concludes his story: "Say whatever you want, but nine months afterwards, I had a child."

hara about one's fellow man]. This curse wasn't said by just one person. It was said with the approval of the entire Jewish nation, together with the *kohanim* and the *levi'im*. And the curse prevents him from receiving Hashem's bounty. If people would listen to me, I advise them to be very cautious with their words, and they will find blessing in their livelihood. This counsel is better than all *segulos*."

Guarding one's speech has many other benefits besides *parnassah*. It is a *segulah* for health, long life, and success. As the Chofetz Chaim (*Chovas HaShemirah* 6) writes, "The ideal *segulah* is to guard one's speech. As it states, מי האיש החפץ חיים, who wants to live in Olam HaBa, אוהב ימים לראות טוב, and he loves to live a good life in this world, the counsel is נצור לשונך מרע, guard your speech. This is the ultimate *segulah* for success in both worlds."

Guarding one's speech will also help him in the world to come. The Chofetz Chaim (*Kvod Shamayim* 1:10) teaches that in heaven, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will refuse to listen to the *mekatrigim* (*malachim* who speak *lashon hara* on him) because he didn't slander and speak *lashon hara* on others.

As we see, there are many benefits gained from guarding the speech. And the greatest reward of all is that we have the privilege to give pleasure to Hashem – and there is no greater joy than that!

It states (*Shir HaShirim* 1:2), ישיקני מנשיקות פיהו. The Yismach Moshe explains that ישיקני means kiss me, and מנשיקות פיהו is when one purses his lips tightly. Hashem says that it is like we kiss with Hashem, מנשיקות פיהו, when we close our mouths and refrain from speaking forbidden speech.

Atonement

Who can say that he hasn't committed severe *aveiros* and that he doesn't need to be purified? In the past, people would fast many fasts to purify themselves from their *aveiros*. But in these generations, we are weak, and tzaddikim tell us that we shouldn't fast anymore (other than the obligatory fasts). So how can we purify ourselves from *aveiros*?

There are easy solutions, and they atone just like fasting. One of them is to refrain from saying something he shouldn't. Reb Uri of Strelisk *zt'l* said that this is equivalent to 84 fasts. Reb Aharon of Belz *zt'l* added, "And I say that it is much more than that."

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* writes (עלים לתרופה), "Until the day one dies, one must afflict himself. Not with

fasts and other kinds of afflictions, but by muzzling his mouth and withholding from *taavos* (worldly temptations). This is more beneficial than fasts and afflictions. וכל רגע ורגע שאדם חוסם פיו זוכה לאור הגנוז שאין מלאך ובריה יכולים לשער, For each moment that he closes his mouth he merits the *or haganuz* (concealed light of creation) that no *malach* or creation can imagine."

The Chofetz Chaim writes in his introduction: For every moment you refrain from speaking what you shouldn't, you are rewarded with the *or haganuz*. You don't need a week or a month of self-control to merit this immense reward. You experience the *or haganuz* for each time you practice self-control and refrain from saying what you shouldn't.⁵

5. Tzaddikim say that when the *or haganuz* prevails, it is an *ein ratzon* for *tefillah*. At these times, his *tefillos* will be answered.

It states (*Mishlei* 21:14), מותן אף בכסתר יכפה אף, when one gives charity secretly (so as not to embarrass the receiver) this removes Hashem's wrath.

The Kotzker *zt'l* (*Emes v'Emunah* #242) says the *pasuk* refers to when one refrains from saying insulting words to his fellow man. This is a מותן בכסתר a concealed gift to Hashem. It is concealed because no one knows what he wanted to say but Hashem Himself, and it is a gift to Hashem because it is like he is giving these words over to Hashem. יכפה אף, this

removes Hashem's wrath from Klal Yisrael.

At the end of *Shemonah Esrei* we request, אלקי נצור, לשוני מרע, "Hashem guard my speech that I shouldn't speak evil..." Why don't we say שמור instead of נצור? שמור is a more common word.

נצור is used when one is guarding items of value. As it states (*Mishlei* 27:18) נוצר פרי, תאנה יאכל פרי, "the one who guards his fig tree can eat its fruit," and it states, נוצר, חסד לאלפים, "Hashem guards *chesed* for thousands of generations." Therefore, we

Therefore, when one refrains from speaking *lashon hara*, it is a good time to *daven*.

When the Enlightenment movement was spreading through Europe, the Chofetz Chaim instructed his students to give *drashos* and encourage people to keep Torah and mitzvos. One student told the Chofetz Chaim that he spoke someplace for two hours, but he feels that he didn't accomplish anything.

The Chofetz Chaim told him that the Vilna Gaon says that for controlling one's speech for even just a moment, you are rewarded with the *or haganuz*. "Imagine the reward you will receive for stopping an entire community from speaking *lashon hara* for two hours!"

say *אלקי נצור לשוני מרע*, because we are requesting that Hashem take all the words that we refrained from speaking, and store them in Heaven before Hashem. These unspoken words are precious gifts, cherished by Hashem.

Kind Words

Two birds were used to purify the *metzora*. One bird was *shechted*, and the other was a live bird which was dipped into the blood, used as a tool to sprinkle the blood on the *metzora*, and then was sent free.

Zohar explains that chirping birds represent speech. The *shechted* bird signifies that we must stop speaking *lashon hara*. The chirping bird that is sent free symbolizes that we should continue chirping, saying many **kind** words to help our fellow man.

Reb Akiva's 24,000 students died because they didn't honor one another. Reb Yechezkel Levenstein *zt'l* explains that their

intentions were good. They didn't want to cause their friends to sin with *gaavah*. When one stands up in honor of his friends, or when he calls them "Reb" etc., this can cause people to feel *gaavah*, which is an *aveirah*. The students didn't honor their fellow man in order to protect them from the *aveirah* of arrogance.

But although their intentions were good, they were mistaken. They should have honored their fellow man, regardless.

This is hinted at in Chazal (*Brachos* 19:), גדול כבוד הבריות שדוחה לא תעשה שבתורה, which can be translated, the importance of honoring your fellow man overrides the prohibition of *gaavah*.

When you honor your fellow man, Hashem will help that he won't become haughty because of it. A hint to this is from the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 57:) which states, לא אמרה תורה שלח לתקלה, "the Torah wouldn't tell you to send [the bird free] if it will cause a sin." The Gemara is referring to the

bird of the *metzora* that is sent free. This bird is permissible to eat and the proof to this is because the Torah wouldn't say שלח לתקלה, which means send it free if it was forbidden to eat it. There may be someone who might catch the bird and eat it, not knowing that it was used for a metzora.

This also alludes to our obligation to honor others. The Gemara says that you don't have to be concerned that this will lead to *gaavah*, because לא אמרה תורה שלח לתקלה, "the Torah wouldn't tell you to send your words, to encourage and to honor others, if it would result in a sin."

Everyone needs encouragement and some honor, and it is our obligation to give it to them. This will build up their spirit and hopes and

help them reach their potential.

It states in *Pikrei Avos* (2:6) that Hillel once saw a skull floating in the water, and Hillel said to it, על דאמפת, אטפוך, "You drowned others, and therefore you were drowned."

This is the pattern: What you do to others is returned to you, *chalilah*.

Based on this principle, we ask, why did הבל קין kill Hevel never killed anyone, so why was he killed?

We can answer that Hevel saw that Kayin was feeling down because his *korban* wasn't accepted. He desperately needed encouragement, but Hevel didn't give it to him. Therefore, in a way, Hevel killed Kayin, and what he did to Kayin came back to him.⁶

6. This is written בדרך דרוש, and not that we are judging Hevel, *chalilah*. But it teaches us the importance of honoring your fellow man because he needs the encouragement.

Remaining Within מַחֲנֵה

ישראל

From the beginning of creation until the *mabul*, Hashem would speak directly to mankind, and Hashem would tell each individual precisely what He wants from them. As the Ohr HaChaim (*Bereishis* 6:3) writes, "Hashem used to rebuke people openly, [as it states], 'Hashem said to the snake...'; 'To the woman, Hashem said...'; 'To Adam, He said...'; 'Hashem said to Kayin...'; Hashem spoke with Hevel...,' and so on. But when they increased their repulsive sins, Hashem said לא ידון רוחי באדם, I will no longer rebuke people face to face. People are no

longer fitting for that level. At first, Hashem would rebuke people to their faces, and everyone was a *navi*. But when mankind became more profane, they lost the level of *nevuah*...⁷ This curse started with the דור המבול, and the reason was, בשגם הוא בשר, because they were sinning with the disgusting, smelly, sin of adultery. Hashem hates זימה, adultery, and it's disgusting for Him to speak with such people"

Bilam told the Moabites, אלקיהם של אלו שונא זימה, "The G-d of this nation hates adultery" and he counseled Moav to cause the Jewish people to sin in that way.

Bilam's words, אלקיהם של אלו שונא זימה, can also be

7. The Or HaChaim continues and writes, "Eventually... tzaddikim returned the 'crown to its original place' [because Hashem would speak with the prophets] but when the Holy abode [Beis HaMikdash] was destroyed, prophecy ended. Nevertheless, *ruach hakodesh* still remained... [But now] we don't even have ריח הקודש, a scent of holiness, certainly not רוח הקודש, a spirit of holiness, and this is Klal Yisrael's greatest sorrow; there's nothing worse. They pine for a scent from their Father in heaven to uplift their souls."

translated, "Hashem is the G-d of the people who hate adultery"⁸ because the Jewish people also despise sin, and that is the reason Hashem loves us.

In last week's parashah, it states (25:1) וישב ישראל בשטים ויחל העם לינות אל בנות מואב, "Yisrael was in Shittim, and the nation started to sin with the daughters of Moav." שִׁטִּים is the name of a place, but it also means to stroll (as in *Bamidbar* 11:8, ושטו (העם)). The Ohr HaChaim writes, "The *passuk* alludes to the deed that led them to sin. It was because the nation strolled outside *machaneh Yisrael*, the Jewish camp, to the place where the daughters of Moav were... Because שִׁטִּים means

to stroll, as in the *passuk* העם ושטו (Bamidbar 11:8). This resulted with ויחל העם לינות, the nation began to commit adultery."

This is a timely topic, as it is now summer vacation season. We encourage people that wherever they stroll, it should be within *מחנה ישראל*. Always go to a place where there's minyan and a good atmosphere, because the Torah hints that strolling outside the Jewish camp leads to sins.⁹

The Torah forbids us from eating the בת יענה (ostrich, see *Vayikra* 11:16). Why does the Torah say that it is forbidden to eat בת יענה, the daughter of an ostrich? Why doesn't the

8. According to this translation, the words are read, אלקיהם של, Hashem is the G-d of, אלו שונא זימה, the people who hate adultery.

9. We'll add that one should ensure that his home is also *machaneh Yisrael*, within the Jewish camp. Because in all generations, the home was a refuge from the bad influences outdoors, a place where people would recharge their spirits. But today, it's possible to bring the entire street into the home. Therefore, we should strive to make the home a *machaneh Yisrael*.

Torah say that one may not eat the ostrich?

The Chizkuni answers that the *yaanah's* flesh is extremely tough, and people aren't interested in eating it anyway. As the Gemara (*Shabbos* 128.) states, "The *yaanah* eats glass!" The *bas yaanah* has softer meat, and one may desire to eat that, therefore the Torah clarifies that it's forbidden.

A father and his bar-mitzvah-aged son came to see the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*. The *bachur* said to the Chofetz Chaim, "I see how hard it is for my father to eke out a living, and I want to help him. So I decided to leave the yeshiva and to go to work."

The father said to the Chofetz Chaim, "Eisav was an איש שדה (an outdoorsman). I want my son to be like Yaakov Avinu, who was an איש תם יושב אהלים (someone who studies Torah in the beis medresh)."

"But father," the boy said, "you work, and you also study Torah. Why can't I do the same? I will set aside times for Torah, and I will help you with your *parnassah*."

The Chofetz Chaim sided with the father. He said, "It is written (*Eichah* 4:3), בת עמי לאכזר, כי עניים במדבר, 'My nation became cruel, like the *yaanah* in the desert.' In what way is the *yaanah* cruel? The *yaanah* has very tough flesh and eats glass and other sharp objects. This might be good food for the parents, but they feed this food to their children, too. Their children are small, their flesh is soft, and these crude foods cut the children's flesh and cause them to bleed. This is how the cruelty of the *yaanah* is seen."

The Chofetz Chaim explained, "Your father is older, and has already been toughened, similar to the flesh of the *yaanah*. Even if he must work, he sets aside time for Torah eachday,

and he will not go astray. But you are still young, delicate, and impressionable. If you leave the beis medresh, who knows what will happen to you?"

This story is an essential lesson for parents. Parents might permit themselves certain things and claim that it doesn't affect them (and sometimes it's true). But they must remember that they have already matured. Their path in life is clear. Their children, however, are still young and impressionable. What may be okay for the parents may not be suitable for the kids. We mustn't be cruel like the *yaanah*, who gives its fledglings what's suitable for itself and not good for its children.¹⁰

Raise the Heads

The Chofetz Chaim *zy" a* said that when Reb Mordechai Binet *zy" a* (the rav of Nikelsberg) would teach Torah to his students (and sometimes also when he studied by himself), he would move his hand around in the air or on his table as if he was writing something. The students were intrigued by this, and they watched his hand movements carefully until they figured out that he was formulating the words *אשרי איש שלא ישכחך* *ובן אדם יתאמן בך*, "Fortunate is the person who doesn't forget You, and fortunate is the man who fortifies himself in You" (from the *Shemonah Esrei* of Rosh HaShanah). In this fabulous way, Reb Mordechai Binet was careful to remember Hashem *Yisbarach*, even as

10. We are alluding to the internet, a very dangerous place for everyone. Gedolei Yisrael advise us to take counsel from a rav regarding how, when, and where to use it, when one needs it for *parnassah*. But parents must remember that even if it is okay for them, it isn't for their children.

he was deeply immersed in his studies.

It is a mitzvah to constantly think about Hashem. Hashem is always thinking about us, and He is leading us with His *hashgachah* at every moment, so we should be thinking about Him, and we should recognize that we can't do anything without Hashem.

It states in this week's parashah (*Bamidbar* 26:2) שאו ראש כל עדת בני ישראל, "Count the heads of Bnei Yisrael" One translation of שאו is to raise. Hashem said to Moshe and Elazar HaKohen "Raise the heads of the Jewish nation," and lift their consciousness. Teach them know that everything is from Hashem.

It states (*Yirmiyahu* 17:6) ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח בדי' והיה ד' מבטחו, "Blessed is the person who trusts in Hashem, and Hashem is the root of his trust."

The pasuk seems to be saying the same thing twice.

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* explains that many people trust in Hashem, but they think that Hashem will help them only through a particular channel. For example, when a person has a store, he has bitachon that Hashem will send him many customers. A *shadchan* trusts that Hashem will give him *parnassah* by enabling him to make many *shidduchim*, and so on. Similarly, when it comes to *refuah*, people have bitachon that Hashem will help the operation succeed, or that the doctor will find the correct cure, etc. But we must know that Hashem's options are unlimited. He can help us in other ways, as well. We do our *hishtadlus*, but our trust is in Hashem, alone.

The Baal Shem Tov says that the double expression of the pasuk is referring to this perfect level of bitachon. ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח בה',

he trusts in Hashem, וְהִיא ה' מְבַטְחֵוּ, and he understands that Hashem can help him in many ways. He doesn't put his trust in any specific means, only Hashem alone.

It states (*Tehillim* 118), טוֹב לְחַסוֹת בַּד' מִבְּטוֹחַ בָּאָדָם טוֹב לְחַסוֹת בַּד' מִבְּטוֹחַ בְּגֵדִים. The standard translation is: "It is better to trust in Hashem *than to* trust in man. It is better to trust in Hashem *than in* the wealthy."

But upon closer attention to the words, the translation seems to be like this: "It is better to trust in Hashem *from* trusting in man."¹¹

People trust that their wealthy friends will come to their aid, or they trust that influential people will help them out, and they learn the hard way that they aren't reliable. In the end, they didn't help them. They learn from those experiences that it is far

wiser to trust in Hashem. Thus, we can explain that the *passuk* is saying, טוֹב לְחַסוֹת בַּד' one knows that it is wise to trust in Hashem, מִבְּטוֹחַ בָּאָדָם, from the times that he relied on man.

Bein HaMetzarim

The Gemara says, "When a person is brought in heaven to judgment, he is asked, 'Did you deal honestly in business? Did you have set times for Torah study? Did you have children? *Did you await the salvation? Were you mifalpel* (study deeply) the Torah?" (*Shabbos* 31). One of the primary questions asked is whether he waited for the salvation, for Moshiach.

Someone once asked the Apter Rav zt'l advice regarding his business, and the Apter Rav answered with wise counsel. Then the Rav emitted a deep

11. If the *passuk* is solely saying the standard translation, it would have written מִבְּטוֹחַ.

moan and said, "A great tragedy happened today."

"What happened?" the man asked.

"We didn't bring the *korban tamid* today." and then the Apter Rav cried copiously for Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash.

Someone came to the Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l*, complaining that his son-in-law had become a Kotzker chossid. He told the rebbe that his daughter was very upset about this (not to mention that so was he, the father-in-law). He cried, "Whoever has a heart can understand me. How could the heart not burst from pain because of my daughter's sorrow?"

The Rebbe replied, "If one indeed has a heart, how could it not burst from pain because of the *churban* Beis HaMikdash."

During the Three Weeks, a tzaddik visited the Sfas Emes of Gur *zt'l*. "What brings you here?"

the Sfas Emes asked since he knew that this tzaddik lived far away.

"My family's tradition is to travel during the Three Weeks," the tzaddik explained. "Hashem is, *kivayachol*, in *galus*, so we go into *galus* too."

"The main thing is to remember that we aren't home," the Sfas Emes replied.

The Sfas Emes rarely traveled, but he continually reminded himself that we aren't *home*. We aren't where we should be.

Reb Yaakov Emdin *zt'l* (*Siddur Beis Yaakov*, Tisha b'Av 6:16) writes, "If our only sin were that we aren't mourning for Yerushalayim, it would be sufficient to prolong our *galus*. In my opinion, this is the primary cause for all the terrible destructions - beyond perception - that befalls us in *galus*. We are pursued and don't have peace. It is all because the

mourning has left our hearts."¹²

The Magan Avraham (551:45) writes, "The Arizal taught that one should mourn during these days [of Bein HaMetzarim] after midday, and cry for around a half-hour."

In the Chasam Sofer's yeshiva, in the afternoons during the Three Weeks, they would read together the *Tikun Chatzos* and mourn the *churban*. Generally, the tzaddik, Reb Fishel Sofer *zy'a* was the *chazzan*. He cried bitterly,

and the community would cry along with him.

Once Reb Fishel wasn't in yeshiva, and a young *bachur* with a sweet voice was chosen to lead *Tikun Chatzos*. This *bachur* didn't say it in a crying voice, like Reb Fishel. He sang it joyously. It appeared more like a Yom Tov *tefillah* than lamentations. When he finished, the Chasam Sofer said, "We have to check out this *bachur* whether he belongs to Shabsai Tzvi's *sr'y* group because how can one relate to the *churban* Beis HaMikdash with so much ease and comfort?"¹³

12. The three *Haftaros* of Bein HaMetzarim are called תלתא דפרענותא (three punishments) and the seven subsequent *haftaros* are called שבעה דגהמא (seven condolences). The Ateres Moshe of Makave *zy'a* asks that since the opposite of גהמא is נחמה, it seems that a more fitting name for the *haftaros* of the Three Weeks would be תלתא דאבלתא (Three Weeks of Mourning).

The Ateres Moshe answers that פרענותא can also mean 'to pay back.' Reb Yaakov Emdin taught that the *tzaros* of galus is because people aren't mourning sufficiently. When we read the *haftaros* of the Three Weeks, we are פרענותא, paying up our obligation.

13. The Chasam Sofer said, whoever mourns for the Beis HaMikdash during the Three Weeks, will merit having good children.

Mourning vs. Joy

The Shulchan Aruch (561:5) teaches, "One may not fill his mouth with laughter in this world." The Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah teaches that this is especially true during the Three Weeks.

However, we must clarify that this doesn't mean we are sad on these days. A Yid should always serve Hashem with happiness.

How does one combine mourning with joy?

Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg zy'a answers this question with the following *mashal*:

A king had to run far away from his palace to a distant land to escape the enemy. He stayed at the home of one of his close friends who lived there. The king watched his host and saw that sometimes he cried bitterly, and at other times he was extremely happy. The king asked

him, "Are you happy that I am in exile, or are you sad? I can't understand these opposing emotions that I see by you."

The host replied, "I am happy, and I am sad. I'm sad because you needed to leave your palace and come here. And I'm happy because I have the privilege to host the king in my home."

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickolsburg explained that during the Three Weeks we cry because the *Shechinah* is in *galus*, but we are also happy because the *Shechinah* is with us.

The *sefarim* explain that we can become closer to Hashem during the Three Weeks than throughout the year because when a king is in exile, whoever wants can come close and speak with him.

Therefore, it says, כל רודפיה השיגה בין המצרים (רודף will find Him בן י-ה) השיגה

המצרים, during the Three Weeks of *Bein Hametzarim*."

Shulchan Aruch (554:25) states, כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה, ורואה בשמחתה, "Whoever mourns for Yerushalayim merits seeing its joy." זוכה ורואה is written in the present tense.¹⁴ The Kedushas Levi and other *sefarim* explain that when one mourns for the Beis HaMikdash he immediately experiences the joy of redemption.

The Kedushas Levi (*Eichah*) writes, "When one thinks about holiness and mourns for Yerushalayim... he perceives a little bit of the joy of Yerushalayim; of how it will be in the future."

Therefore, mourning isn't a contradiction to joy. On the contrary, by mourning, we experience the joy of the future.

At a *chasunah*, we do several things to remember

the *churban*. We break a cup under the *chuppah*, we say the *brachah* שוש תשיש, which is a prayer for the *geulah*, the *chassan* wears ashes on his head, etc. The Sfas Emes (*Ki Savo* 5653) explains that these customs and halachos aren't a contradiction to the happiness of the marriage taking place; on the contrary, they complete it. He writes, "In our generation, when one remembers the Beis HaMikdash, he becomes attached to its light. Therefore, at every *simchah*, one must remember the Beis HaMikdash. At a *chasunah*, we say the *brachah* שוש תשיש [and we pray for the *ge'ulah*] because when the Beis HaMikdash stood, the *simchah* was complete. Today, we merit this *simchah* through mourning for the Beis HaMikdash. As it says, מושש... כל המתאבלים, "Rejoice... all those who

14. If it were in future tense, it would state זוכה ויראה.

mourn." Because of his mourning, he merits to feel the joy of Yerushalayim."

Shabbos

In the *tochachah* of *parashas Bechukosai*, as it discusses *galus*, the Torah (*Vayikra* 26:34) says, *אז תרצה* ¹⁵ *הארץ את שבתותיה...* The Tiferes Shlomo *zt'l* writes, "אז, when the Yidden are in *galus*, *תרצה... את שבתותיה*, Hashem enjoys the Shabbosim. The Shabbosim of *galus* are greater than the Shabbosim of the past when the Beis HaMikdash stood. Because, in this bitter exile, the weekdays are very dark. Our spiritual connection is solely through *Shabbos Kodesh*. Therefore, Shabbos is very high, and the love on Shabbos is even greater than in the past."

The Shabbosim of the Three Weeks are

particularly lofty and exalted since the weekdays are so low.

The holy sefarim tell that the highest point of Shabbos is *shalashudes* time because during the week, the afternoon is a time of *din* (harsh judgment) and Shabbos turns the *din* of the afternoon into *rachamim* (compassion) and when *din* turns into *rachamim* it is a very special time.

The Yid HaKadosh *zy'a* teaches that during the Three Weeks, the entire Shabbos becomes like the auspicious times of *shalashudes*. This is because during the Three Weeks, all twenty-four hours of the day are associated with *din*. Shabbos turns the *din* into *rachamim*, so the entire Shabbos is special and sacred, like the special moments of *shalashudes*.

15. According to its simple meaning, the *passuk* is saying that *galus* will atone for the transgressions of *shmitah* which caused the exile (see *Rashi*).

Torah

We discussed two ways to be liberated from the yoke of *galus* even before the Final Redemption. One is to mourn because whoever mourns the *churban* is זוכה ורואה בשמחתה, receives a scent of redemption even in the present. The second approach is to keeping Shabbos because on Shabbos there is no *galus*.

A third method is to study Torah. When we study Torah, it is like redemption is here.

At a *siyum*, it is permissible to eat meat and to drink wine during the Nine Days. Rebbe Ahron of Belz zy'a said that this teaches us that when a Yid studies Torah, there is no *galus*.

The Chozeh of Lublin taught a similar lesson. He asked: At a *bris* during the Nine Days, halachah states that only ten people may eat meat and drink wine.

At a *siyum*, however, everyone present may have meat and wine. What is the difference?

The Chozeh answers that the *churban* came because there wasn't enough Torah study, as it says, (Yirmiyahu 9:11) על מה אבדה ארץ על עזובם את תורתי, "Why was the land destroyed? Because they abandoned My Torah." Therefore, when one studies Torah and finishes a *mesechta*, he has amended the root of the *churban*. To some extent, a scent of the *ge'ulah* is in the air, so all participants can partake in the meal.

The Mishnah (*Avos* 2:14) says, "הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה, "be diligent in studying Torah." The Avodas Yisrael writes that הוי is *gematriya* 21, corresponding to the 21 days of the Three Weeks. "הוי - during the Three Weeks; שקוד ללמוד תורה - devote yourself to studying Torah."

Why is it especially important to study Torah during the Three Weeks?

The Avodas Yisrael explains, "It is the way of kings to have musicians. When the king is happy, he doesn't need a band to play for him. But when the king is sad, he calls for his musicians to play and make him happy. Similarly, *keviyachol*...since the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, there is sadness... One who cares will come before the King, devoid from all *atzvus* (depression) and strive to make the King happy". *Keviyachol*, one makes Hashem happy by studying Torah with joy.

During the Holocaust, people were amazed to see the *hasmadah* of Rebbe Pinchas of Ustila *zy'a* (the son-in-law of Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a*). The anguish and the worries of the

Second World War were unbearable; how was he able to put aside all his pain and suffering and delve into Torah study?

He explained: "People asked my father-in-law this very same question during WW1. They couldn't understand how he had the peace of mind to study Torah during the war. He explained that during hard times, it is even more important to study Torah. Because the Mishnah says, 'When a Yid is in pain, the *Shechinah* says, 'My head hurts. My arms hurt.' Hashem suffers together with us. Presently, many people of Bnei Yisrael are in distress and pain, and Hashem is certainly suffering together with them. We should therefore try to make Hashem happy. And nothing brings Hashem joy like when a Yid learns Torah."