

# Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts  
from  
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Shlita

Ki Seitzei





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# Torah Wellsprings

Ki Seitzei

## **Bitachon**

A poor man who lived in Cracow would sit at the street corner selling bagels that his wife had baked. One morning, a wealthy person who recognized the poor man at the corner said to him, "You're a *talmid chacham!* It isn't proper that you should do this for your *parnassah*. I will give you a weekly stipend so you can study Torah in bais midrash by day and by night."

This agreement went on for a few weeks, but then the poor man was back on the street selling bagels. The wealthy man saw this and questioned him.

The poor man said that he doesn't want to be supported anymore.

"But a deal is a deal. You can't back out without a *din Torah*," was the rich man's answer.

It was an unusual *din Torah* since each party's goal was to give instead of receiving money.

The rav of Cracow then was the Megaleh Amukos *zt'l*, and the wealthy man told him, "We have an agreement, and he doesn't have the right to back out of it without my consent."

The Megaleh Amukos asked the poor man why he doesn't want to accept the weekly stipend, which would enable him to study Torah without disturbances.

The poor man replied, "When my wife and I were in the bagel business, we were constantly turning our eyes to Hashem. As my wife prepared the bagels, she would daven to Hashem that the bagels come out tasty and beautiful so the customers

would buy again in the future. And when I was outdoors chopping wood for the oven, I davened to Hashem that I find dry wood, which is better for baking, and when I sat at the corner, I davened that people should buy from me. We were constantly davening for *siyata dishmaya* and turning our eyes to Heaven. But now that we have a stipend, we daven less. We feel less of a need to daven because someone is taking care of our financial needs. We don't want to live a life detached from Hashem, therefore, we decided to return to our previous lifestyle."

The Megaleh Amukos praised the couple for their connection to Hashem.

Shortly before this episode, the Megaleh Amukos notified the people of Cracow that his resignation from the post of rabbi was soon in coming. He never told them his reason for wanting to leave the town, and

despite their many requests that he tell them the reason, he refused. But because of the poor couple's desire to have a constant connection with Hashem, the Megaleh Amukos changed his mind and decided to remain in Krakow. He wanted to live among such special people who seek a constant relationship with Hashem.

Lavan said to Yaakov Avinu (*Bereishis* 30:28), נקבה שברך עלי ואתנה "Tell me your price and I will pay it." He wanted to pay Yaakov Avinu fixed wages.

Yaakov didn't want that.

The Rishonim explain that when one receives a set amount of money each week, the income seems secure, and there is less room for *bitachon*. Yaakov asked for payment that would require him to turn his eyes to Hashem. He requested that all animals born עקודים נקודים ברודים, with certain *simanim*, should be his payment.

With this kind of agreement, Yaakov Avinu knew that he might earn nothing at all and possibly become very wealthy. Everything is up in the air and dependent on Hashem. Yaakov preferred this arrangement rather than a set salary because he wanted to feel entirely reliant on Hashem.<sup>1</sup>

This week's *parashah* discusses the prohibition of lending with *ribbis*, interest (see 23:21-22). The Kli Yakar explains that the problem with *ribbis* is that it is a guaranteed source of income, and the lender doesn't feel the need to

have bitachon. The Torah wants a person's *parnassah* to contain a degree of risk so that he will train himself to trust in Hashem.

As the Kli Yakar writes, "Ribbis is prohibited because it causes people to cast away their trust in Hashem... With all other businesses, one trusts in Hashem because his success is never guaranteed. However, when one lends money with interest, his income is set and certain. Moreover, he took collateral, so he isn't worried about losing the money he lent.

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1. Once, a *gadol* saw that Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* was extraordinarily happy and he asked him about that.

Reb Yechezkel replied, "I was very happy when the Ponovitzer Rav *zt'l* hired me to be the *mashgiach* of Ponovitz Yeshiva, because I naively thought that the Ponovitzer Rav would pay on time. The only factor that worried me was that I might come to rely on my stable income, instead of turning my eyes to Hashem.

But now I'm the *mashgiach* of Ponovitz and the paycheck still comes late. I need to have bitachon that Hashem will support me. That's the reason I'm so happy. I am being forced to have *bitachon* in Hashem."

"The borrower also does an *aveirah*, because he is causing the lender to lose his *bitachon*. As we know, generally, those who earn their *parnassah* by lending money with *ribbis* are stingy people, and they don't give much *tzedakah*. This is because, as discussed, they lack *bitachon*.

"Nevertheless, it is permitted to lend money to non-Jews with *ribbis*. This

is because gentiles are often thieves, and they are difficult to deal with. Even when the gentiles are subject to the Jewish courts, they always find ways to free themselves from their obligations. And even if collateral was provided, one still isn't confident he will get back his money. Therefore, in these instances, the eyes of the lender are turned to Hashem to save him..."<sup>2</sup>

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2. A chassid told Reb Dovid Moshe of Tchoortkov *zt'l*, "Rebbe, I will soon be rich. The priest owns a large forest, and he is too old to take care of it. He will be selling it to me at a very low price. All my friends and financial advisors tell me that it's a deal of a lifetime."

He promised the Rebbe that he will give him a large share of the *maasar*.

And then he spoke with the Rebbe about other matters.

At the end of the conversation the Rebbe said, "About the forest, I don't recommend that you buy it."

The man left the Rebbe's room confused. Everyone told him he could make millions on the forest. How could he throw it away? He decided he'd disregard the Rebbe's warning and go ahead with his plans.

The day after the deal closed, he discovered he made a grave mistake. He sent lumberjacks to begin cutting down trees, and

they returned to tell him that all the trees they felled were infested with termites.

"I lost all my money in this unwise investment," he grieved. "I should have listened to my Rebbe."

He was too embarrassed to face his Rebbe because he didn't listen to his counsel. Two years passed, and he still couldn't bring himself to face the Rebbe.

Finally, he thought, "I lost my money, should I lose my Rebbe, too?"

He came to Tchortkov and said, "Rebbe! I should have listened to your *ruach hakadosh*."

The Rebbe replied, "It wasn't *ruach hakodesh*. It is just that when you spoke to me about that investment, you didn't say '*be'ezras Hashem*.' You were certain you would make a lot of money, and you didn't think you need Hashem to help you. But it's impossible to succeed without Hashem. When I saw you took Hashem out of the picture, I knew it wasn't a good investment for you. Because how could you earn money, without Hashem's help?"

A wealthy person told Reb Elia *zt'l* (a student of the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*) about his immense wealth, and he said with confidence, "I will never become poor."

"Why do you say so?" Reb Elia asked. "*Parnassah* is in Hashem's hands, and one can't guarantee the future."

The wealthy man said, "You don't understand. It is impossible for me to become poor. I have so many businesses; if one doesn't do well, the others will. Let's say my leather business fails, I still have the lumberyard. And if my lumberyard doesn't prosper, I will still earn money by collecting toll on a bridge I own..."

"Don't say that," Reb Elia said. "*Parnassah* is a *galgal hachozer be'olem*, like a turning wheel. Today one is rich, but the wheel of fortune can always change."

Reb Elia met this wealthy man years later and the once wealthy man said, "You were so right. *Parnassah* isn't guaranteed. I lost all my money."



## Above Heaven

The Russian army pasted a note on Brisker Rav's front door that declared: "Due to the war, many soldiers will be moving to Brisk. As you live in one of the larger houses of Brisk, the army will take over your home and turn it into an army base. The army will provide you a replacement home in another city. We apologize for the inconvenience. We will give you at least a week's notice before you need to relocate to your new location."

Needless to say, the Brisker Rav's family was distraught. They said, "Who knows where they will send us? Probably to a city where there are no Yidden, and we can't live there. We will lose our home and get nothing in exchange..."

The Brisker Rav zt'l calmed his family and explained, "The Russian government cannot force us to move if it wasn't decreed in Heaven. Decisions are made in Heaven, not here on earth. If Hashem doesn't want us to move, it won't happen."

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"What happened?" Reb Elia, asked.

"One of my sources of revenue was a bridge. Once, Nicolai's army marched over the bridge with cavalry and heavy equipment. It was too much for the bridge to carry. The bridge collapsed, and soldiers died in the river below. There was also a great financial loss for the Czar. I knew that if I don't escape, I will be imprisoned. I quickly went home, filled a bag with bank notes, and crossed the border clandestinely. When I was settled, I looked in my bag and realized I took the wrong papers. What I took was worthless. I've been poor ever since..."

Because *parnassah* comes from Hashem, and one should put his trust in Hashem, alone.

Indeed, the army never followed up on their threat. They never seized their home.

A hint to the Brisker Rav's approach is found in this week's *parashah*. It states (25:19), תמוחה את זכר עמלק, מתחת השמים, "Wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven." The Tiferes Shmuel *zt'l* explains that we must erase the notion that things happen מתחת השמים, under the heavens. Everything begins למעלה מן השמים, above Heaven, and whatever is decreed above will occur below.

Similarly, it states (*Eichah* 3:66), ותשמידם מתחת שמי ה'. The Imrei Emes *zt'l* explains that we must abolish the thought that things happen

"under the heavens" and recognize that everything happens by Hashem's decree.<sup>3</sup>

Amalek wants people to think that everything happens "under the heavens." For example, people ask, "Why does my neighbor earn so much money while I don't?" Amalek encourages the explanation that it is because the neighbor worked harder or because he made wiser financial decisions. We, on the other hand, understand that it is because this is Hashem's decree.

The *parashah* begins, כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך, "When you go out to war against your enemy..." Obviously,

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3. It states in this week's *parashah* (23:11), איש כי לא יהיה טהור מקרה לילה. The words מקרה and לילה allude to two factors that make a person *tamei*: One is when one thinks matters happen by מקרה, by chance. The second is when one thinks life is לילה, dark, and negative, and he doesn't believe that everything is for the good. When we acquire the emunah that everything happens by Hashem's hashgachah and everything is for the good, that is taharah, purity.

the wars that the Torah is referring to don't apply to our times. Yet, we know that the Torah is relevant in every generation. So how should we read this *pasuk* in our times? What is the Torah inferring when it discusses going out to war?

Following the path of *drush*, *כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך*, alludes to the war against the *yetzer hara*. Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* teaches that this explanation (of *drush*) becomes the *pshat*, the primary way to understand the Torah in our generation. In our times, the Torah isn't referring to going out to physical wars; rather, in our times, the Torah refers to the great spiritual battle against the *yetzer hara*.

Similarly, at the end of the *parashah*, the Torah discusses destroying Amalek. In our generation, we cannot wage this war in its literal sense. In this generation, the *pshat* is to wage war to acquire and maintain *emunah*.

The war against Amalek signifies the battle against heresy. And that is the *parashah's* most basic meaning in our times.

The Torah states (25:18), *אשר קרך בדרך*, Amalek professes that things happen by chance (*מקרה*). The war against Amalek is to wipe away this notion and to acknowledge that everything comes from Above. By attaining this recognition, we destroy Amalek. We can't wage a literal war against Amalek, but we keep the *mitzvah* by increasing our awareness that everything is from Hashem, and nothing originates from *מתחת השמים*, beneath Heaven.

### Going out to War

In a letter, Reb Yitzchak Hutner *zt'l* bemoans how we generally think of *tzaddikim*. We believe they never had to battle their *yetzer hara*, but it isn't so.

He writes in the letter, "We have a bad habit when

we discuss the greatness of *tzaddikim*. We begin at the end; with the great levels they reached, and we skip the many years they had great battles with their *yetzer hara*. This leads us to believe that they were born *tzaddikim*.

"Everyone praises the *shemiras halashon* of the Chofetz Chaim, but who speaks about all of his struggles, ups, and downs, he experienced until he reached that level? This is just one example among thousands. The problem is that when a *bachur* has a strong desire to grow in *avodas Hashem*, and when he is confronted with challenges, he thinks he will never reach the levels of the *tzaddikim* whom he seeks to emulate. He thinks that if he has challenges, there is no hope for him. But that is ridiculous. Know, my friend, you will fall again and again, and there will be battles that you will lose. But in the end, you will be victorious,

and you will wear on your head the crown of success. The wisest of all men said, שבעה יפול צדיק וקם, 'a *tzaddik* falls seven times and gets up!... The wise understand that the *tzaddik* gets up [and reaches higher levels] *because* he fell seven times. I beg you, don't think of *tzaddikim* as people who are at peace with their *yetzer tov*. Instead, when the *yetzer hara* is burning inside you, and you are struggling to overcome the *yetzer hara*, those are the moments you are like the *gedolim*, more than the moments when you are at peace with the *yetzer hara*...."

The Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* taught (*Bamidbar* 13:20), והתחזקתם, make yourself strong and courageous when you serve Hashem. ולקחתם מפרי הארץ, get encouragement from the fruit of the earth. A fruit seed rots in the ground, and then a tree grows from it. Similarly, whenever one falls from his *avodas Hashem*,

he can pick himself up and grow to become even better than before.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves *hischazkus* when one strengthens himself to do Hashem's will, even if it lasts only for a moment."

Rebbe Gedalyah Moshe of Zvhil *zt'l* asked someone why he doesn't listen to a certain *mussar drashah*. The man replied, "Even if the speech inspires me to do *teshuvah*, the *teshuvah* won't last for long. Soon afterward, I will be myself again."

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

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* writes, "One should rejoice immensely and consider every deed of *avodas Hashem* very precious. He should decide in his heart that he won't sell it for all the money in the world. Even if it was only for a moment, one word, thought, or deed will never become lost, and it counts a lot for him and perhaps for all Yisrael. Can there be a greater joy than carrying out the purpose of his creation? He should do whatever he can and seek to do more and more – small deeds and great ones. As the saying goes, 'whatever one grabs at a market sale, it's worthwhile.'"

It states, *כי תצא למלחמה*, "When you go out to war..." and we explained above that the *pasuk* refers to the war against the *yetzer hara*. The Tiferes Shlomo *zt'l* notes that the *pasuk* doesn't state, *כי תצא לנצחון*, "When you go out to win." It says when you go out "to

war." Because the goal is to fight the war, and when you go out to battle, eventually you will win, as it states (ibid.) ונתנו ה' אלקיך 4. בידך.

### Compassion

One of the mitzvos of this week's *parashah* is (22:10), לא תחרוש בשור וחמור יחדו, the prohibition to plow with an ox and donkey together.

This is forbidden because of *tzaar baalei chaim*. As the Chinuch (550) writes, "It is known that animals suffer distress when they are among other species. We see, for example, that

birds of one species flock together; they don't want to be with other species. It is even more disturbing for animals to *work* with animals of another species...."

The Torah prohibits us from having a donkey and an ox plow together as a courtesy to the distressed animals when forced to work with other species.

The Chinuch concludes, "The wise should take *mussar* from this, and they shouldn't appoint two people with totally different natures to work together... Such as a *rasha* and a *tzaddik* or to employ

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4. As the Rizhiner *zt'l* said, "A *potch* for a *potch*, the main thing is that you give the final *potch*." Sometimes the *yetzer hara* wins a battle and sometimes you win.

That is the nature of a war. You aren't always successful in winning every single battle. The main thing is to succeed in the end.

In *Shacharis* we say, המה כרעו ונפלו ואנחנו קמנו ונתעודד, "They stooped and fell, while we got up and were encouraged" (*Tehillim* 20). The *pasuk* doesn't say that we don't fall. It states that we fall, but we get up again. The goal is not to never stumble. Rather, to get up and try again.

someone respected with someone of a lower class. If the Torah forbids employing animals of different species, certainly it is far harder for people, for they possess intelligence. It is distressful for them to be with people that are different than them."

Let us explain this lesson some more:

Animals of the same species have more or less the same nature. One can predict the reactions of donkeys or that of camels. However, people are very different. Each person's mind works differently, according to their different personalities, upbringing, and country of origin. They can be divided into several categories (wealthy/poor, tzaddik/rasha, respected/lower class). Just as animals desire to be with their species, human beings also feel more comfortable being around their type, and they have distress when they are among people who are so different than them.

According to the Chinuch, this is the reason that the Torah prohibits plowing with two different species. We mustn't force animals to endure this distress. We also understand from this prohibition to be considerate to human employees and have them work with similar people.

The *Daas Zekeinim MiBaalei HaTosfos* has another explanation for the prohibition of plowing with an ox and donkey that are harnessed together. He writes, "An ox chews its cud (מעלה גרה). The donkey will feel bad that the ox is eating while it can't."

The Torah prohibits us from causing the donkey to feel this distress. What can we learn from this prohibition regarding our concern for the happiness of human beings?

Perhaps not to flaunt something you have that others don't.

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

There are several other mitzvos in this week's *parashah* that teach us to cultivate sensitivity to the needs of others.

One example is (23:4-5), לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ה' גם דור עשירי לא יבא להם בקהל ה' עד עולם, "An Amonite and a Moabite may not marry into the Jewish nation, even the tenth generation can't marry into Hashem's nation - forever." Even after they convert, their marriage options remain very limited.

This prohibition can continue for generations. If one knows that he is a direct line descendant (son after son) from an Amonite or Moabite *ger*, he is forbidden to marry most Jewish girls. This

prohibition would continue until today; however, it is impossible to trace someone's lineage so far back in our times.

The Torah writes the reason for this prohibition, על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ומים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים ואשר שכר עליך, בלעם בן בעור... לקללך, "It is because they didn't greet you with bread and water when you were traveling, as you left Mitzrayim."

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



aren't fitting to join the holy Jewish nation."

The *Chinuch* writes, "They weren't concerned that other nations would discover their bad nature and lowliness..." - at least, they should have been embarrassed about world opinion. It should bother them that other nations will consider them callous and unkind.

But Amon and Moav didn't mind that other nations will discuss their cruel ways. They were corrupt and callous, and they didn't even care.

Therefore, they can't marry into the Jewish nation.

Once again, the prohibition is primarily to teach us to have proper *middos*. We need to acquire the *middos* and the compassion of the Torah. It should be obvious to us that we must help our fellow man in need, and we must certainly never harm others.

Compassion is at the foundation of being a Yid. Even more, it is the root of being a human being in this world, as Hashem desires it.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Once, Reb Alter Samilovitz *zt'l* saw a young girl crying on the curb.

"What's the matter?" he asked her.

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

"Let me see your dress," Reb Samilovitz said, as he put on his glasses. "Go tell your mother that I say you have a pretty dress."

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

Reb Samilovitz said to the person who was walking with him, "The Midrash says, 'Just as Hashem removes tears from all faces (as it states *Yeshayah* 25:8, (ומחה ה' ... דמעה מעל כל פנים) similarly, you shall also remove the tears from all faces,' and I just accomplished that by

### A Good Judgment

Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* taught that being involved in *chesed* is *mesugal* for

receiving a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and he explained this *segulah* with a *mashal*:

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removing them from this young girl's face."

One week, after immersing in the *mikvah* on Friday afternoon, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zy'a* asked his *gabai* Reb Shalom Fogel *z'l* to bring him cake and coffee. Reb Shalom Fogel *z'l* was surprised at this unusual request.

Reb Shalom brought the coffee and cake to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe said, "Bring them to So-and-So who is in the beis medresh. When I was in the *mikvah*, I heard him say, 'After a hot *mikvah* like this one, all that's missing is a cup of hot coffee with a piece of cake,' and I want to grant him his wishes."

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

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

The Rebbe replied, "Last night, at 3:00 a.m., you came into the bais midrash. The bais midrash wasn't heated, and you had *rachmanus* on the scholars learning there, so you went out in the freezing snow and chopped wood for the furnace. As you worked, you sang. I heard the song. It's a beautiful song. That's the song I want to hear."

It was a beautiful song, because it was created while compassionately doing *chessed* for Yidden.

There was a luxurious hotel; only the very wealthy went there. And even they never stayed longer than a few days, or at the most, they remained a week. It was too expensive to stay longer.

Once, a wealthy person went to the luxurious hotel, where he was shocked to meet a friend from his youth. "I didn't know he became wealthy," the wealthy man thought to himself. "When we were friends in school, he was from the poorer children."

He greeted his friend and asked the questions that almost everyone asked one another in that hotel: "When did you come? And when will you leave?"

The answer was always within a week, but this friend of his youth replied, "I arrived twenty years ago, and I don't have plans to leave."

"How can that be? How did you become so wealthy

that you can live here so long?"

The man replied, "I'm the janitor. I work here."

When you are needed, you can remain around for a long time.

The *nimshal* is, if you do *chesed*, Hashem will say, "He is needed in the world. He helps others. We can't take him away." Hashem will give him *parnassah*, health, and anything he needs so he can continue doing good things in the world. Therefore, performing deeds of *chesed* is *mesugal* for receiving a good judgment.

The Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah*, 3:13) teaches, "There are mitzvos of the Torah that most people aren't careful with them.... One is *gemilus chasadim*... Chazal say the world stands on three pillars: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilus chasadim*. This mitzvah is מן החמורות ומן העקרים הנדרשים מן האדם, among the severest and

most fundamental principles that Hashem requests from man. As it says (*Michah* 6), ומה ד' דורש ממך, What does Hashem ask of you? Only to do justice, and to love *chesed*.'" "

Therefore, let's make doing deeds of *chesed* a primary goal. And as we saw, when we do this fundamental mitzvah, we will receive a good judgment for the upcoming year.

### Smile

*Chesed* doesn't necessarily need to cost you money. You can do *chesed* simply by smiling. As it states (*Avos* 1:15), והוי מוקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות, "Greet everyone with a smile." And, as it states (*Avos* 3:12), והוי מוקבל את כל אדם, בשמחה, "Greet everyone with happiness."

That is a great mitzvah, as there are people who carry heavy loads of worries on their shoulders,

they are sad and distressed, and when you greet them with happiness, you blow into them a breath of joy and happiness.

The Rav Bartunera explains that מקבל means "in front of" or "before." (As it states [*Shemos* 19:2] נגד ההר and Unkelos explains, לקבל טוֹרָא, that the nation stood "in front of the mountain.") Thus, when the Mishnah states והוי מוקבל, את כל אדם בשמחה, it can be translated, "Stand before every person with joy."

This means people should see that you are happy. This is a great benefit, as it will train others to be happy, as well. However, if you will be sour and down, this will influence others to have such bad sentiments regarding life's challenges.

Reb Yisrael Salanter *zy'a* taught that someone who goes around with a sour face is like a pit in the middle of the street (בור), because he is causing people to be sad together

with him. In contrast, those who go around with a happy countenance make others happy, which is a great *zechus*.

The tzaddikim of Ziditchov *zy'a* said that a שמייכל (*smile*) is *roshei teivos*, כולם יהיו משועבדים לעבודתו יתברך

everyone will be devoted to serving Hashem.

Happiness is essential in Elul because אלול is *roshei teivos*, לעבעדיג און ווייטער לעבעדיג happy and happy again. As the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* says, "When a person sets out on the path of teshuvah, it is a severe sin to be sad."<sup>6</sup>

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## 6. Smile and people will smile back at you.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuels finally found a home to purchase that suited their needs. The location, size of the home, and price were just what they hoped for. There was just one thing that needed to be checked. "What about the neighbors?" Mrs. S. asked the seller. "Are they friendly?"

"Of course," the seller told them. "They are all very friendly people. You will feel right at home."

"That's good, because I don't want to live in an unfriendly neighborhood."

The Samuels bought the house. As the movers carried the furniture into their new home, Mrs. Samuels saw one of the neighbors standing near their home, glaring at her. "Why doesn't she smile to newcomers?" Mrs. Samuels asked herself. "When new people move into the neighborhood, I come over to say hello. Why don't they? Are they unhappy that we moved in?"

Mrs. Samuels called the seller and complained, "Why did you trick us? You promised us that the neighbors are friendly. It isn't so!"

The seller told her, "Smile to the neighbors, and you will see how friendly they are."

### Tefillos

*Shulchan Aruch* (581) states, נוהגים לקום באשמורת לומר, סליחות ותחנונים מר"ח אלול עד יום"כ, "The custom is to awaken early to say *selichos*, from *rosh chodesh Elul* until Yom Kippur."

This is indeed the custom of the *Sefardishe* communities. They say *selichos* from the day after *rosh chodesh Elul* until Yom Kippur. And fortunate is their portion. As the Tur (581) writes, כל המוסיף לבקש, רחמים זכות הוא לו, "Whoever davens more [in Elul] it is his merit." It will help him earn a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment.

The Rema (ibid.) writes, ומנהג בני אשכנז אינו כן, "This isn't the custom of the Ashkenazi communities." The Ashkenazi custom is to begin saying *selichos* on the Sunday (or motzei Shabbos) before Rosh Hashanah. And when Rosh Hashanah is on Monday or Tuesday, like it is this year, we begin saying *selichos* on Sunday of the week prior.

The Sefardic custom has two parts: to awaken early and to say *selichos*. As it states, נוהגים לקום באשמורת לומר, סליחות ותחנונים, "The custom is (1) to awaken early in the morning (2) to say *selichos*."

The Rema writes that this isn't the Ashkenazi

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Mrs. Samuels followed his advice. She smiled, and the neighbor smiled back at her.

And then she realized that there was a mirror near the house. (The movers put it there and didn't yet bring it in the house.) She realized that there was never a neighbor frowning at her or smiling to her. When she smiled, the mirror smiled back, and when she had a grim face, that was the face that was reflected.

And indeed, it is always that way. Greet people with happiness, and everyone will be happy to see you.

custom. Reb Shmuel Wosner *zt'l* explains that it isn't the Ashkenazi custom to say *selichos* at the beginning of Elul, but it is their custom to awaken early during Elul.

That custom is for everyone, Ashkenazim and Sefardim alike.

And when we awaken early, we can study Torah or say *Tehillim* and tefillos.

As the Shaarei Teshuvah (581) writes, "I saw rabbanim who were always studying halachah, but during Elul they would stop a little bit from their studies to say *tachanunim* (prayers to Hashem)."

It is important to say *Tehillim* during Elul.

Although we don't usually say *Tehillim* the first half of the night, Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* (*Imrei Pinchas* 427) says, "During

Elul, it is permitted to say *Tehillim* even in the beginning of the night."

Elul is a time for tefillah. In addition to the additional tefillos we say this month (*Tehillim, selichos, tachanunim, etc.*), we should strive to say the standard tefillos of Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv with more *kavanah*.

The first step to improve in these tefillos is to come on time and to remain in beis midrash until the end of the tefillah. Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach wittily called עלינו "*Tefillas HaDerech*" because people say it while they are walking out. Some say ותשאני רוח "A wind carried me away" (ובא לציון) and they are already outside the beis midrash.

Similarly, some only enter the beis midrash when the *tzibur* is saying כי בנה סוס (in *Oz Yashir*).<sup>7</sup>

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7. Rebbe Dovid Biderman of Lelov *zt'l* said that wearing tefillin until the very end of the tefillah ("until after the Kaddish following Aleinu) is *mesugal* for *parnassah*.

If you come on time, you won't need to skip or rush through the tefillos, and there is a greater potential for you to daven with *kavanah*. Furthermore, it is *derech erez* to come at the beginning of the tefillah. It shows respect for the tefillah and Hashem.

The Trumas HaDeshen would say *Baruch She'amar* for almost an hour, each day, in Elul. Most of us won't do that. Nevertheless, that is a reminder that we should put in the effort to daven properly during Elul.<sup>8</sup>

The Meiri (*Chibur HaTeshuvah*) teaches, "One should attempt to pray a

lot before Rosh Hashanah so that he will arrive at Rosh Hashanah with a pure heart."

The significance of Rosh Hashanah can be explained with the following *mashal*: A group of fish spotted bait and went for it. When the fishermen raised the net, the fish realized they were caught. One fish said to his friend, "We should have taken the bait and fled. We took our time eating the bait, and now we're caught."

Actually, when they took the bait, they were already caught in the net.

The *nimshal* is, people make decisions regarding

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8. The Gemara (*Brachos* 60.) states that during the first forty days of a pregnancy one can pray that the child be a male. After forty days the gender of the child in the womb is already formed, and (according to many opinions) it is too late to daven that the child be a male. Tefillos won't change anything.

The Shaar HaMelech (1:5) teaches that this Gemara hints to the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. One should daven during these days to change the female (*midas hadin*) to masculine (*midas harachamim*).



*parnassah* and other matters, and afterward, they often regret their choices. They say, "I should have been wiser and not made that foolish investment," etc. Actually, even before they made the decision, they were already caught in the trap. Because on Rosh Hashanah, it was decreed that they will lose money, and the unwise financial decision was to enable the decree to transpire.

The time to save yourself is *before* Rosh Hashanah, in the month of Elul.

We can explain the importance of tefillah this month with a *meshal*:

*Melamdin* can be very strict with their students, while fathers are kind and compassionate. If a *melamed* is too strict with a student, the father might speak with the *melamed* and request that he be softer with his son.

Once, there was a father who home-schooled his

son. During the daytime, when the father played the role of *melamed*, he was very strict and demanding of his son. At night, he was a compassionate, doting father.

One night, the son said to his father, "Perhaps you can speak with my *melamed*, and ask him to be kinder to me?"

The *nimshal* is, in Elul, Hashem reveals Himself as a compassionate father, and on Rosh Hashanah, the judgment is with the attribute of *din*, harsh justice, like a demanding *melamed*. We ask in Elul that also on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem should treat us with compassion and kindness.

This is hinted to in the *pasuk*, ה' הושיעה המלך יענו ביום, קראנו, we request, ה' Hashem's attribute of compassion, הושיעה, should save us that also when it will be המלך, Hashem's attribute of harsh justice, Hashem should answer us and save us.

## Time

Elul is also a time for making a *cheshbon hanefesh*. One should think: What did I do this year that is worth keeping up and what needs improvement?

But people are so busy that they can't find time for introspection. They don't find time for tefillah, either.<sup>9</sup>

The shofar of Elul awakens us. It reminds us that we must find time to review our deeds and to daven and that we must make good use of this precious month.

The Shevet Mussar (27) tells the following *meshal*:

Someone came across a deep pit. He peered inside and saw three hungry lions, pacing back and forth, hungry and angry.

"Roar!" the man shouted, teasing the lions, and the animals roared back. He took some dirt and threw it at the lions. He watched the lions become wild in their frenzy. He gave an even louder roar to tease the lions, and then he slipped. He almost fell into the lion's den but managed to grab onto a mound of grass that grew on the pit's wall.

He hung on as the lions jumped to reach him. But

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9. Many people are afraid of introspections, because they don't want to discover their faults. Therefore, they seek to always be busy, never to be alone with their thoughts.

One of the modern trends in traffic control is the traffic circle. Instead of idling at a red light, traffic moves slowly around the traffic circle, each vehicle turning off where it wants to go. Someone explained that this is because people are afraid to sit and wait at a traffic light without anything to do, lest they have a moment for self-reflection. They therefore keep moving, so they don't have a moment to think.

he was high enough and out of their reach.

He shouted, "Help! I'm in a lion's den! Does anyone hear me?"

A gray and a black weasel came along and began eating the clump of grass he was holding onto. He shouted at the weasel, "Go away! My life depends on this clump of grass."

The *nimshal* is, the new year is approaching, and we don't know what the new year will bring. Hashem gave us Elul. If we hold on to Elul firmly, we can be saved. But the distractions and obligations of life gnaw away at this life source. People have work, they have other needs, and there isn't time left for *tefillos* and introspection. We must shout at our distractions, "Elul is my only hope! Don't make me lose Elul!"

The shofar in Elul proclaims, "I know you're busy and that you have a

lot to do. But don't drop the lifeline I'm handing you. Grab onto Elul. Say *Tehillim*, take out some time to reflect upon your life. Grab onto Elul before it passes by."

The Dubno Magid *zy'a* told the following *mashal*:

There was a boy who worked as a messenger for a busy company. At the end of every workday, his bosses sent him to the bank to deposit the day's profits.

There was a thief who watched this boy carrying a bag filled with money to the bank each day, and, as the saying goes, "a thief never loses hope." He thought about how he could steal the money.

He came up with an idea.

He went to a tailor and said, "I work for a very wealthy man. He asked me to order a suit for him."

"Let him come here so that I can measure him."

"My boss is very busy. He doesn't have time to come. He asked me to find someone with a similar build as he, and you can make the suit according to that person's measurements."

The tailor asked, "What will be if after I sew the suit, he discovers that it doesn't exactly fit him?"

"My boss will pay you, regardless. He says it is worthwhile for him to buy the suit in this manner."

As they were speaking, the lad was approaching with his daily bundle of money. The thief said, "Do you see that boy? He is exactly the size of my boss."

He didn't wait for the tailor to respond. He sprang forward and said to the lad, "Can you help us? It will only take a moment."

The lad checked his watch. There was plenty of time before the bank closed, so he entered the store.

The tailor told the lad to put on a half-finished suit so that he could write down his measurements. The lad put down his moneybag for a moment to get into the suit. At that moment, the thief grabbed the money pouch and ran off with it. The lad shouted "Thief!" and tried to run out the door to catch the thief, but the robust tailor held him back with both hands and said, "You can't leave my store wearing my suit!"

The Dubno Magid explains that the lad didn't realize how careful he must be with the money pouch. He didn't know that there was a thief who schemed for a long time to steal it. Had he known, he would never have let go of his bag.

The shofar of Elul is our reminder that there's a thief, the *yetzer hara*, who wants to take Elul away from us. With this awareness, we will grab onto the Elul, and we won't

let the *yetzer hara* take it away from us.

### ***Kabalah Tovah***

Tzaddikim called resolutions for the new year, "A new garment for the new soul for the new year."

Before Rosh Hashanah, Reb Elya Lopian *zt'l* asked Reb Aryeh Leib Chasman *zt'l*, "What *kabalah* should I accept on myself for the upcoming year?"

Reb Leib Chasman replied, "I want you to decide, but make sure it is something you can keep."

After some time, Reb Elya Lopian returned and told Reb Leib Chasman what he chose.

"Are you certain you can keep this?"

"I'm certain."

"Then I want you to do only half of it."

A *kabalah* can be small, and when it is kept

diligently, one reaches very high levels.

Someone said to Reb Zundel Kroizer *zt'l*, "A miracle happened to me, and I want to accept a new *kabalah* to express my gratitude. Which *kabalah* do you recommend I take on?"

Reb Zundel Kroizer advised him to add just one more minute of Torah study. "If you generally learn from 9:00 to 10:00, learn until 10:01."

One minute of Torah may appear insignificant to us, but nothing is small in Hashem's eyes. And that one good deed will lead to many others.

An old Yid was *niftar* in Uzbekistan, and before his demise, he asked his son to transfer his body to Eretz Yisrael when the opportunity enables him to do so.

But as is often the way of people, things get pushed off. The son was

already eighty years old, living in Eretz Yisrael when he realized that he still didn't fulfill his father's wishes. He knew that if he doesn't act now, he will never get around to doing it.

He hired Reb Mendel Ekstein (who has experience in transporting graves) to bring his father's remains to Eretz Yisrael.

Reb Mendel Ekstein traveled to Uzbekistan, opened the grave, and almost fainted when he saw that the tallis covering the body had remained fresh after all these years. The tallis is usually first to disintegrate, but miraculously this tallis remained intact. Reb Mendel never saw anything like this before. He was afraid to continue. "Perhaps he was a *tzaddik nistar*?" But he was hired for this mission, and it was the *niftar*'s final request, so he took the tallis off to see the body. The skeleton was as he'd expected it to be —

the body was completely decomposed. The *tachrichim* were disintegrated, too. Only the tallis remained intact.

In Eretz Yisrael, the custom is to bury people without a tallis. Reb Ekstein asked a *sheilah* that perhaps they should make an exception this time and to bury this man in Eretz Yisrael with his tallis because of the miracle that occurred to him. The rabbanim ruled that, indeed, he should be buried with the tallis.

Reb Mendel asked the eight-year-old son, "Do you know why your father's tallis remained complete? Perhaps your father was a *tzaddik nistar*?"

The son replied, "The day my father began wearing a tallis, after his *chasunah*, he made a *kabbalah* that he won't speak while wearing it. He kept this *kabbalah* his entire life. Apparently, it was in that

merit that the tallis remained intact."

We repeat this story as a reminder of the power of a good *kabbalah*. It could seem small to us, but it is very significant, and with Hashem's help, it can help us attain a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

### ***Amen Yehei Shmei Rabba***

Reb Yishmael ben Elisha was once in Heaven and was shown rooms that contained terrible decrees. He said, "How can anyone endure all of this?"

He was then brought to a higher room, and he saw even greater *tzaros*. "How can we possibly endure them?" he asked.

Heaven replied, "When Klal Yisrael say *Amen yehei shmei rabba*, all of these *gezeiros* are ripped up."

Also, when we say *Amen yehei shmei rabba*, we arouse a desire in Heaven to bring Moshiach. The Gemara (*Brachos* 3.) says that

"when we say '*Amen yehei shmei rabba...*' Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Fortunate is the King who is praised in His home with these words. What did the Father gain by sending His children into exile? Woe to the children who were banished from their Father's table."

*Shulchan Aruch* (56) states, "One should have *kavanah* when answering Kaddish. One should say it in a loud voice. One should run to answer Amen to a Kaddish."

The Mishnah Berurah explains, "One should say *Amen yehei shmei rabba* in a loud voice because this helps concentration, and this will annul bad decrees. Nevertheless, one shouldn't say it in such a loud voice that it will cause others to laugh at him because then he will be causing people to sin. One should run to listen to Kaddish because answering "*Amen yehei shmei rabba*" is a מצוה גדולה מאוד, a very great mitzvah,

greater than answering *Kedushah* or *Modim*."

The Baal HaTanya said, "The *malachim* would give away everything to be able to say *Amen yehei shmei rabba*."

The Gemara (*Brachos* 57) teaches that when a person sees himself in his dream saying *Amen yehei shmei rabba mivorach*, he is a *ben olam haba*. The Yaavatz adds, "If this is the reward for answering Kaddish in a dream, how great will be

the reward when one says these words while awake!"

The Mishnah Berurah (56:1) writes, "Chazal say, 'Whoever answers *Amen yehei shmei rabba mivorach* בכל כחו, with all his strength, his *gzar din* is torn up.' The Rishonim explain that כל כחו means [to say it] with heart and soul. One shouldn't merely say the words, while his heart isn't there. He should also listen to what the chazan is saying, so he will know on what he is answering Amen..."<sup>10</sup>

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**10.** The Mishnah Berurah adds, "Certainly, one must be extremely careful that he doesn't speak in the middle of Kaddish or *Kedushah*. It states in *Masechta Derech Eretz* that Reb Chamma found Eliyahu with thousands of donkeys carrying אף וחימה (wrath and anger) to punish the people who speak during these times... The Sefer Chassidim writes, 'There was a chassid who saw another chassid (who was already *niftar*) and he saw that his face was green. 'Why is your face green?'

"It is because I would speak when the chazan was saying ויכילו and by Kaddish."

"The *sefer Matteh Moshe* repeats the following Midrash: A *chacham* came to his student in his dream, and the student saw that he had a blemish (כה) on his forehead. The *chacham* told him that it was because he wasn't careful not to speak when the chazan said Kaddish..."



Now that we are just a few days before the days of judgment, we recommend saying *Amen yehei shmei rabba* with *kavanah*. Among the many

benefits is that it tears up all negative *gzar dins*, harsh decrees, and it arouses Hashem to bring the *ge'ulah*. May it be speedily in our days.