

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Shoftim





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Torah Wellsprings

Shoftim

Temimus

The Ruzhiner *zt'l* once told his chassidim the following story:

A Yid, who sold furs for his *parnassah*, had many furs in stock, but they weren't selling.

Once, early in the morning, someone knocked on his door and said he wants to buy all the furs.

This was a dream opportunity. However, he didn't daven Shacharis yet. According to halachah, one mustn't conduct business before Shacharis.¹

"Come back in an hour," he said, "and I'll sell them to you for a good price."

"No. I need them now. If you don't sell them to me right away, I'll buy elsewhere."

His *parnassah* was tight, but halachah comes first. So, despite the *yetzer hara's* pleas, he chose to do Hashem's will.

Not wanting to explain to the goy that he doesn't do business before Shacharis, he quoted the goy an exorbitant price for the furs. He figured that the goy would surely refuse to pay so much and that he would leave. But the goy replied he is prepared to pay that price!

The *yetzer hara* spoke up again and said, "You can't let this deal go. It is a miracle from Heaven. He is

1. As it states (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 89:3), "One is forbidden to work until he davens *Shemonah Esrei*."

willing to pay double the price. How can you pass up on such an opportunity?"

But his loyalty to Hashem came first. So, he increased the price even more.

The goy replied, "I see you don't want to sell them," and left.

This is the end of the story.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe told this story to his chassidim, and the chasidim were waiting to hear the ending, the punch line, the salvation that this Yid merited due to his *mesirus nefesh* for keeping halachah.

The Rizhiner told them, "I see you are silent. You are waiting to hear the end of the story. But that was the end of the story. I wanted you to hear about this man's *mesirus nefesh* to keep halachah."

Most chassidic stories end with a miracle, a

salvation, but this story ends with a person being loyal to Hashem, while foregoing a very lucrative opportunity. And that was the lesson the Ruzhiner Rebbe wanted to impart to his chassidim: Loyalty to halachah, at all costs.

This lesson is discussed in this week's *parashah* (18:13), תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך, "Be complete with Hashem, your G-d." *Temimus* means to be loyal to Hashem, and one aspect of *temimus* is to be unwaveringly devoted to keeping halachah.

There is nothing to consider, nothing to debate. We do what Hashem commands.

The ת of תמים (according to an old custom) is written bigger than the standard text in the Sefer Torah. The Kotkzer *zt'l* explains that the large ת hints that there is enough room for everyone. Everyone can live a life of *temimus*. It isn't only for a select few, it is for everyone. Furthermore,

the large ה hints that one should be whole with *temimus*, with all his 248 limbs. No part of his body should be without *temimus*.

The Baal HaTurim writes that the large ה implies that if you have *temimus*, it is like you kept the entire Torah from א through ה.

Everything is for the Good

Another primary aspect of *temimus* is to believe that Hashem is leading us in the very best way. As Rashi (18:13) writes, *אלא כל מה שיבוא, עליך קבל בתמימות ואז תהיה עמו ולחלקו*, "Whatever He gives you, accept with *temimus*, and then you will be with

Hashem and His portion."² Trust in Him, and believe that is for your good.

One hundred years ago, in Williamsburg, New York, a woman brought her ill son to a doctor. "His high fever isn't going down," she told the doctor.

The doctor trembled when he recognized the deathly illness that the child developed. "Here's a prescription. Go to the pharmacy and buy the medicine immediately. Your son's life is dependent on it."

There was no Medicaid or other social programs to help the poor in those days,

2. We quote the *Rashi* (18:13):

התהלך עמו בתמימות ותצפה לו ולא תחקור אחר העתידות אלא כל מה שיבוא עליך קבל בתמימות, "Go with Hashem with *temimus*, and trust in Him, and don't seek what will be in the future. Whatever He gives you, accept with *temimus*, and then you will be with Hashem and His portion."

Tzaddikim say that Rashi is always so brief with his words, but in this commentary, Rashi is very expressive. Rashi's elaboration indicates the importance of attaining *temimus*.

and this poor woman didn't have money to pay for the expensive medicine. She had just used up her last pennies to pay for the doctor.

However, there was no time to waste; her son's life was in danger.

She went to the pharmacy and explained to the pharmacist that she desperately needed the medicine to save her son's life. "Please have mercy on my son. I will pay you when I have money. I promise. It won't take long."

The pharmacist had a different idea. "I need some cleaning help. If you agree to work here, that will be my payment for the medicine."

She agreed.

The pharmacist immediately wrote out a contract, and she signed it without hesitation.

The pharmacist took advantage of this poor woman's desperate need for the medicine, obligating her to work for many weeks as payment for the drug.

She was so relieved that there was a solution, she didn't even care too much. All that mattered to her was that she had the medicine to heal her son.

On her way home, she took a shortcut home through a crime-ridden neighborhood. A gangster stopped her and asked for money. She told him that she didn't have anything (which was the truth). He grabbed the bag she was holding, ignoring her urgent pleas.

The thief wanted to taste the contents of the bottle, thinking it was alcohol (which was what he was after in the first place). He removed the cap, took a large slurp, and immediately spit out the black liquid on her white

clothes. Then he smashed the bottle on the ground and ran off.

She returned to the pharmacist in tears and told him what happened. "Can I see the contract?"

The pharmacist said, "Oh no! A deal is a deal. It isn't my problem you were robbed. You owe me all the hours we agreed upon."

She told him, "I wasn't thinking of ripping up the document. On the contrary, I want to add into the document more weeks of work, so you will agree to sell me another bottle of medicine."

The pharmacist's eyes lit up. This was his lucky day. They added some more weeks into the contract, and he gave her another bottle of medicine.

"But it isn't the same bottle as before," she told him. "And the liquid in this bottle is red, while the liquid in the first bottle (and

now partially on her clothes) was black."

The pharmacist realized that he had made a grave mistake. He accidentally gave her the wrong medicine, which would have killed her child instead of healing him.

The pharmacist grabbed the contract and tore it. He said, "I changed my mind. You don't have to work for me. The debt is forgiven, and you can have this bottle of medicine for free. Just don't tell anyone that I made this terrible error!"

This story is a clear indication to us that everything is for the good. When the criminal smashed the bottle, she thought it was bad. But it was for the good because the medicine would have poisoned her son. The entire episode proved to be for her benefit.

As Rashi writes, *אלא כל מה שביוא עליך קבל בתמימות*, "Whatever He gives you, accept with *temimus*..."

Because even if it looks bad at first, it is always for the good.

About a hundred years ago, in the year תרפ"ט, Reb Boruch Frankel z'l and a friend came to America to earn a living. Their wives and families remained behind in Europe, and each month they sent them money. They stored the rest of the money in savings accounts.

They planned to save up enough money until they can open their own business in Europe.

Finally, the day came. They had enough money. It was time to return home.

They bought two tickets on a ship departing for Europe in about a week and went about closing up all their business in America. But then Reb Boruch Frankel's father was *niftar*. He sat *shivah* in America, knowing he would miss his voyage. He planned to purchase

another ticket after the shivah.

Many people visited Reb Boruch during the *shivah*, and during one especially busy time, his business partner came in with many documents.

"What are these for?"

"We have to sign some documents to close our businesses before we leave. I brought them here to you so that you can sign them."

Reb Boruch Frankel looked at them briefly and signed the documents without checking each one of them thoroughly. After the *shivah*, he discovered that one of the documents he signed permitted his partner to remove all the money from their joint bank account. His partner tricked him and stole all his savings.

Now Reb Boruch didn't even have enough money to pay for his voyage home.

Reb Boruch stayed in America and worked hard for several more years. In תרצ"ד he became a legal American citizen, and then he returned to Europe.

World War II broke out. Being an American citizen, he was able to escape to America with his family. Unfortunately, his business partner was murdered in the Holocaust.

That terrible moment when his partner stole all his money was now viewed as one of the most fortunate moments of his life. It saved him and his family from disaster.

We share another story that shows us that everything is for the good.

There's a therapy for children associated with horseback riding. As the child learns horseback riding skills, the therapist trains the child with life skills and boosts their self-esteem.

One therapist rented a ranch in Aderet (a village near Beit Shemesh), and many children came for the therapy. This was going on for several years, but then the ranch owner decided to raise the rent substantially.

The therapist said, "If I agree to pay that amount, all the money I earn will go to the rent."

But the landowner wouldn't lower the price, and he gave his tenant a week to decide.

The therapist was walking down the street, wondering what he should do, and through *hashgachah pratis*, he met his teacher, the one who trained him in this therapy. The teacher immediately noticed his student's anxiety and asked him about it. The therapist told him his dilemma.

The teacher said, "You can work with me on my ranch. There is room for both of us."

The therapist was happy that there was a solution, but he still wasn't sure what to do.

Four o'clock in the morning, just a few hours before he had to decide whether to stay in Aderet or not, he was woken by a phone call from the police. "There's a fire in Aderet, and it's spreading. You must leave the village."

But what should he do with his herd of horses? He had a solution. He brought

them to his teacher's ranch, and afterward, he practiced his therapy there. It was impossible to continue his therapy in Aderet, as the entire ranch burned down.

He saw how everything was for his good. His problem with the rent got him to think about other options, which brought him to his teacher's ranch.

Everything is for the good. When we look back, we often merit seeing that it is so.³ And therefore, as

3. A שבט is a staff that one uses to hit. A משען is a stick used for support. Dovid HaMelech says (*Tehillim* 23:4) , וּמִשְׁעֲנֶתְךָ הַמָּה יִנְחֲמוּנִי , "Your staff and your supporting stick comfort me." Because even when one is hit with a שבט, it is really a משען, his support. Hardship is ultimately for our benefit. This awareness יִנְחֲמוּנִי comforts me.

It states (*Tehillim* 139:8), אִם אֲסֶק שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אַתָּה , "If I go up to heaven You are there, הִנֵּה , ואציעה שאול הנק , and if I make a bed in Gehinom, behold You are present." This *pasuk* discusses two opposite experiences. ואציעה שאול , "If I go up to heaven" refers to good times. "If I make a bed in Gehinom" hints to difficult times. The *pasuk* is saying that in all situations, good and bad, Hashem is with us.

When is Hashem closer? When going through good times, the *pasuk* says שָׁם אַתָּה "You are *there*." When going through hard times the *pasuk* says הִנֵּה behold You are *here*." It seems that Hashem is even closer to help when a person endures difficulties.

Rashi writes, כל מה שיבוא עליך, קבל בתמימות ואז תהיה עמו ולחלקו, "Whatever He gives you, accept with *temimus*, and then you will be with Hashem and His portion."

No Worries

It states (20:1), כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך וראית סוס ורכב עם רב ממך לא תירא מהם כי ה' אלקיך עמך, "When you will go out to war against your enemy and will see horses, chariots, a nation larger than yours, don't be afraid of them, because

Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Mitzrayim, is with you."

Those wars were frightening. As Rashi (20:3) writes, "They clash their cymbals, have their horses gallop and neigh loudly, they shout, and they blow horns." When the Yidden see the mighty nations howling and rushing towards them, it is natural to be afraid.

Especially since their nations were larger than

There's a saying, "A dog is man's best friend," and this adage was true for Mr. B., who was always together with his dog. When Mr. B. suffered a heart attack, the dog traveled along in the ambulance. Even in the hospital room, the dog was at his master's side. They were inseparable. But the doctors refused to let the dog enter the OR (operating room). The dog stood near the door and barked and howled until the doctors had no choice but to let the dog in. The dog sat loyally next to Mr. B., who was put to sleep. The dog was happy to be once again with his master, but when they took out a knife and began operating, the dog became viciously upset. This is because the dog didn't understand that the operation is for his master's benefit.

It states (*Tehillim* 73:22), ואני בער ולא אדע בהמות הייתי עמך, "I am a fool. I don't know. I am like an animal..." We are like animals who don't know anything. We don't realize how everything - even things that seem bad - are all for our benefit.

the Jewish nation. As it states, עם רב ממך, "a nation larger than yours."

Furthermore, they were cruel people. As the *pasuk* states למלחמה על אויבך, "a war against your enemy" and Rashi writes, "Consider them your enemies and don't have compassion on them, because they won't have compassion on you."

The wars were against people who hated us, who won't have any compassion if we fell into their hands.

Nevertheless, the Torah urges us, לא תירא מהם כי ה' אלקיך, עמך... אל ירך לבבכם אל תיראו ואל תחפזו ואל תערצו מפניהם כי ה' אלקיכם ההלך עמכם להלחם לכם עם אויבכם, להושיע אתכם, "Don't be afraid of them, because Hashem, your G-d, is with you... Don't be fainthearted. Don't fear. Don't panic. Don't break before them, because Hashem your G-d is going with you to fight the wars for you...to save you."

Rashi writes, "They come with the strength of man, and you come with the power of Hashem."

עם רב ממך, Rashi writes, "In your eyes, they are a large nation, but in My eyes, they aren't a large nation. סוס ורכב, I consider them as though they have only one horse."

(Rashi 20:2) שמע ישראל, "Even if your only merit is that you say Shema, you deserve to be saved."

Besides wars, there are other matters people worry about, such as parnassah, shidduchim, nachas, health, and more. Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:32) writes that although the Torah discusses wars, the lesson applies to all matters that people fear. He writes, "The Torah is telling us that if one sees trouble approaching, his heart should rely on Hashem's salvation." For all worries, and all types of life's struggles, the Torah tells us, לא תירא מהם... אל ירך לבבכם... כי, "Don't be afraid... Don't be fainthearted because Hashem, your G-d is with you."

You think your problems are insolvable, but Hashem's eyes, the problems are minor.⁴ Think about the many times Hashem saved you in the

4. In reference to war it states עַם רַב מִמֶּךָ, and Rashi writes, "To your eyes, they are a large nation, but in my eyes they aren't a large nation. כֹּס וְרֶכֶב, I look at them as though they have one horse." Our problems and difficulties are enormous and unsolvable in our eyes, but in Hashem's eyes, they are easy and simple to resolve.

There were four brothers in a room. The five-year-old was playing with Legos and cried when his castle collapsed. His brother, a fifteen-year-old, laughed at him and said, "When you reach my age, you will know what problems are. Legos falling isn't the worst thing in the world. But I got into trouble with the *mashgiach* of my yeshiva today, and that's real trouble."

The twenty-year-old brother laughed and said, "Having a problem with the *mashgiach* is small stuff. I'm in *shidduchim*, and yesterday another *shidduch* went down. I know what troubles are."

The oldest brother who was married and has a family laughed and said, "Losing a *shidduch* is also small change. One *shidduch* goes down, and another one comes up. Eventually you will find your *bashert*. But do you know how hard it is to raise children and to support a family? That's a real challenge."

Everyone laughs at those who are going through smaller problems than they. Dovid HaMelech says, ה' מִה רַבּוּ צָרֵי, "Hashem! How great are my troubles!" Dovid knew the definition of troubles. People wanted to kill Dovid, he had to flee, and so on. There were times when Dovid felt hopeless. As he says (*Tehillim* 94:18), אִם אֶמְרָתִי מִטָּה רִגְלִי, "If I said my feet falter..." But Hashem always helped him. As the *pasuk* concludes, חֶסֶדְךָ ה' יִסְעֵדֵנִי, "Your kindness supports me."

In Hashem's eyes, all problems are easy to solve. Therefore, for all problems and worries, we can turn to Him, and we will celebrate His salvation.

past. He will save you again. Trust in Him."⁵

It is essential for soldiers not to be afraid at war because one can't succeed in battle with fear. Furthermore, fear is contagious, and he will influence others to be frightened. Therefore, the soldiers were told (20:8), מִי הָאִישׁ הַיָּרֵא וְרֵחַ הַלֵּבָב יֵלֶךְ וְיָשָׁב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יִמָּס אֶת לֵבב אֲחָיו לְלָבְבוֹ, "Whoever is afraid and fainthearted should return home. He shouldn't cause his brothers to be afraid, as he is."

Rashi (20:9) adds, "People were appointed to stand at the back of the troops to

help erect those who fell. They would encourage the soldiers: 'Return to the war. Don't run away. Because if you run away, you lose the war.'"

In *Rashi's* words, תְּחִילַת, נִפְּלִיָה נִסָּה, "The beginning of falling [in war] is fleeing."

As the *Rabbeinu Yonah* (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:32) tells us, these lessons apply to all areas of life. No matter what we are going through, don't panic because you will fall and fail if you are afraid.⁶ Furthermore, your fear is contagious and will cause others also to be anxious and worried.⁷

5. Regarding wars, it states (20:1), כִּי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ עִמָּךְ הַמַּעֲלֶךְ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, "Hashem your G-d is with you, who took you out of Mitzrayim." The *pasuk* is saying that Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim and He performed miracles for you in the past. Remember that because this will give you confidence that He will save you this time, too.

6. Our first request in the brachah וּלְמַלְשֵׁינֵינוּ in *Shemonah Esrei*, is אֵל תְּהִי תִקְוָה, that our enemies should lose hope. Afterwards we request their downfall, as we say תֵּאבְדוּ, תֵּעָקֵר "May they be lost... uprooted," and similar curses. But we begin with אֵל תְּהִי תִקְוָה, that they should lose all hope, because losing hope is the origin of all the troubles and disasters that follow.

7. Reb Chaim Shmuelelevitz *zt'l* (תשל"א *Sichos Mussar*) writes that we

Instead, put your trust in Hashem. Hashem will help you. Others who see your confidence and trust will learn from you to similarly place their trust in Hashem.

As the Rabbeinu Yonah teaches, this lesson applies to *parnassah*, finding *shidduchim*,⁸ health issues,⁹ and countless other matters. Life can be frightening and

learn from this *parashah* that one must be cautious not to weaken other people's *bitachon*. Because if you show you are worried and anxious, that influences others to panic and to worry about their problems. Trust in Hashem and let your *emunah* influence others to trust in Hashem, too.

8. Years ago, in a *kollel* in Yerushalayim, there was a person who was extremely jealous of his fellow *kollel* student, and he was always slandering him, trying to harm him and to lower his esteem in people's eyes. The poor student didn't understand why he deserved this treatment, and he would complain to his rebbe, Reb Dovid Biderman *zt'l*.

His rebbe advised him to follow Chazal's counsel, שומעין חרפתן ואינם משיבין, to refrain from responding.

When his children became of marriageable age, his nemesis was still slandering him, and his *lashon hara* ruined many potential *shidduchim*.

His rebbe encouraged him to have *bitachon*. "Hashem will help. Eventually, you will see that this is all for your benefit."

He followed this advice; he put his trust in Hashem and didn't fight back. There wasn't much he could say or do in any case.

His oldest child was a daughter, but due to all the *lashon hara*, she was getting older, and was still single. And then his second child, a boy, was "in the *parashah*" waiting to get married. His opponent worked overtime, because now he spoke *lashon hara* about both children. Many potential *shidduchim* were ruined, *r"l*. Nevertheless, as Rebbe Dovid Biderman taught him, he focused on his *bitachon*.

Hashem can do anything. Despite the *lashon hara*, a *shidduch* will go through.

Baruch Hashem, both children got engaged the same night, to the same family. There was another family in Yerushalayim that had an older boy and girl in *shidduchim*, and they made "an exchange" (what the Yerushalmim call "a *bayt*") and their children became engaged to each other.

The father traveled to Vienna to collect money for *hachnasas kalah* for the two upcoming *chasunos*, but he hardly made any money.

He didn't lose hope. "I thought I would get money in Vienna, but Hashem can help in different ways, too."

On his last night in Vienna, he found a wallet filled with money in his hotel's bathroom. Most guests of this hotel weren't Jewish, so according to halachah he wasn't obligated to return it. However, according to Viennese law, he had to hand over the wallet to the police, or he could be arrested as a thief.

The person who lost the money contacted the police to search the hotel for his wallet. The police locked the doors of the hotel. No one could leave without inspection.

He mixed the money with his own, and he threw away the wallet. When the police checked him, they found the money, but the amount wasn't exactly the amount that was lost. The wallet wasn't the same, either.

"How do you have so much money?" they asked him. "You look like a pauper."

"Why do you say so?" he replied. "I have very big businesses in Yerushalayim."

The police called his kollel in Yerushalayim and they asked the person who answered the phone whether they know this-and-this person and whether he is wealthy.

The person who answered the phone was his arch-enemy, the one who sought every opportunity to slander him. He didn't understand the purpose of the call, but he figured that a wealthy

worrying. But the Torah tells us not to worry. With His help, everything will work out.

***Bitachon* for Spirituality**

People strive to serve Hashem properly; to

conquer their yetzer hara, have good middos, daven properly, and learn Torah, but after years of attempts that resulted in many disappointments, they are ready to give up. However, the Torah urges them not to fear. Hashem is with

person from Vienna wanted to know whether the person collecting money in Vienna was legitimately poor.

"I know him, and he has a lot of money" the evil man replied. "He is wealthy and does not lack anything."

Hearing this, the police believed that the money he was carrying was his own, and they permitted him to return to Yerushalayim with the money.

We can learn two lessons from this story:

(1) Everything is for the good. As Reb Dovid Biderman told him, something good came from his enemy who constantly tried to humiliate him.

(2) Have *bitachon* in Hashem and Hashem will help you. This man had a hard time making *shidduchim* and earning money, but with *bitachon*, everything worked out well.

9. In the *brachah* of יוצר המאורות we say, בורא רפואות, "Hashem creates remedies." It is written in the present tense. Until today, Hashem creates cures. The Noam Eliezer of Skulen זt'l explains that we don't say, ברא רפואות, that "Hashem created remedies" (in the past tense) because we are praising Hashem for creating new cures, all the time. Even when doctors say that there is no known cure, there is no reason for despair. Trust in Hashem because Hashem is constantly creating new remedies.

them. If they keep on trying, they will succeed.

It states (20:1), *כי תצא למלחמה*, "When you go out to war against your enemy." The Or HaChaim explains, "The *pasuk* refers to the war against the *yetzer hara*, and the *pasuk* tells us not to be afraid, although the *yetzer hara* is stronger than us." עם *רב מוכ*, the *yetzer hara* is stronger, but do not fear.

The Or HaChaim writes, "There are two aspects that make this war so difficult: One is that man isn't trained for warfare, while the *yetzer hara* is a trained warrior. The second problem is that the human body desires everything the *yetzer hara* offers: to steal, to be arrogant, to eat everything one desires, etc. And, when a person transgresses the Torah many times, the *yetzer hara* becomes even stronger.

"Hashem tells us, *כי תצא למלחמה וראית בעיניי שכלך סוס ורכב*, 'When you go out to war, and in your mind's eye you

see a horse and chariot.' The horse represents the *yetzer hara* who is trained in warfare, unlike man, who isn't. רכב, chariot, represents *הרכבת האדם*, man's make up because he naturally desires those things that the *yetzer hara* offers. Additionally, עם *רב* the *yetzer hara*'s strength has increased, מוכ, because of your many sins. Nevertheless, Hashem comforts us and says, לא *כי ה'*, don't be afraid, תירא מהם, Hashem is with you. אלקיך עמך.

"It is true that if you fight with your own strength, you will lose the war. But since Hashem is with you, and His strength is great, He will save you. Because when a person desires to be pure, Hashem accepts him with his right hand, and Hashem weakens the strength of the *yetzer hara*. ...המעלך מארץ מצרים. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is your proof because just as Hashem saved you from Mitzrayim, He will help

you win the war against the *yetzer hara*.¹⁰

10. A *yungerman* from Ashdod told me about that one night he was visiting his parents in Bnei Brak, and it was well after eleven o'clock when he got into his car to drive back home. He immediately realized that his cellphone wasn't with him. "It is certainly somewhere in my parents' home, because I used my phone there tonight." He returned to his parents' home, but after searching for his phone for quite some time, he couldn't find it.

It was already very late at night, and he told his parents to contact him when they find the phone.

When he sat down in his car, the telephone fell out of his pocket! It was with him all along, only he didn't realize it.

He began driving home and saw a *bachur* standing at a bus stop. He stopped and asked, "Which bus are you waiting for?" He knew that few busses were running at that late hour.

"I live in Ashdod, and the last bus just left."

"Come with me. I'll take you there."

During the ride, the *bachur* told his story, "Until recently, I was addicted to the iPhone. My parents hired a talented *yungerman* from Bnei Brak to speak with me, to help me overcome my addiction. I go to him once a week. He helps me; I'm just about cured. Last week, I threw away my iPhone and I've been clean since then.

"I was with my mentor tonight, too. He cheered my success and encouraged me to keep it up. I boarded the final bus to Ashdod and I saw that my friends were on the bus too. They all have iPhones. I knew that if I will be together with them, I'd be drawn to look at their devices. So I turned around and got off the bus at the next stop. My friends were astounded; they didn't understand what happened to me.

"You arrived just as I got off the bus, and I was contemplating where to go."

These are very encouraging thoughts. We can't win against the yetzer hara on our own. But with Hashem's help, we can overcome the yetzer hara. Therefore, have bitachon, and trust that Hashem will help you achieve your spiritual goals.

As the Yismach Yisrael (*Vayishlach* 5) writes, "Even when according to man's perception there is no cure to the ills of his soul, nonetheless he should believe and trust in Hashem's divine kindness and the Creator's endless greatness. With His compassion, Hashem will

In retrospect, we understand why this *yungerman* couldn't find his phone. It was so he could help this *bachur* get home.

We learn from this story that Hashem helps those who seek to do teshuvah. He arranges everything for them, from talented people to speak to until a ride home, to easen the path of teshuvah.

As we wrote from the Or HaChaim, the war against the *yetzer hara* is very difficult to win because (a) the *yetzer hara* is trained in warfare, while you aren't. (b) The *yetzer hara* sells what you desire. (c) The sins of your past make it even harder for you to loosen the *yetzer hara's* grip. All these are existent by the lure of the internet. (a) "The *yetzer hara* is trained in warfare, while you aren't." Genius minds create the sites on the internet. They studied strategies for months and years, and their primary motive is to have people connected to the internet for hours on end. The average person isn't as wise as all those minds, and he never learned strategies on how to avoid addiction. How can he expect to outsmart the system and be protected from the negative side of the internet? (b) The *yetzer hara*, and the internet, are selling items that the human body desires. (c) "Your past sins make it hard for you to abandon the *yetzer hara's* grasp. This is also particularly true regarding technology. The more one becomes accustomed to it, the harder it is to leave it.

help even me, the lowest person of all."¹¹

The Rabbeinu Yonah (*Mishlei* 3:6) writes, "In addition to the reward you will receive for your *bitachon* in the next world

— which is very great — you will succeed in everything you do." As we see, this is for all your *gashmiyos* and *ruchniyos* ambitions. Trust in Hashem, and Hashem will help you.¹²

11. Someone said to Reb Yisrael Salanter *zy'a*, "I don't think I'll ever do *teshuvah*. I'm set in my ways, and I can't change."

Reb Yisrael Salanter rebuked him, "Chazal tell us that when we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the Satan becomes frightened. He fears that our *teshuvah* herald the shofar of Moshiach. So, you see, even the Satan believes in your ability to do *teshuvah*. Why don't you believe it?"

The Beis Avraham *zt'l* (this week's *parashah*) explains that seeds don't grow in silver or gold, only from the earth. This serves to remind us that when a person is at a low level, down in the dumps, he can grow and flourish. The hint is from this week's *parashah* (20:19), *כי האדם עץ השדה*, comparing a human being to tree planted in the ground. You are in the ground, but you can rise from those lowest levels and reach the highest levels.

12. Rebbe Mottele Slonimer *zy'a* (*Maamar Mordechai* p.342) told the following story:

There were two *tzaddikim* who were friends. They made a pact that whoever dies first will tell his friend in a dream what happened to him in his judgment in heaven.

One of them was *niftar*, and soon afterwards, he came to his friend in a dream. He said, "When the court reviewed my deeds, they saw that everything was perfect. But I had one sin...and for this, I was told that I would need to go to Gehinom. I told the court that I don't want to go to Gehinom, so they brought me to a very large

Bitachon with Certainty

The *Sefer Ha'Ikrim* teaches: Just as we are certain the sun will shine tomorrow morning, that is the degree of certainty we should have that Hashem will help us.

In fact, we are so confident that Hashem will help that we can rejoice

with Hashem's salvation even before it comes.

The Brisker Rav taught (*Tehillim* 37:3-2), בטח בה, 'trust in Hashem, והתענג על ה', and rejoice with the salvation you are sure will come. ויתן לך משאלות לבך, in the merit of your high level of *bitachon*, Hashem will grant you all your heart's desires.

building, gave me a small hammer, and said, 'Demolish this building with the hammer. When you finish, you can go to Gan Eden.'

"I was devastated. It seemed it would take many years before I demolished the large, sturdy building. My only tool was a small hammer.

"But then I thought: 'Why did I wear tallis and tefillin every day during my lifetime? Why did I study Torah and keep the mitzvos? It was because I wanted to do Hashem's will? Well, now it's Hashem's will that I destroy this large building with this hammer. Even if it takes many years, I will do my mission with joy.' Joyously, I raised the hammer and swung it at building with all my might. The entire building collapsed, and I was swiftly brought to my place in Gan Eden."

This story reminds us that sometimes a deed can seem very difficult, but if you set yourself to doing it, Hashem will help you. Therefore, don't be afraid if it seems the path for *teshuvah* is distant from you. Do what you can, and with Hashem's help you will succeed.

Once, there was a commotion in the beis medresh of the Brisker Rav in the city Brisk. The *yungerleit* were animatedly discussing something that occurred the previous night in their city. The Brisker Rav *zt'l* asked them what it's about. They told him about the *chillul Hashem* and the disgrace of Torah that took place in their city.

Non-religious elements of Brisk conducted a play, acting out a Jewish war. A large number of soldiers stood at attention, and the general announced, "Whoever built a new house... should return home" (see 20:5), and some of the soldiers left.

"Whoever planted a new vineyard should return home," and a few more soldiers left.

"Whoever is newly married should return home," and a few more soldiers left.

Then the general said, "Whoever is afraid of war should go home," and everyone ran away.

Only two old, hunchbacked soldiers remained, and they were honoring each other, each wanting that the other get the honor of taking the "first shot."

The people in the beis medresh were upset that the irreligious people of Brisk were making fun of the Torah.

The Brisker Rav told them, "Actually, everything was exactly as they acted it out, only they left out the main part. Those two elderly Yidden won the war."

Those who are afraid of war because of their *aveiros* should return home. As it states (20:8), *מִי הָאִישׁ הַיָּרֵא וְדָךְ, הִלָּבֵב יֶלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ*, "Whoever is afraid, and is fainthearted should return home." Rashi explains, "He is afraid because he has *aveiros*."

The Gemara (*Sotah* 44.) says, even if someone spoke between *tefillin shel yad* and *tefillin shel rosh* can return home.¹³

The Rebbe of Kotzk *zt'l* (*Siach Sarfei Kodesh*, end of *Shoftim*) asks that from a few *pesukim* earlier (20:3), it seems that all one needs is the merit of saying Shema, and that is sufficient to be saved. So, why do we now say that the slightest transgression is a reason to be afraid and return home?

The Kotzker *zt'l* answers: To win a war, you need either *bitachon* or to

be clean from all *aveiros*. If a person has *bitachon* and believes that in the merit of saying Shema, Hashem will help him in the war, it will be so. But if a person doesn't have this feeling of trust and certainty and lacks *bitachon*, he must be totally clean from sin to win the war. Therefore, even for the minutest *aveirah*, he should return home.

Seven Guards

The *parashah* begins שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך, "Judges and police you

13. It states (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 25:9), אסור להפסיק בדבור בין תפלה של יד לתפלה של ראש, "It is forbidden to speak between the *tefillin shel yad* and the *tefillin shel rosh*."

The *Mishnah Berurah* explains that it is forbidden "because he causes a *ברכה שאינה צריכה*, that he will have to make another *brachah*," as explained in *Shulchan Aruch*.

Also, even if he isn't making a *brachah* on the *tefillin* right now (for example, he is putting on *tefillin* *Rabbeinu Tam*) he also mustn't speak. As the *Mishnah Berurah* clarifies, "*lechatchilah*, the *shel rosh* should be put on immediately after the *shel yad* (without interrupting with conversations and the like). As it states, ויהיה לך לאות על ידך ולזכרון בין עיניך, and ויהיה implies that they should both be put on at the same time."

shall appoint at all your gates."

The holy *sefarim* say that this alludes to the seven gates of the face: two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, and the mouth. One must guard and judge how he uses them.

The Shlah HaKadosh writes, "The *pasuk* is hinting to a *mussar* concept here, based on what's written in *Sefer Yetzirah* 'There are seven gateways on man: two eyes, two ears, the mouth, and two nostrils.' One must place guards at these gateways to be cautious with what he sees, hears, says, and with the anger that comes out from the nose. He must place שופטים ושוטרים, judges and police, at these gates. This means he must always judge himself [if he should or shouldn't see, hear, say, or become angry]. The Torah, therefore, writes תתן לך, 'Give to you.' [They are for you, on your body]. You must constantly

examine yourself so that there aren't any *aveiros*."

אלו"ל hints that we must be cautious with the eyes and with the speech, because אלו"ל stands for אננו לי"ה ועינינו לי"ה, "We are devoted to Hashem, and our eyes are turned to Him." The Imrei Chaim (*Re'eh*) writes that this hints that especially in Elul, we need to turn our eyes solely to Hashem.

Furthermore, אלו"ל is *sofei teivos* for (*Tehillim* 15:3) לא רגיל על לשוני, "He didn't speak *lashon hara* with his tongue." This alludes to the importance of guarding our speech during Elul.

Judge Favorably

Rosh Hashanah is fast approaching, and everyone is seeking ways to merit favorable judgment. The Kedushas Levi advises that we should have a positive view on others, focus on their good, and judge him favorably. If we do so,

Hashem will judge us favorably as well.

On the *pasuk*, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך, the Kedushas Levi writes, "Rosh Hashanah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu judges the Jewish nation with immense compassion and kindness. We must rouse those attributes of compassion so that Hashem will use them, too. When we act kindly, and when we judge every Yid לבך זכות, favorably, this rouses that Hashem will do the same, and He will judge all Yidden favorably.

"This is the translation of the *pasuk*, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך, you arrange the judgment of heaven... ושפטו זדק, את העם משפט צדק, by judging your fellow man favorably. Because the way a person acts to others, that is how Heaven will act towards him."

Let us tell some stories about judging your fellow man favorably.

Once, in a yeshiva, the *gabai* called up a wealthy person for *maftir*. People started talking, "Why did the *gabai* give *maftir* to the wealthy person? There's a *chasan* in the beis medresh, and *maftir* belongs to the *chasan*! The *chasan* is an orphan! The *gabai* shouldn't have slighted him by giving him a regular *Aliyah*."

The *chasan* heard their hushed conversation and clarified the matter. "I asked the *gabai* not to give me *maftir* because the haftarah is long, and I'm shy to say the long *haftarah*."

If the *chasan* remained silent, they would have judged the *gabai* wrongly. They would say that his desire for money caused him to slight the *chasan*.

We must train ourselves to judge our fellow man favorably, especially since our assumptions are often wrong.

Two neighbors didn't get along too well. They

didn't fight, *chas veshalom*, but when they met, their conversations were always tense.

But then something happened that had the potential to turn this cold relationship into an outright fight. One of the neighbors told his rav, "My neighbor's son is getting married, and my neighbor placed the envelope for the invitation in my mailbox. I opened the envelope, and there was nothing inside! He is hinting that he doesn't want me to attend the *chasunah*. And that's not right. I'm a neighbor, after all. If that's the way he wants it, I will stop pretending to like him. I will make it a real *machlokes*."

The rav replied, "You must judge your neighbor favorably. Perhaps he forgot to put the invitation into the envelope."

The man replied, "Did you ever receive an

envelope for an invitation with nothing inside it?"

The rav admitted that he never heard of such a thing, "Nevertheless, you are obligated to judge him favorably."

Later that day, this man received an invitation in the mail to some other *chasunah*. He opened the envelope, and lo and behold, and there was no invitation inside! Hashem showed him that sometimes people forget to put in the invitation, and he should judge his neighbor favorably.

He saved the envelope, so he would always remember to judge his fellow man favorably.

A kollel yungerman was marrying off a child, and he asked his friends in the *kollel* to help him with the great expenses. Knowing that he was poor, they all contributed what they could.

But when he sent out the wedding invitations, they saw that the *chasunah* would be held in the large Wagshall Hall, one of the more luxurious venues in Bnei Brak. They were upset. "Is that why he took our money so that he can make the *chasunah* in an expensive hall? Why can't he make his *chasunah* in a regular hall, as we do?"

But they kept their thoughts to themselves. They didn't rebuke him.

Shortly after this incident, extra money came into the *kollel* coffers, and those in need had a right to come forward to receive a bonus. The man said, "Now that I'm making a *chasunah*, I certainly need this bonus."

But the person in charge of the distribution refused to give him any extra money.

"Why not? Why am I less eligible than anyone else?"

The person in charge replied, "We see you have plenty of money. How else can you make a *chasunah* in Wagshall's large hall?"

The *yungerman* replied, "If I could tell you the reason, you would understand. But I can't tell you." And he left.

Many *yungerleit* heard this exchange, and they judged this man negatively. They didn't believe he had a valid explanation for spending so much money on the hall.

The following day, the *kollel yungerman* came to the *kollel* and he said to the person in charge of the distribution and to the other *yungerleit*, "I couldn't tell you yesterday, but now I can tell you. I wanted to make the *chasunah* in Wagshal's small hall. When I spoke to the hall manager, he asked me who my father was, and I told him. He exclaimed, 'Your father saved my life during the Holocaust! I was searching

for him for years so that I can repay him.' He requested that I make the *chasunah* in the large hall, and he said that he gives it to me for free, on condition that I don't tell anyone. Yesterday, I told him that I'm losing money and my respect in the *kollel* due to this secret, so he agreed that I could tell the story."

The entire *kollel* was ashamed that they suspected him. They learned to judge their fellow man favorably.

And, as the Kedushas Levi taught, by judging others favorably, Hashem will judge us favorably on Rosh Hashanah and grant us, and all Klal Yisrael, a good year.

Elul

The Lechovitzer zt'l said, "Elul is the beginning of the year." Elul isn't the end of the year. The year begins with Elul.

To explain, we share a story that I heard from Reb Yiddel Berger.

As a bachur, Reb Yiddel Berger visited many gedolei Yisrael, to learn from their ways. One Friday night, he davened in Ponevish, and after the tefillah, many talmidim walked the Ponovizher Rav to his home. Reb Yiddel followed them. When the last student left, and the Ponovizher Rav zt'l had already entered the house, he knocked on the door. The Rebbetzin answered, wondering what this chassidic looking bachur wanted. He said, "I don't have where to eat the Shabbos meal. Can I eat here?"

"Of course! Certainly!" she replied, and she told her husband, "We have a guest this Shabbos."

(Reb Yiddel says that he is thankful that she didn't tell him to go eat in the yeshiva, where many yeshiva bachurim ate.)

At the meal, the Ponovizher Rav told Reb

Yiddel a story that happened to him:

To build the Ponovizher yeshiva, the Ponovizher Rav zt'l traveled to America to collect money. He planned to stay in America for half a year. But at the beginning of his stay in this foreign country, he suffered pain in his legs. Local rabbanim and roshei yeshiva brought the Ponovizher Rav to the hospital. The doctors determined that it's diabetes and said, "Your legs must be amputated, or the infection might spread throughout your body."

The Ponovizher Rav replied, "I need to ask the Chazon Ish for his opinion."

The doctors asked, "Who is the Chazon Ish? Is he a great doctor or professor?"

The rabbanim and roshei yeshiva explained to the doctors who the Chazon Ish is. "He isn't a doctor or a professor. He is a great

Torah scholar who lives in Israel."

The doctors never heard anything like that before. Someone's life is in danger, he needs an operation immediately, and they are going to seek approval from a rabbi without a medical background?! The doctors stated, "In our opinion, you don't have time to ask a rabbi from Israel. By the time you get an answer, it might be too late."

The rabbanim and roshei yeshivos tried to convince the Ponovizher Rav to follow the doctors' advice. "It is a matter of pikuach nefesh," they told him. But the Ponovizher Rav wouldn't hear of it. Without the Chazon Ish's approval, there will be no operation.

They sent out a telegram to the Chazon Ish. The response came a few days later. "No!" the Chazon Ish said. "Don't let them operate."

Miraculously, his feet began feeling better until he was completely healed.

The Ponovizher Rav remained in America, collecting money for half a year as he originally planned. When he returned to Bnei Brak, before going home, he went to the home of the Chazon Ish, and asked the Chazon Ish why he went against the doctor's counsel.

The Chazon Ish replied, "When I received the telegram, I was in the midst of my learning. I thought to myself, 'Oy, Ribono Shel Olam! I am sitting here in Bnei Brak, and a question came from far away New York. How can I answer a question such as this one when I know that you will do whatever I say? The responsibility lay entirely on my shoulders, and it was a question of life and death. So, I prayed, 'Ribono Shel Olam, show me an answer from your Torah.'

"I was learning *misechta* Shabbos, and I looked at

the Gemara and read the words פסיק רישא ולא ימות, 'If one cuts off the head won't he die?' I thought to myself, 'The Ponovizher Rav's feet aren't feet. They are his head because the entire yeshiva and all the Ponovizher Rav's activities are dependent on the Rav's feet. Because if he can't go to the homes of the wealthy to collect money, there won't be a Ponovizh yeshiva building, etc. Therefore, I decreed that they shouldn't amputate his feet because for the Rav, his feet are like his head. He will only live if we leave him with his feet.'

We see from this story that the feet, the end of the body, can sometimes be counted as the head. Similarly, Elul isn't the feet and the end of last year. It is the head of the new year. Therefore, if we invest in *teshuvah* and *tefillah* this month, positive results will be experienced throughout the coming year.