

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Vayishlach



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Torah Wellsprings

Vayishlach

Bitachon and Confidence

In this week's parashah (34:25) the Torah tells us that when Shimon and Levi attacked Shechem, they possessed *bitachon*. As it states, *ויבאו אל העיר בטח*, "And they came to the city with *bitachon*."

Shimon and Levi were two people fighting an entire city. What were the chances that they would succeed? But the Torah tells us that they came *בטח*, secure in the knowledge that Hashem will help them, and indeed He did.¹

1. The Chazon Ish *zt"l* (*Emunah u'Bitachon* 2:7) writes, "A holy spirit (*ruach hakodesh*) rests on a person who has *bitachon*. He attains a spirit of courage that assures him that Hashem will surely help him."

The *Sefer Ha'Ikrim* writes, "*Bitachon* in Hashem is greater than all praises that one can say to Hashem." This is because with words, one can say that the almighty Hashem can do everything, He loves us, He helps us, etc., but it may be that his heart doesn't accept what he is saying. Perhaps he has doubts. But when one has *bitachon*, that proves that he believes in all the above. He believes that Hashem loves him, cares for him, and will help those who rely on Him. *Bitachon* is the greatest praise because he is living and practicing what he believes in.

As it states (*Tehillim* 65:2), *לך דומיה תהלה*, "For You, silence is praise." Even when we are silent, if our hearts are filled with *bitachon*, it is the utmost praise.

Similarly, it states (*Tehillim* 71:15), *ואני תמיד איחל והוספתי על כל תהלתך*, "I always trust in You and that is greater than all Your praises."

The Ramchal (*דרוש בענין הקיווי*) writes, "When one trusts in Hashem, his

Rashi writes, "They were confident [they would win the war] because the people of Shechem were in pain [and weak from the *milah*]."

Rashi quotes a Midrash that states another reason they were confident that they would win the war. "The Midrash says that they trusted in the strength of the old one (בטוחים היו על כחו של זקן)."

Who was "the old one"? Some *meforshim* say that Rashi means they trusted in Yaakov Avinu's strength. As the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 80) states, "Yaakov Avinu didn't want his children to [wage this war against Shechem]. But after they did so, he said to himself, 'Will I allow my children to fall into the hands of the goyim?'"

"What did Yaakov do? He took his sword and bow and stood at the entrance of Shechem. He said, 'If the nations come to fight with my children, I will fight with them...'"

Shimon and Levi were confident that this would happen, and they trusted that Yaakov's great strength would save them.

Others explain that Shimon and Levi trusted in Avraham Avinu's *tefillos*. Avraham Avinu davened for them, as it states (*Bereishis* 12:6), ויעבור אברם בארץ עד מקום, שכב, "And Avram passed through the land until Shechem." Rashi writes, "Avram went there to daven for Yaakov's children who would fight a war with Shechem."

He foresaw the future of the Jewish nation and davened for their success.

bitachon will lift him out of Gehinom. *Malachim* will take him out of Gehinom. *Bitachon* purifies like a *mikvah*. *Bitachon* elevates the person to a high level where there are no sins and blemishes."

Shimon and Levi relied on his tefillos to save them.

As the Meor Einayim (*Mikeitz*) writes, "It is known that the *avos* davened during their lifetime for what will occur in the future up until the coming of Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days."

For example, at *akeidas Yitzchak*, Avraham said (*Bereishis* 22:5), ואני והנער נלכה עד כ"ה, and כ"ה hints to כ"ה כסלו, the date of Chanukah. The Meor Einayim explains, "Avraham davened that his descendants should win the war against the Yevanim in the days of Matisyahu.

"Yosef HaTzaddik spoke to Binyamin and said (*Bereishis* 43:29), אלקים יחך בני; the word יחך hints to חנוכה. [Yosef davened] that Hashem should perform miracles on Chanukah."

The *avos* davened for us, too. We can be certain that our adherence to Yiddishkeit until today is

due mainly to our *avos's* tefillos. As the Meor Einayim writes, "Our ability to be strong with Torah and mitzvos is all because our forefathers davened for us."

Shimon and Levi trusted that Hashem would help them in the merit of Avraham's tefillah. As Rashi writes, בטוחים היו על כחו של זקן."

In review, the Torah tells us ויבאו על העיר בטח, Shimon and Levi came to Shechem, בטח, confident that they will be victorious. We've explained various opinions as to what they trusted in. According to Rashi's first explanation, they were sure they would win the war because the population of Shechem were weak from the milah.

According to Rashi's second explanation, they trusted in the strength of the old one (בטוחים היו על כחו של זקן). The 'strength of the old one' is either that Yaakov Avinu would

protect them or that they trusted in Avraham Avinu's tefillos.

Whichever explanation we follow, one thing is certain: Shimon and Levi came to the war confident that they would win.

That sureness and positive thinking were necessary in order to succeed because one can't win a war without *bitachon*.

Therefore, when the Jewish nation went to war, the Torah (*Devarim* 20:8-9) warns, מִי הָאִישׁ הִירָא וְרַךְ הַלֵּבב יֵלֶךְ, וְיֹשֵׁב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יָמוּס אֶת לֵבבוֹ אֲחִיו כְּלָבְבוֹ, "Who is the person who is afraid and has a weak heart, he should return home. [He shouldn't go to war], so he doesn't cause his fellow man's heart to melt [from fear] as he is afraid."

Tzaddikim say that Napoleon once spoke with one of his generals, and the general told him that he thinks they will lose a particular battle. Napoleon replied, "If you would think we can win, we would. But since you are pessimistic, we will probably lose." Because to win, you have to feel confident that you can succeed.²

Lions and Courage

In the Shulchan Aruch we are told to be strong like a lion, as it begins, יתגבר, כארי לעמוד בבקר, "Be mighty like a lion to awaken in the morning."

Also, in *Pirkei Avos* (5:20) it states הוֹי... גְבוּר כְּאֵרִי לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן אֲבִיךָ שֶׁבַשְּׁמַיִם, "Be mighty like a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven."

2. Tzaddikim said that it is the same with the *yetzer hara*. When you think you can conquer the *yetzer hara*, you will. But when you are afraid that you won't succeed, you probably won't.

What is unique about a lion?

The Taz (*Orach Chaim* 1:1) explains that the lion's strength lies in its courage. He writes, "Naturally, the lion isn't afraid of any animal, as it states (*Yeshaya* 31:4) מקולם לא יחת, '[The lion] isn't afraid of their shouts.' So too, a person shouldn't be afraid of the *yetzer hara*, despite the fact that the *yetzer hara* is stronger than him."

Let's explain the *pasuk* (*ibid.*) מקולם לא יחת that the Taz quoted. The *meforshim* on Nach explain that when the lion eats its prey, many shepherds gather around and shout at it, מקולם לא יחת, but the lion isn't afraid of their shouts.

As a group, the shepherds are certainly stronger than a lion, but the lion isn't afraid of them. It is courageous, and that is its strength.

We should apply that attitude to *avodas Hashem*.

The *yetzer hara* is a *malach* and a trained warrior. To win against the *yetzer hara* we need to be courageous, fearless, and absolutely sure that we will succeed. We must believe that we can overcome the *yetzer hara* who entices us to bad *taavos* and *aveiros*.

How can courage help us if the *yetzer hara* is stronger than us?

Czar Nikolai's army would fight during the day and drink at night. Once, one soldier drank too much, and he was still asleep when his troop moved on. Upon awakening, he knew he had to catch up with his battalion quickly, but first, he wanted something to eat.

It was Friday night. He came to a Jewish home and helped himself to the pot of steaming, hot *cholent*. He mounted his horse, placed the pot of hot *cholent* on the horse's mane, and set off to

find his division. The hot *cholent* burned the horse's back, which spurred the horse to run quickly. It didn't take long before reaching his battalion, but his horse kept charging forward, straight towards the front.

The enemy soldiers saw him charging full speed towards them, and they got scared. They assumed that he undoubtedly

possessed a powerful weapon since he wasn't afraid to face them alone. They fled in panic. In this manner, Czar Nicolai's army won the war without firing a single gunshot. Reb Mendel Futterfass *zt'l* told this story, and he explained that it is the same with our battle against the *yetzer hara*. If one shows courage and *hislahavus*, the *yetzer hara* will be afraid of him and leave him alone.³

3. Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* taught how one can banish a *dibuk*: "Know that the most important factor is that you should strengthen your heart like a warrior without any fear. Don't be weak because then the spirit will be strong and will not heed your words."

This concept leads us to the following story about the Turei Zahav. The story was told by Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l*, who read it in the *pinkas* (ledger) of a *chevrah kaddishah*:

A *dibuk* became attached to a girl and people rushed to the Turei Zahav to ask for his assistance. The Turei Zahav went to the home of this afflicted girl and as soon as he entered the room, the *dibuk* turned around, faced the wall, and announced, "*Baruch haba Rabbeinu Hagadol baal Turei Zahav* (welcome, the great Rav, author of *Turei Zahav*)."

People asked the *dibuk*, "Why do you call him 'Rabbeinu Hagadol,' and why did you turn and face the wall?"

The *dibuk* replied, "A *rasha* isn't permitted to look at the face of a *tzaddik*, therefore I turned around. And I know that his name is

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* explained the power of courage with an analogy:

When you are among a pack of dogs and show them that you are afraid, they'll run after you. But if you show them that you aren't scared, the dogs will leave you alone.

Reb Yaakov Meir explained that this is also how it is with the *yetzer hara*. If you show fear and meekness in front of the *yetzer hara*, the *yetzer hara*

can overpower you. But if you show confidence and courage, the *yetzer hara* leaves you alone.

The Tanya (ch.26) writes, "There is a great rule that I must tell you: When two people are wrestling, each one is trying to throw the other one to the ground. If one of them is lazy and moves about heavily, he will fall, even if he is stronger. The same is true with the war against the *yetzer hara*. You can't win this war with laziness and

Rabbeinu Hagadol baal Turei Zahav because that's how he's called in heaven."

The Turei Zahav said, "If this is how I'm called in heaven, then I demand that you leave this girl right away." The *dibuk* left.

The parents of the girl were wealthy and wanted to give a lot of money to the Turei Zahav to express their gratitude, but the Turei Zahav didn't want to accept the gift.

The Turei Zahav wore a very old, worn-out talis. The father assumed that he will certainly accept a new talis, because it's a mitzvah. So, he bought him a new talis, but the Turei Zahav didn't accept that either. He explained, "I want to wear my old tallis and I want to be buried in that tallis, because my tallis can testify before the heavenly court that I never uttered a word of *tefillah* without *kavanah*."

heaviness, which are products of sadness and a closed heart - hard like a stone. You only win the battle with *zrizus*, which comes from an open, pure heart, clear from all worldly worries and sadness."

So, it isn't always the stronger one that wins the war, but rather the more courageous one. He will ultimately emerge victoriously.

Leopards and Brazenness

We are also told to be like brazen leopards. As Chazal (*Avos* 5:20) tell us, *הוי עז כנמר... וגבור כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים*, "Be brazen like a leopard and mighty like a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven."

In addition to being like the mighty and courageous lion, we must be like the brazen leopard, too.

Ra'v Bartenura explains, "The leopard isn't powerful, but it's brazen. You should also have *azus*, brazenness.

Don't be embarrassed to ask your teachers when you don't understand. As Chazal say, *לא הבישן למד*, the embarrassed one doesn't learn."

Shulchan Aruch (1:1) describes what it means to be brazen. *ולא יתבייש מפני בני אדם. המלעיגים עליו בעבודת ה' "* "Don't feel embarrassed before people who laugh at you in Hashem's service."

Two things prevent a person from serving Hashem: One is the lack of courage; he doesn't believe he has the strength to fight the *yetzer hara*. The second deterrent comes from people who laugh at him.

We must overcome these fears. Be like a lion and a leopard. Be courageous and bold. Believe in your strengths and abilities, and don't let other people's opinions stop you from doing what you know is right.

Once, the Kedushas Yom Tov attended a

rabbinic meeting, together with his son, Reb Yoel (who later became the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l*). Reb Yoel davened with unusual hand gestures that helped him have *kavanah*. One of the rabbanim thought it was funny and asked Reb Yoel, "Is today Purim?"

Yoel replied, "If I knew I would be meeting Haman, I would bring along my *grager*."

Haman and Amalek make fun of *yiras shamayim*. As it states, אשר קרר בדרך, "Who cooled you off along the way." We must serve Hashem with confidence and audacity. We shouldn't be afraid to serve Hashem with fervor.⁴ As it states at the beginning of Shulchan Aruch, ולא יתבייש מפני בני אדם

המלעיגים עליו בעבודת ה' יתברך, "Don't be afraid when people make fun of you when you are serving Hashem."

Fear Creates the Problem

In this week's parashah, Yaakov Avinu is traveling to his father, Yitzchak, who lived in Chevron, to the south of Eretz Yisrael.

Edom, which is Eisav's country, is also in the south. Yaakov feared that when Eisav heard that he is the vicinity, he would come and take revenge on him for receiving the *brachos*. This is the reason Yaakov tried to make peace with Eisav.

As the Ramban (beginning of the parashah) writes, "The

4. Once, in the winter, a chassid made a hole in the ice over a lake and was *tovel* there. But he couldn't find his way out.

People nearby began panicking.

The Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l* said, "Nu, he should say *Nishmas*." His intention was that the heat produced from saying *Nishmas* with *hislahavos* will melt the ice and he will be able to get out.

south of Eretz Yisrael is near Edom, and Yaakov's father, Yitzchak, also lived in the south. Yaakov would either pass through Edom or come close to Edom, and Yaakov feared that Eisav might hear that he was nearby. So before arriving, he sent *malachim* to Eisav's land [to make peace with him]. The *chachamim* criticize Yaakov for this."

Many years had already passed, and Eisav's anger had subsided. Had Yaakov not sent messengers to Eisav, Eisav wouldn't have thought to come to see him. By bringing up the issue, Eisav's old grievances were reawakened.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 75:3, quoted in *Ramban*) elaborates:

It states (*Mishlei* 26:17),
 מוחזיק באזני כלב עבר מתעבר על ריב לא

וַיִּלְכְּ, "Like someone who grabs onto a dog's ears, so too is a person who gets involved in a fight that isn't his."⁵ We can compare it to someone who sees the head of thieves sleeping at the side of the road. He awakens him and says, "There are bad people nearby. You better get away from here." The thief got up and slapped the man.

The man shouted, "You evil man! I came to help you, and you hit me?"

The thief replied, "It's your fault. Why did you wake me up?"

Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Eisav was going his own way, [he wasn't thinking of harming you]. So why did you send messengers to him?!"

5. If the dog bites him, it's his own fault, because he started up with the dog. Similarly, if you see two people in a fight, don't take sides and don't get involved. Because if you do, if you get hurt, it will be your own fault.

As is the nature of fear, Yaakov's fears only complicated matters. He was afraid of Eisav, and this caused Eisav to remember his grudge from years ago.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 60.) states:

Reb Yehudah bar Nasan walked behind Rav Hamnuna, and Rav Hamnuna heard Rav Yehudah moan from fear. Rav Hamnuna said, "You are bringing troubles onto yourself. As it states (*Iyov* 3:25), כי פחד פחדתי ויאתני ואשר יגרתני, 'I was afraid, and it happened. The matter I was worried about came to me.'" Fear can cause the issue you are afraid of to happen.

As the Maharal (*Chidushei Agodos Bava Metziah* 33) writes, "The Rishonim say: When one is afraid that he might fall, that fear itself causes him to fall. [We'll prove it.] Place a wooden plank across a river, and now walk across it. You will

likely fall into the river. Now place the plank on the ground and walk over it. You won't fall off. Because when you are above a river, you are afraid of falling, and that fear causes it to happen. This is also true when one is afraid that he might become poor. Thinking about this causes it to happen.... As it states in *Iyov* (3:25), 'That which I was afraid of, came to me.'"

Elephant tamers tie their elephants to a post, and the elephants don't try to pull away from the post to escape. If they tried, they would succeed. They are big and strong enough to pull away from the post. So why don't they try? The answer is that when they were young and small, they tried to break loose but failed. They don't realize that that was years ago when they were small and weak. Today, they are many times that size. Now they can easily break loose.

We too must overcome our fears. Don't be afraid of the *yetzer hara*, and don't be fearful of public opinion. Do what you know you must do, and you will succeed.

"I Will Protect You"

The Torah (32:8) tells us that when Yaakov Avinu heard that Eisav is coming towards him with an army of four hundred men, וירא "Yaakov was very afraid and was distressed." The Daas Zekanim MiBaalei HaTosefos explains that he was distressed over the fact that he was afraid. We quote:

"He was distressed that he was afraid of Eisav after Hakadosh Baruch Hu promised [that He would protect him]." He knew that he shouldn't be afraid

because Hashem had promised to protect him.

According to the Daas Zekanim the *pasuk* is read as follows:

וירא יעקב מאד, ויצר לו, Yaakov was very afraid, ויצר לו, and his fear caused him distress because he knew that he should trust in Hashem's promise.

Yaakov said (32:11), כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה ועתה הייתי לשתים, "I crossed this Yarden with my staff, and now I have become two camps."

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* explains that also in this *pasuk* Yaakov is lamenting that he lost his *bitachon*. כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה, Yaakov said, "I used to have *bitachon*, and with my firm trust in Hashem, I put my staff in the Yarden, and the waters split.⁶ ועתה הייתי

6. The Degel Machaneh Efraim writes, "My grandfather (the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l*) said that he once crossed the Dnieper River without using Hashem's names. He placed his belt on the water, and he

לשתי מחנות, but now I've divided my camp into two groups, as I am afraid that Eisav might attack one of them."

The Riv'a (from the *Baalei HaTosfos*) teaches that Yaakov lost his protection because of his fear. Hashem promised Yaakov that he would protect him. As it states (*Bereishis* 28:15) ושמרתך בכל אשר תלך, "I will watch over you wherever you will go." But since Yaakov

was afraid of Eisav, he lost his protection. As it states (32:26), ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו, עמו, "Yaakov's thigh was dislodged when he wrestled with [the *malach*]."

The Riv'a adds, "This also happened to Moshe. Hashem told him, כי אהיה עמך, 'I will be with you,' yet he was injured at the hotel. This happened because he was afraid of Pharaoh, as he said, שלח נא ביד תשלח, 'Send someone else...'"⁷

said that with immense *emunah* he crossed the river. This can be the translation of כי במקלי עברתי... that Yaakov crossed the Yarden with his immense *emunah*."

7. The Seforno explains that as long as Yaakov Avinu was thinking about Hashem, he was protected. The moment he lost focus, the *malach* was able to smite him on the thigh.

The Seforno writes, "Because of Yaakov's constant *deveikus* to Hashem in his thoughts and in his speech, the *malach* couldn't harm him. But when the *malach* told him about the nation's future sins ... (הודיעו החטא העתיד במדריכי עמו) this upset Yaakov, his *deveikus* ceased, and [that's when the angel hit him and] his thigh was dislodged..."

The Zutchke Rebbe *zt'l* offered another explanation how Yaakov was wounded, even after Hashem pledged to guard him.

He explains that the Sar of Esav didn't harm Yaakov. He couldn't because Hashem said He will protect Yaakov. Rather, *Yaakov harmed himself*. Wrestling necessitates strenuous body movements.

Hashem's Pleasure

The Torah tells us (32:25), ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר, "A man battled with Yaakov until the morning."

Who was this person?

Rashi tells us that this man was שרו של עשו, Eisav's *malach*, the *yetzer hara*. It wasn't really a person, it was the *yetzer hara* who was battling Yaakov Avinu. The wrestle is called ויאבק, which is dust (see *Rashi*) and alludes to the dust they raised by their wrestling. ויאבק is *gematriya* כסא הכבוד, Hashem's holy throne, as the Baal HaTurim points

out because the dust of this battle rose to the Heavenly throne.

Yaakov's struggle with the *yetzer hara* went all the way up to Hashem's throne because Hashem gets immense pleasure from these battles.

A king's crown is made from gold, diamonds, and precious gems, but there are also places on the crown where there is nothing at all. Those empty spaces add beauty to the crown. The crown wouldn't be as beautiful if gems would cover every inch of the

As Yaakov battled with the angel his thigh dislodged because of those maneuvers. The angel didn't do it, but Yaakov's own exertion did.

The Zutchka Rebbe explains the *pasuk* as follows: וירא כי לא יכול לו, "The *malach* saw that he couldn't harm Yaakov" because Hashem was protecting him. ויגע בכף ירכו "So he touched Yaakov's thigh." This means that he held onto Yaakov. That he could do. He didn't have permission to harm Yaakov, but he was permitted to grab Yaakov. If Yaakov knew the angel couldn't do more than that, he wouldn't have been afraid. However, Yaakov was afraid, and he struggled and wrestled with the angel, and וותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו, "Yaakov's thigh dislodged, due to his wrestling."

crown without any separations. The bare spots hint at the tests we endure. They seem empty, insignificant, undesirable, but these tests give our *avodas Hashem* beauty and splendor.

A *bachur* who had fallen off the *derech* was on the path of return. Once, he said to the *yungerman* who was helping him in his *teshuvah*: "I had a very great test on Shavuos. The *yetzer hara* pushed me to go to the pubs I hung out in when I wasn't religious. Baruch Hashem, I didn't listen. Instead, I stayed home and read a novel. I'm happy about that. But when I compare myself to other young men my age, I feel so far behind. I'm sure others my age had an inspirational Shavuos, studying Torah all night long and then davened Shacharis with *hislahavus*. After Shacharis, they danced with joy. But all I did was read a novel. How can I compare to them?"

This is indeed a good question. What would we answer this *bachur*? Certainly, the young men who spent hours serving Hashem in *beis medresh* had a better Shavuos.

The wise *yungerman* replied:

"In the *Beis HaMikdash*, the *levi'im* sang inspirational music while the *kohanim* put fats and blood on the *mizbeiach*. Who made a greater pleasure for Hashem, the *levi'im* or the *kohanim*? The Torah writes *ריח נחוח* (a pleasant scent for Hashem) about the *kohanim*, but it doesn't state *ריח נחוח* in reference to the *levi'im* music. It seems Hashem derives more pleasure from the *kohanim's* service, with blood, fats than the wonderful, inspirational singing of the *levi'im*. Similarly, we can be certain that your struggles against the *yetzer hara* created a greater *nachas ruach* before Hashem than the exalted *avodah* of your peers because you passed a great

test, and that is most precious to Hashem."

The Torah writes (32:33), על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה "Therefore, Bnei Yisrael mustn't eat the *gid hanasheh*...until this day, because the *malach* struck Yaakov on the *gid hanasheh*." This prohibition was given to remind us that the *malach* smote Yaakov in his battle. But, we wonder, wouldn't it be better to commemorate that Yaakov *won* the battle against the *malach*? Why do we remember specifically that Yaakov was wounded in battle?

The answer is that it is the struggles that are most

precious to Hashem. More than winning and succeeding, the value lies in the battle we put up against the *yetzer hara*.

Eisav's *malach* changed Yaakov's name to ישראל, and the *malach* told him that he is doing so because, ...כי שרית, "You battled...and you won" (32:29). Yaakov is called ישראל because כי שרית, because he battled against the *yetzer hara*. He isn't named for ותוכל, for winning. Why? Isn't winning the battle against the *yetzer hara* a greater acclaim?

Once again, the primary praise, and Hashem's primary *nachas ruach*, is the ושרית, the battle we wage against the *yetzer hara*.⁸

8. Rebbe Leibele Eiger *zt'l* answers that it is impossible for a person to win the war against the *yetzer hara* on his own. When he wins the war, it is because Hashem helped him. Yaakov was named for ושרית, for standing in war, because that is the part that man can do, but success comes from Hashem.

When one plays dreidel, the person does the first part – he spins the dreidel. But where it lands isn't in his hands. Similarly, a person begins the battle against the *yetzer hara* and Hashem completes it for him.

To verify that a *sefer Torah* was written by *ehrlicher*, G-d fearing Yidden, and not, *chalilah*, by people who don't believe in the Torah, the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* advised that they look at the end of the *sefer Torah*. If the letters aren't neat (some letters are larger than others, the letters appear shaky, etc.) that means that there was a *הכנסת ספר תורה* where the custom is those present write in the final letters). The imperfect letters prove they kept the customs and traditions of the Jewish nation and had a *hachnasas sefer Torah*. However, if the end of the

Torah is written beautifully, you should suspect that perhaps it was written by non-religious Yidden.

The lesson we can take from this is that when things aren't orderly and aren't so beautiful, that is a good sign. Because that is how *avodas Hashem* appears. You win some, and you lose some. If everything is smooth, something may be wrong.⁹ This isn't how *avodas Hashem* generally appears. And it is these hardships, ups and downs, that make our service a *nachas ruach* for Hashem.

9. A wise person said: When the echocardiogram registers ups and downs, that's a sign the patient is alive. It isn't a good sign when the line is flat.

Many plane passengers are afraid of turbulence. But what is the alternative? That the plane should stop flying? If the plane stops flying, it will drop to the ground.

The *nimshal* is, when one struggles with the *yetzer hara*, one is tempted to give up. But that isn't an option because if you give up, you will spiral to even lower levels. The only choice is to keep up the battle.

Growth from Challenges

It is easier to go down the stairs than to climb them, and it is easier to walk down a hill than it is to climb it. This hints to us that when things are hard, that is a sign you are going up. If you find *avodas Hashem* difficult, that's a good sign. Your struggles are a sign that you are climbing to higher levels.

As it states (35:17), ויהי בהקשותה בלדתה ותאמר לה המילדת אל תיראי כי גם זה לך בן, the *Rimzei d'Chachmasa* (written by a student of the Chidushei Harim *zt'l*, Reb Shmuel Leib Zack) explains, ויהי בהקשותה, when a person is having a hard time in *avodas Hashem*, we tell him, אל תירא, do not worry. כי גם זה לך בן, You are climbing to higher levels. בן means child and alludes to growth and success.

The Gemara (*Menachos* 29:) says, "Reb Akiva would learn many *halachos* על כל קוץ וקוץ, from each corner of the [letters of the] *sefer Torah*."

The *Or LaShamayim* (*Lech Lecha* ד"ה ויאמר ה' השני *Lecha*) says that קוץ can be translated as a thorn, pain, hardships. From every קוץ וקוץ, difficulty in life, Reb Akiva attained higher levels.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81.) relates that Rav Amram had a great test, and he overcame the *yetzer hara*. Rav Amram said to the *yetzer hara*, חזי דאת נורא ואנא חזי דאת נורא ואנא עדיפנא מינדך, "See! You are fire, and I am flesh, and I'm greater than you." We can explain that Rav Amram was saying אנא עדיפנא, "I reached my levels, because of you." Because the challenges you put in my way helped me reach my high levels.¹⁰

10. The Ponovitzer Rav *zt'l* expressed it with a *mashal*:

A very wealthy person was invited to an army camp, to watch the soldiers train on an obstacle course. The soldiers had to jump over

It states (*Tehillim* 63:3), כן בקודש חזיתך. The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* explains that Dovid HaMelech davened, כן בקודש, "Halevay, when I will be in the Beis HaMikdash, חזיתך, I, will be able to see You

with the same clarity as I see You in *galus*..." Because when one serves Hashem in *galus*, amidst challenges, the light of his *avodas Hashem* is very bright because it was achieved

pits, crawl under barbed wire, swing over a pond, etc.

The wealthy man said to the commander, "I want to make life easier for the soldiers. I will hire workers to fill up the pits, dry up the pond, remove the barbed wire, so the soldiers can pass through the field easily."

The general replied, "If you are so generous, perhaps you will pay the costs we incurred to build these obstacles." The commander explained that the obstacles were placed there purposely, to train the soldiers to fight under all circumstances.

Similarly, we must know that the troubles we encounter in life were placed there purposely. We grow from them; they are all for our benefit. Through these challenges, we are able to maximize our potential.

By doctor's order, a man had to walk an hour each day. So, instead of driving to yeshiva, he walked a half hour to his yeshiva. After learning, he walked another half-hour home. That's how he got one hour of exercise each day.

Often, friends from yeshiva stopped to offer him a ride. "Come into the car" they told him. "I'll drive you to the yeshiva," or they offered to drive him home. He turned down the offers because he needed the walk.

The *nimshal* is that the hardships we go through in life aren't superfluous. They have a purpose. Through them we reach greater levels.

amidst a lot of toil. He hoped that also in the era of the Beis HaMikdash, when avodas Hashem will be easier, he should have such revelations.

The Chasam Sofer (ד"ה ויאמר עוד Shemos) writes, "In one way, *malachim* are greater than human beings, because they are pure, holy creations, entirely detached from the decadence of this world. But, on the other hand, people are greater than *malachim* because the small amount of kedushah and taharah they possess was attained due to their free choice. They had the potential to do evil, but they refrained to give honor to Hashem. [This is a quality that *malachim* don't have.]

"Now, the great tzaddikim who don't have any aveiros, such as the avos, they were as holy as the *malachim*, and they also had free will like humans. [They attained their high levels because of their free will.] Therefore,

they are greater than both *malachim* and man. This is implied in the words *כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים*. שר [means greater], because you are greater than both levels, because *והוכל*, you had free choice to sin, but you steered away from all bad. Therefore, you are called *ישראל*." The name *ישראל* has שר in it, indicating that Yaakov was at the highest level, above *malachim* and above all mankind, because he attained perfection and purity with his own toil, with his own free choice.

Tehillim 119

Tikunei Shabbos states that saying chapter (*Tehillim* 119) *קי"ט* banishes the *kelipos* (enemies, tumah, and the yetzer hara). The *Or Pnei Moshe* (ד"ה איתא בתקוני שבת Va'eschanan) says that this is hinted at in the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 6:19), *להדף את כל אויבך מפניך*, "to thrust away all your enemies from before you," because *להדף* is *gematriya* 119, *קי"ט* and *א"ת* is *roshei teivos* for *תמוניא אפי*, eight phases, and

chapter קי"ט of *Tehillim* is called תמניא אפי, because it has eight *pesukim* for each letter. The *Or Pnei Moshe* writes, "When one says this chapter often, it causes להדר"ף, the enemy within us [the *kelipos* and the *yetzer hara*] to become broken and removed."

The Imrei Noam (אות ט"ז) says that before Yaakov Avinu met Eisav, he said this chapter to be protected from Eisav. The hint is וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו, and לפניו is *gematriya* 176, and there are 176 *pesukim* in chapter קי"ט of *Tehillim*. The chapter begins with אשרי תמימי דרך, and Yaakov is called איש תם, as it states (*Bereishis* 25:27), ויעקב איש תם יושב, אהלים.

When Yaakov wrestled with Eisav's malach, it states, ויאבק איש עמו, "a man wrestled with him" and ויאבק is *gematriya* 119. These hint that Yaakov utilized this chapter to subjugate Eisav.

Kibud Av Ve'Em

A father called up a *rosh yeshiva* and told him that although his son is learning well in *yeshiva* and growing in *yiras Shamayim*, he doesn't honor his parents at home. "Perhaps you can speak with my son and set things straight."

The *rosh yeshiva* promised he would try.

The next day, the *rosh yeshiva* asked the *bachur* to learn with him every Friday morning.

"That would be a great honor," the *bachur* replied. "What does the *rosh yeshiva* want to learn?"

"*Hilchos kibud av va'em.*"

"*Hilchos kibud av ve'em?*" the *bachur* asked. "Why? Don't you think it's better if we study halachos that are applicable in our times?"

Actually, *hilchos kibud av ve'em* are applicable each day, and even at every

moment, as we will explain.¹¹

The *Chayei Adam* (*siman* 67) writes, "Honoring parents is a mitzvah from the Torah, and it is חמורה שבחמורות, one of the most stringent obligation. A person must honor his father and mother and fear them. One must be very cautious with this mitzvah because honoring and fearing parents is compared to honoring and fearing Hashem. The mitzvah is to honor in thought, deed, and words... Honoring in thought means to think of your parents as גדולים ונכבדי

ארץ, the most respected people in the world, even if other people don't think so. Thinking highly of your parents is a primary form of honoring them."¹²

So, there's an aspect of *kibud av ve'em* that can be practiced every day, at any time. Wherever you are, you can think about how much you admire and respect your parents. Such thoughts are the primary mitzvah of honoring parents.

There's another way you can honor your parents every day and at all times:

11. A month before *bein hazmanim*, the *mashgiach* of Ponovizh, Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* said to the yeshiva *bachurim*, "Just as we study *hilchos yom tov* thirty days before *yom tov*, it is proper that you should begin studying *hilchos kibud av va'em* thirty days before returning home."

Certainly, if you haven't seen your parents for a few months, and you're going home soon, you should review the halachos, so you can keep *kibud av ve'em* properly. However, as we wrote, *kibud av ve'em* can be performed every day and at any given moment.

12. Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* excelled in honoring his parents. Every day he focused on how great they are. As the *Chayei Adam* advises, he considered them גדולים ונכבדי ארץ.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (143:21) writes, "If someone truly desires to honor his father and mother, he should study Torah and do good deeds because that will bring immense honor to his parents. People will say, 'Fortunate are the parents who raised this child.' However, if the son doesn't go on the right path, the parents will suffer humiliation because of the child. He is embarrassing his parents terribly."¹³

The honor and the humiliation are also applicable in the next world. The *Zohar* (vol.2, 115) writes that when people do good deeds and study Torah, their parents are honored in heaven. And *chas veshalom*, if they act

improperly, the parents are disgraced in heaven.

The *Yesod v'Shoresh HaAvodah* (*Tzavaah Hakdoshah* ch.28) advises that when people do good deeds, they should have in mind that they are also performing the mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em* because their parents will be honored in heaven (and as the Chinuch taught, they are honored in this world, too).

So, *kibud av ve'em* is always applicable, and therefore, it is always the right time to discuss the great mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em*.

This week, in particular, is an excellent time to discuss *kibud av ve'em*, because it states (32:8), וירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו, "Yaakov was very afraid, and he was

13. The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* adds, "So too, if a father has genuine compassion on his children, he should study Torah and do good deeds, be good to Heaven and good to people because then the children will be honored that he is their father. But if he doesn't follow the right path, his children will be disgraced together with him."

distressed." The *Daas Zekenim m'Baalei HaTosfos* writes, ירא היה שיועיל לעשו זכות שכבר אב ואם והוא לא קיים כבר עברו עשרים שנה, "Yaakov was afraid that Eisav would benefit from the mitzvah of *kibud av va'em*, which Yaakov didn't perform this mitzvah for twenty years." Yaakov feared that Eisav's merits of *kibud av ve'em* might give Eisav the upper hand, enabling Eisav to harm him.

Throughout those twenty years, Yaakov *avinu* certainly performed *kibud av ve'em* from a distance, in the manners we described above. However, Eisav did *kibud av ve'em* with his deeds, and Yaakov Avinu was afraid because he lacked that aspect of the mitzvah for twenty years.

The *Pele Yoetz* writes, "Each mitzvah has its mazal. People are prepared to spend a lot of money to have the honor of opening the *aron kodesh* or to be a *sandak*, etc., although these aren't even actual mitzvos

– not from the Torah nor from the *rabbanan*. *Ashreihem Yisrael* [they are fortunate]! However, each time one obeys his father or his mother, he does a mitzvah from the Torah! But the fools transgress, and they will be punished."

It is written in *sefarim* that when one doesn't honor his parents, he loses his *yichus*. The uniqueness of Klal Yisrael is our heritage that we are descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and descendants of other great tzaddikim. But if one doesn't honor his parents, he has disconnected himself from his heritage. Thereby he loses his *yichus*, and that is a tremendous loss.

The Ohr HaChayim (*Shemos* 20:12) writes, "There are mitzvos that have wonderful *segulos* attached to them, in addition to the reward that Hashem will give for each mitzvah. And for this mitzvah [of *kibud av va'em*], the Torah

revealed [that its *mesugal* for living a long life]."

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "We see clearly that those who honor their parents live long lives, or they experience success and serenity in all their ways."

The Beis Ahron of Stolin *zt'l* commented that he attained his spiritual levels from the mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em*.

A Path for *Teshuvah*

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 85.) relates:

Rebbe came to the hometown of Reb Elazar (the son of Reb Shimon bar Yochai). Reb Elazar wasn't alive at the time, and Rebbe wanted to know whether any of Reb Elazar's children still lived there.

The townspeople told him, "Reb Elazar has a son in the city, his name is Yossi, but he is a great *baal aveirah*, *r'l*."

"Rebbe spoke with Yossi, gave him *semichah*, and appointed Reb Shimon ben Issi ben Lekunyah (the boy's uncle) to teach him Torah."

The Gemara tells us, "Every day Yossi told his teacher that he wants to return to his city [which means, he wanted to return to his past lifestyle]. Reb Shimon ben Issi would tell him, "You were made a *chacham*, you wear the golden cloak of scholars, we call you 'rebbe', and you want to leave?"

He would answer, "I swear, I won't ask to leave again."

Eventually, he became a great scholar and *tzaddik* - a *Tana*. He is called, "Reb Yossi ben Reb Elazar ben Reb Shimon."

When Reb Yossi was *niftar*, they wanted to bury him near his father, Reb Elazar, but a snake was blocking the entrance to the cave, and they couldn't

bury him there. People thought that Reb Yossi wasn't fitting to be near his father. A *bas kol* emanated and said, "It isn't that Reb Elazar is greater than Reb Yossi. Rather, it's because Reb Elazar suffered the pain of being hidden in a cave for thirteen years" (see *Shabbos* 33).

This Gemara is saying that Reb Yossi reached his father's level (only he lacked the merit of suffering for Torah). That is how high Reb Yossi rose with his teshuvah. And Reb Yossi's pivotal change began when he

received *semichah*, was called "rebbe," and wore the golden cloak of rabbanim. Honor can do that to people. It can turn them around. This is how Rebbe made Reb Yossi a *baal teshuvah* and a great *Tana*.

We have here a lesson in chinuch. If you want your child to grow and succeed, honor him as though he has already reached the level you hope he will attain. That will inspire your child to achieve the goals you have set for him.¹⁴

14. A *bachur* from Reb Isser Zalman Meltzer's yeshiva once said an innovative Torah thought. Reb Isser Zalman requested *mashkeh* (an alcoholic beverage) and the entire yeshiva drank *lechayim*, because of the joy they felt from this *bachur's* discovery in Torah. That *bachur* remembers that he studied diligently for the next half year, because of this episode.

Reb Isser Zalman *zt'l* was once filling out *hamlatzos* (recommendation letters) for many people. His wife asked him, "There are around twenty letters here. Why don't you do like other rabbanim, just write one letter, make twenty copies of it, and sign each one on the bottom."

Reb Isser Zalman answered, "What do you think will earn me my Olam HaBa? My *Even HaAzel* (his sefer on the Rambam)? Primarily, I will be rewarded for the favors that I do for Yidden."

The Or Zarua discusses lessons we can learn from the order of the alef beis.

For the letters ז ק ר, he explains that the first letter, ז, written like this: ז"י means empty,¹⁵ representing the empty people, sinners. How can we bring them to teshuvah? The solution is ק ר, *roshei teivos* for קריא רבי, "call him

rebbe." This is what Rebbe did to bring back Reb Yossi. Build up his self-esteem, and he will reach his full potential.¹⁶

After suffering the *tzaros* of World War Two, there was a chassidishe *bachur* who strayed from the path and planned to marry a non-Jewish woman. People tried to talk him out of

15. ז"י means empty. As Onkelus on תהו ובהו writes, צדיא ורקניא, "empty and void."

16. When Reb Yankele Galinsky *zt'l* was a prisoner in Siberia, one of his roommates was a gentile, a former general in the German army. Every night, when the gentile thought everyone was asleep, he put on his uniform, which he kept hidden under his bed, and marched around the room as though he was leading hundreds of soldiers. One night, Reb Yankele asked him why he does that.

The German was embarrassed. He didn't realize that he was being watched. Reb Yankele promised he won't tell anyone, and that he was just curious why he did this. The German replied, "I used to be a powerful general in the German army. Hundreds of soldiers obeyed my every command. I don't want to forget my glorious past. I put on my military uniform with all my medals, and I pretend that I'm once again commander over hundreds of soldiers. That gives me strength to endure the humiliation and affliction we suffer here in this Russian prison."

Reb Yankel would tell this story because we should also remember that we are the King's son. We must not forget our glory and pride.

committing this grave sin, but he paid no attention.

Reb Gad'l Eizner *zt'l* approached him and told him, ס'פאסט נישט פאר א חסידישע, בחור, "It isn't proper for a *chassidische bachur* to do such a thing." That rebuke turned him around. Because the way to bring people to *teshuvah* is not through harsh rebuke and pointing out how low they are, rather by revealing to them how great they truly are.

As it states (*Mishlei* 3:11), מוסר ה' בני אל תמאס. The Yesod HaAvodah explains: מוסר ה' Hashem gives *mussar* by saying בני, "You are my son! אל תמאס, Don't disgrace yourself with foul deeds."

During a ride in a taxi, a wealthy man asked the taxi driver, "How much does this ride cost?"

"Twenty dollars."

"If my employee, who is sitting in the back seat, gets off, how much will the ride cost?"

The taxi driver replied, "It will be the same. Twenty dollars."

The arrogant, wealthy man turned to his employee and said, "Did you hear what he said? The taxi driver also says you have no value."

Similarly, the *yetzer hara* tells us that we don't have any value, but it isn't true.

Our discussion is related to Chanukah because the goal of the Yevanim was for Klal Yisrael to feel low and unimportant.

On the pasuk והשוך על פני תהום, "Darkness over the depths." Chazal (*Bereishis Rabba* 2:4) say that it refers to Yavan "who darkened the eyes of the Jewish nation with their decrees." They darkened their eyes by making them feel that they were unimportant people.

When the Chashmanaim won the war, Bnei Yisrael acquired *emunah* that every Yid, no matter who he is, is very important. With each

mitzvah he performs, he brings spirituality and blessings to all worlds, and he causes a nachas ruach for Hashem.

The Yevanim decreed that Yidden must write on their oxen's horns, שאין לכם חלק באלקי ישראל, that they don't have a portion with the G-d of the Yidden. The Sfas Emes (תרל"ו ליל ז' ד"ה איתא) says that these words are contradictory, because אלקי ישראל, means Hashem is their G-d, and every Yid is united with Hashem. So

how do they say in the same sentence that they don't have a portion with אלקי ישראל?

But the answer is that the Yevanim admitted that Hashem is the G-d of the tzaddikim. But they said that this title and prestige doesn't apply to the average Yid, only to the great tzaddikim.

And that was their error because Hashem is אלקי ישראל, the G-d of each and every Yid.¹⁷

17. A *baal teshuvah* told the Magid of Mezritzh *zt'l* that his *yetzer hara* is urging him to return to his past ways, to his past *aveiros*. He said, "Those deeds are so not appropriate for me now that I'm a *baal teshuvah*. But the *yetzer hara* doesn't give up. He keeps urging me to go back to those bad deeds."

The Magid told him a *mashal*:

A bartender decided to close his bar and turn his business into a clothing store. He didn't have patience for the drunks anymore, who often caused havoc and damage to his place. He put up a new sign that read "Clothing for Sale."

But the drunks were used to coming to his tavern, and they kept coming back.

They shouted from outside the store, "Open up for us! We need a drink!"

He opened the window and shouted out, "This is no longer a bar. It's a clothing store. You came to the wrong address."

The Magid told the *baal teshuvah* that when the *yetzer hara* comes to him, enticing him to do an *aveirah* that is befitting for his past, and not for his new self, he should answer, "I'm no longer that person. You came to the wrong address. The person you are seeking isn't here anymore."

This is what occurs when you give honor to someone. It helps him realize that he isn't the same low person as before. The deeds he used to do aren't appropriate for him anymore.