

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Vayakheil



בס"ד

Torah WELLSPRINGS

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Torah Wellsprings

Vayakheil - Shekalim

Finding Your Path

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* (*Darash Moshe, Terumah*) teaches that it is only by the Mishkan that we were given set, exact details of how it should be built. However, regarding instructions and techniques on how to draw *kedushah* into one's heart, or into one's home, and how to be *mechanech* one's children, there is no single rule that fits all *yidden*. Instead, each person can be *mashpia* according to his way, based on his *middos* and the

middos and *kishronos* of his students and children. The main thing is that his intentions should be *l'shem shamayim* to bring them closer to Hashem and His Torah and mitzvos."

Let's use the example of the Shabbos table. Not everyone will, nor should, lead an identical Shabbos *seuda*. Some families sing for hours,¹ while other families focus and expound on *divrei Torah*. Some parents insist that their children sit at the table from the beginning until

1. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei* 932) writes that Reb Elazer would tell his nephew, Reb Chiya, who was a talented singer: "Chiya, my son, stand up and honor Hashem with the talent Hashem gave you. Navos (mentioned in *Sefer Melachim*) had a beautiful voice, and when he came to Yerushalayim for the *yomim tovim*, all the *Yidden* would gather around to hear him sing. They would say that it was worth coming to the Beis HaMikdash, even if just to hear Navos sing. One year he didn't go up to the Beis HaMikdash for *yom tov*. He was punished for this sin because he didn't serve Hashem with his talent that year."

the end of the meal and some families are easier going with this. Every family creates its own Shabbos atmosphere, and to an extent, that is how it is supposed to be. There is no set of rules for bringing the *Shechinah* into the Shabbos *seudos*.

This applies to all areas of *avodas Hashem*.² Each individual must find his *derech* in *avodas Hashem*, to bring the *Shechinah* into his life.

This idea gives us *chizuk*, and it is also an obligation. We receive *chizuk* because we realize that we don't have to feel bad if we can't do what others can. They bring the *Shechinah* into their lives in their way, and we do it our way. Yet, this *vort* also obligates us because each person must excel and lead a spiritual life according to their strengths and abilities. No one can say *avodas Hashem* isn't for him.

2. It states (*Koheles* 11:9), והלך בדרך לבך, "Follow the way of your heart." The Netziv (*Ha'amek Davar*, end of *parashas Shelach*) explains, "People serve Hashem in different ways: Some toil in Torah all day long, others are occupied with *tefillah*, and others are busy doing *gemilus chasadim*, and all of these paths are *leshem Shamayim*. Even in the realm of Torah study, not all people should study the same way. Also, regarding mitzvos, people vary [where they place their emphasis]. As the Gemara (*Shabbos* 118) teaches that the *amoraim* would ask their friends, 'Which mitzvah was your father most cautious with?' One said his father was most cautious with *tzitzis*, another said that his father was most cautious with Shabbos. Also in *gemilus chasadim* people aren't the same. If one will ask: Since there are so many ways to serve Hashem, which is the correct path? What is the correct way to study Torah, keep the mitzvos, and do *chesed*? *Koheles* answers: הלך בדרך לבך, see where your heart pulls you. Your heart will draw you to where your strengths are," and that is the path you should follow.

"I will Dwell Among Them" (Shemos 25:8)

(Bechoros 8:) The elders of Athens (זקני אתונה) asked Reb Yehoshua ben Levi, "Where is the middle of the world?"

With his finger, Reb Yehoshua ben Levi showed that the middle of the world is right where they stood.

The Ishbitzer *zt'l* explains that when the elders of Athens asked, "Where is the middle of the world?" they meant, "We know that the Beis HaMikdash was in the center of the world and where the *Shechinah* resided. Where is the middle of the world today? Where does Hashem rest His *Shechinah* in this generation?"

Reb Yehoshua ben Levi pointed to where they were, to say that Hashem resides in the heart of every Yid.

The Divrei Yisrael (*Bechukosei*) writes, "The Gan

Eden of Bnei Yisrael is in heaven, and the Gan Eden of Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in the *neshamah* a Yid who sanctifies himself."

The Noam Elimelech *zt'l* (*Vayeshev* וישב) writes, "I heard a sweet *mashal* directly from the mouth of our master, the Magid of Ravne (the Magid of Mezritz) *zt'l*. We see that now when we are in *galus*, there are people who attain *ruach hakodesh* more easily than in the days of the *nevi'im*, when people needed vows and a lot of time in *hisbodidus* (solitude) to attain *nevuah* and *ruach hakodesh*, as is known. It can be compared to a king sitting on his throne in his palace, and the king's friend invites the king to come to his home for a visit. The king will be angry at him because it is beneath the king's honor to leave the palace to go to a commoner's home, even if that person prepares a large banquet for the king. One can't invite the king to

his home unless he makes a lot of preparations. However, when the king is traveling and needs a place to sleep, he will agree to sleep in any clean place, even in a poor person's home.

"The *nimshal* is easily understood. When the Beis HaMikdash stood and the *Shechinah* was in the Kodosh Kadoshim, if a person wanted to merit *ruach hakodesh* or *nevuah* he had to prepare extensively. But now, due to our many *aveiros*, the *Shechinah* is in *galus*, wandering around the world, seeking a place to reside. If it finds a clean place - in the heart of someone who cleaned himself from *aveiros* - the *Shechinah* will want to dwell there."

At times, when Hashem resides in the heart and mind of a Yid, Hashem is even more present than He was in the Beis HaMikdash.

Shlomo HaMelech built the first Beis HaMikdash and he prayed (*Melachim* 1, 8:57), יהי ה' אלקינו עמנו כאשר היה עם אבותינו, "May Hashem, our G-d, be with us as He was with our forefathers." The Akeidah (quoted in *Chasam Sofer, Terumah, Haftarah*) explains that the *avos* built a Mishkan in their hearts, and their *korbanos* were when they had self-sacrifice and went against their will to do Hashem's will. When Shlomo built the Beis HaMikdash he davened that Hashem should dwell there as He dwelled with the *avos*. But the ideal Mishkan is in one's heart.

It states (36:35), ויעש את הפרכת... מעשה חושב עשה אתה כרובים. The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos* p.112:) emphasized the word מעשה חושב, which hint to one's thoughts. One should make his thoughts holy, and then כרובים, he will become like the holy *malachim*.³

3. There are people who desire and yearn to serve Hashem, but they don't want to stand out and appear different than their

We can become a Mishkan, a Beis HaMikdash. We can build it in our hearts. But to do so, one must clean himself from *aveiros* and be prepared to excel and his own way.

The Crown of Wealth - the Crown on the Table

It states (*Avos* 4:13), שלשה כתרין הם, כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות, "There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of *kehunah*, and the crown of royalty." They are represented by the three crowns (קִרְוֵי) in the Mishkan: one was over the *aron*, one was on top of the *mizbeiach* of *ketores*, and one crown was over the *shulchan* (*Shemos Rabba* 34:2).

The crown over the *shulchan* represents the

crown of royalty, as the phrase, שולחן מלכים indicates the table of kings (*Rashi, Shemos* 25:24). The crown of royalty also symbolizes the crown of wealth.

The *shulchan* also had a *מסגרת*, a border-frame around its four edges. The *Kli Yakar* (*Shemos* 25:25) explains that the border was a reminder for the Yidden not to eat whatever they desire. Rather, they must limit themselves. And the crown on top of this *מסגרת*, border-frame, tells us that those who control themselves are the true kings. They have the self-control to rule over their temptations, and therefore, they can be a king and rule over others, too. But those who eat whatever they want, without limits, are

friends who don't make *avodas Hashem* their primary objective in life. A counsel for these yearning people is *מעשה הושב*, to serve Hashem in their thoughts. Externally, they will appear regular, like everyone else, just as they appeared before. But now, with everything they do, they have Hashem in mind, and they connect all their deeds to *avodas Hashem*.

poor. They are poor intellectually (because they aren't eating wisely), and they can become literally poor, too. This is for two reasons: (a) Their bad habits, always seeking the most expensive and best foods, can make them poor. (b) When it comes to food, they eat like those who are famished; they act like the poor who hardly ever saw food before. And therefore, the punishment is poverty, a way of life that they imitate.

We quote the Kli Yakar ועשית לו מסגרת: שיסגור בעד התאות שלא יהיה לו פתח פתוח אליהם אלא "The frame-border around the edges of the *shulchan* implies that] one should put a limit to his *taavos*. They shouldn't all be open and available to him. He

should close them off and give them boundaries.

ועשית זר זהב למסגרתו סביב. כי הסוגר בעד תאותו הרי הוא בן חורין ומלך לאפוקי הפורץ גדרו לעולם הוא עני בדעתו. "You shall make a crown for the frame-border all around," because when one controls his *taavos*, he is a free person. He is a king. Unlike those who eat whatever they want and are poor intellectually. ונקט לשון זר זכה נעשה לו זר וכתר לא זכה, נעשה זר ונכרי כי יעזוב לאחרים חילו. the *pasuk* writes זר, because if he merits it, it becomes a crown, זר. Otherwise, he becomes זר strange and foreign." Because when one controls his *taavos*, he becomes a king. But when one doesn't practice self-control, he can become poor, literally.⁴

4. The Baal Shem Tov zy'a once saw a non-Jewish youth who was deriving a lot of pleasure riding back and forth on his beautiful horse. The Baal Shem Tov said that this boy's destiny was to become a king, but he exchanged the pleasure of being a king with the pleasure of riding on his horse.

This is because each person is granted a certain amount of pleasures

This is a new definition of kingship and wealth. The wealthy aren't necessarily those who can buy whatever they desire; rather, it is those who practice self-control and are happy with their lot.

This lesson also applies to luxuries. Many want to live a life of luxury, but it isn't necessarily royalty

and can lead to poverty. A king is someone who lives within his means and with limitations.⁵

We would assume that the *shulchan*, which represents royalty and wealth, wouldn't be constructed with half *amos*, because half represents something lacking and imperfect. Yet, the *shulchan*,

in life, and if he takes too much pleasure in one area, he will lose out in more important areas. This is also true in reference to Torah and mitzvos. If one overly indulges in the pleasures of Olam HaZeh, he loses his right to derive pleasure from *avodas Hashem*.

The Kedushas Levi (Tetzaveh וְלֵאמֹת ד"ה ומלאה) writes, "A person who wants Olam HaZeh will always feel he is lacking. If one taavah is fulfilled, he will lack some other form of pleasure. He always feels that he is lacking something. But someone who serves Hashem is always fulfilled. As it states (Tehillim 34:11) דורשי ה' לא יחסרו כל טוב, 'Those who seek Hashem will never lack any good.' This is because the greatest joy is the happiness of serving Hashem. He is attached to the *ein sof*, endless Hashem, Who is perfect in all ways, so he doesn't lack anything."

5. The Alter from Kelm zt'l (*Chachmah u'Mussar* vol.1, *maamar* 72) told a story of a wealthy man who was bragging about his wealth. A wise man told him, "Your master is my slave, and you are a slave to slaves."

The Alter explained, "This wealthy person was a slave to his *taavos*, and the wise man ruled over his master, because he was in control over his *taavos*."

the utensil in the Mishkan which symbolized sustenance, plenty, and majesty, had a half-*amah* measurement. It states (37:10), ויעש את השלחן עצי שטים, אמותים ארכו ואמה רחבו ואמה וחצי קמתו, "He made the *shulchan* from *shittim* wood; two *amos* its length; an *amah* its width; and an *amah* and a half its height." The Zera Kodesh (ד"ה ועשו *Terumah*) Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l* explains that the half *amah* of the *shulchan* hints to us that when it comes to worldly pleasures, one should limit himself. He shouldn't take everything he can. "Because, as a rule, if the body wants something, it isn't good for the *neshamah*. Therefore, one should control himself."

Not everyone was able to donate to the building of the Mishkan. It states (*Shemos* 25:2), ויקחו לי תרומה מאת, כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו, "Let them take for Me a donation [to build the Mishkan], from every man whose heart motivates him..." The

Zohar (*Terumah* 128.) writes, "Accept the donations מאת כל איש, from those who are called איש, which means those who overcome their *yetzer hara*. Whoever wins the *yetzer hara* is called איש. Those people were allowed to contribute to the Mishkan.

Indeed, the *roshei teivos* of ויקחו לי תרומה מאת כל מלכו"ת, royalty (*Zera Kodesh, Terumah*). They were people who had the attribute of kingship because they were able to rule over their temptations.

The *Zohar* concludes, "What does אשר ידבנו לבו mean? This means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves him. לבו refers to Hashem." Hashem loves those who wage war with their temptations.

Similarly, it states (*Shemos* 15:3), ה' איש מלחמה ה' שמו. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* explained, "Hashem is with איש מלחמה, a person who

wages war against their *yetzer hara*."⁶

6. A bachur who used to bring breakfast to his rosh yeshiva every morning noticed that the rosh yeshiva never finished the yogurt, so he asked him about that. The rosh yeshiva replied, "I eat what I need for my health and no more. The yogurt company decided that their cup-size is the portion one needs for a meal, but that doesn't mean I must follow their directives. For me, less is also enough."

The next day, the rosh yeshiva saw the bachur eating one chocolate bar after another, and the rosh yeshiva looked at him in a reproaching manner. The bachur explained to the rosh yeshiva, "Just because the chocolate company makes a bar, signifying that this is the amount one needs, doesn't mean that I have to listen to them. I eat the amount I need..."

A good *bachur* was having a difficult time finding his *shidduch*. His father was a very crass person – the type of person people are embarrassed and uncomfortable to be around – and when people heard that he is the boy's father, they immediately said no to the *shidduch*.

Once a *shadchan* offered the *shidduch* to the father of a girl. The father asked, "Who is the father of this fine *bachur*?"

The *shadchan* replied that the father is dead.

The father didn't make any further inquiries. Why should he find out about someone dead?

The *shidduch* was finalized and at the *chasunah* there was a man seated at the head table, eating everything in sight in a very inappropriate manner. The father of the *kallah* asked the *shadchan*, "Who is that person?"

"He's your *mechuten*; the father of your precious son-in-law."

"You told me he isn't alive!"

The *shadchan* replied, "Do you call living like that *living*?"

Rebbe Zev of Zhitomir *zt'l* once looked out his window, and said,

The Yetzer Hara

Reb Hillel Kolemaia *zt'l* visited Rebbe Avraham Yaakov of Sadigura *zt'l*. When Reb Hillel was about to leave, the Sadigura Rebbe said, "Reb Hillel, you are renowned for your *mussar*. Please give me some *mussar*."

Reb Hillel Kolemeia said, "Why doesn't the Rebbe give *mussar* to his chassidim?"

The Rebbe replied, "I teach my chassidim to eat properly. If they will do so, their deeds will automatically also be good."

Taavas achilah, indulging in food, strengthens the yetzer hara, and then it is harder for the person to fight it.

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* teaches that when the *yetzer hara* sees that he can't entice a Yid to do *aveiros*, he has him fall deeply into the *taavah* of eating, which will cause him to lose his battles against the *yetzer hara*. Reb Chaim Vital said that this is hinted at in the *pesukim* (*Shemos* 1:8-11), ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים, "A new king arose over Mitzrayim." The king is the *yetzer hara*, the מלך זקן וכסיל, the foolish old king (*Koheles* 4:13).⁷ He says הנה עם

"I see a cheese blintz running down the street."

The chassidim looked out the window wondering what their Rebbe was referring to, but all they saw was a *yungerman* running down the street with his tallis and tefillin tucked under his arm. The Rebbe explained, "His mother-in-law made cheese blintzes this morning, and she told him to daven quickly, so he could eat them while they're hot. A person is where his thoughts are (as the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* teaches). Therefore, since this *yungerman* was excited about the cheese blintzes, that's how he appeared to me."

7. The *yetzer hara* is called מלך זקן וכסיל, but is he so foolish? See how many people he captures? The *yetzer hara* is actually very clever.

בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו, "Behold the nation, Bnei Yisrael, are...stronger than we." This means the *yetzer hara* perceives that he doesn't have the strength to cause the holy Jewish nation to sin. So, what does he do? ויבן ערי מסכנות לפרעה את פתם ואת רעמסס, he had the nation build Pison and Ramses. פתם is made up of two words, פה תהום, a mouth that devours everything. רעמסס is the רעמסס which is part of the stomach. It is actually רעמסס, because the stomach will cause him to do bad. Also, פרעה symbolizes ערף, the neck. In short, he has people indulging in food. This strengthens the *yetzer hara*, and then the *yetzer hara* can control him.

The Degel Machaneh Efraim *zt'l* (*Eikev*, ד"ה ומלתם) teaches that improper eating, and in particular, eating non-kosher food ruins one's *emunah*. The

Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 91:) brings several *pesukim* to prove that there will be *techiyas hameisim* (the resurrection of the dead). The Jewish community of a particular country sent a letter to the Rambam, claiming that the *pesukim* that the Gemara brings could be understood differently, and therefore they were doubtful of its authenticity.

The Rambam didn't want to answer the letter himself, so he asked his student, Reb Shmuel ibn Tibon *zt'l*, to respond to the people.

Reb Shmuel explained to them that *Chazal* had pure, clean, untainted minds since they were cautious to eat kosher, and to eat properly, according to the Torah. Therefore, their interpretation of the Torah is true.

Rather, this phrase means that he is the king over fools. Because whoever listens to the *yetzer hara* is a fool.

Reb Shmuel Ibn Tibon wrote them the following, "Someone who is very cautious, and he sanctifies the way he eats, to eat only according to the ways of Hashem and His Torah... [he attains a clear and holy mind to understand Torah]. The *tana'im* and *amora'im* of the Mishnah and the Gemara were extremely cautious that they shouldn't become impure through food and drink, and therefore their intelligence shone forth. They had *ruach hakodesh* to explain every concealed matter of the holy Torah, for they had the spirit of G-d in them, Who He is united with His Torah... But these people [who have questions about *techiyas hameisim*] are certainly impure and have impure blood. Their hearts and brains have become clogged with non-kosher foods. That's the reason their minds are inclined to heresy and *apikorsus*. They can't accept the sweetness of our Torah that is based on G-dly intelligence of the

divine King. And since they have so much chutzpah and left the camp, [a king] will suddenly destroy them and everything they have.' And that is exactly what happened. A few days later, a great monarch came and killed them and stole their money" (quoted in Degel Machaneh Efraim).

At the wedding of one of the children of the Pachad Yitzchak of Boyan *zt'l*, the hour had already become very late, and the dessert wasn't served yet. Was it permitted to eat the dessert since it was at the end of the meal, or perhaps since it was already time for *Shacharis*, they couldn't eat the dessert because it's forbidden to eat before *Shacharis*?

The Pachad Yitzchak sent someone to Reb Dovid Ortinberg *zt'l* (author of *Tehilah l'Dovid*) to ask his halachic opinion.

As they were waiting for the messenger to return,

someone said, "We're allowed to rely on the opinions that it's permitted to eat the dessert."

The Pachad Yitzchak replied, "How would we look if we would do everything that's permitted?"

This is because one shouldn't only ask oneself whether something is permitted, he should also ask whether it's proper. As the Yesod HaAvodah (2:9:24) writes, "It is very beneficial for *avodas Hashem* that a person shouldn't only think 'is it permitted for me to eat this food... to go to that place... to do that deed...' rather one should think, 'will this be good in Hashem's eyes?'"

The Pachad Yitzchak of Boyan *zt'l* taught אין קידוש אלא במקום סעודה "Holiness comes from eating properly."

One Friday night, chassidim sat together at a *zit* (*chassidic gathering*)

discussing the importance of eating with *kedushah*. The following day there was a *kiddush* in shul and hot kugel was served. Reb Ahron, the Rav of Zhitomir *zt'l* had attended the Friday night *zits* and was inspired to eat with holiness. He decided to wait a few moments before he began eating to weaken the grip of the *yetzer hara*. In the meanwhile, he used his fork to cut his portion of kugel into small pieces. That's when he found a needle inside the kugel. Reb Aharon would often say, "Since then, I make sure to attend every Friday night *zits*, because the *zits* saved my life. Had I would eaten immediately, I would have swallowed the needle."

Tzaddikim of the Bobov dynasty tried to say an על המזוזה each day, so they could say the words ונברך עליה בקדושה ובטהרה, "We will bless You in Eretz Yisrael with holiness and with purity."

"Raise the Heads of Bnei Yisrael" (Shemos 30:12)

The Medresh (*Tanchuma Tisa* 3) states that Moshe said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam! When I die, no one will mention me!"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, "I swear, just as you are now standing and teaching them *parashas Shekalim* and you raise their heads, so will it be every year: When the nation read this *parashah* before Me, it is like you are standing there and raising their heads."

This is implied by the pasuk (Shemos 30:12), כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל, "When you raise the heads of Bnei Yisrael..." This occurs every year when we read *parashas Shekalim*.

But what does it mean to have a raised head?

The Rebbe of Ishbitz *zt'l* taught:

An animal's head is the same height as its body, representing that an animal can't use its mind to rule over its body - he can't control his natural urges. However, a human being holds his head above his body because he can use his mind to decide what he should do and what he shouldn't. We attain this ability on Shabbos Shekalim when Moshe Rabbeinu comes and raises our heads.

The old model of travel was with animals. People rode horses and donkeys, or the horses pulled their chariots, and so on. Today, people ride in cars, trains, and airplanes.

When the railroad system was first introduced, the Shinover Rav *zt'l* explained that people used to be greater than animals, therefore they rode on animals. Today, they aren't greater than animals anymore, but they are still greater than *domeim*, inanimate objects. So, they can ride on metal trains,

but they don't have the right to ride animals.

A *bachur*, whose spiritual level was declining, asked Reb Shalom Shwadron *zt'l* for permission to travel to a particular place that was inappropriate for a yeshiva student. Reb Shalom Shwadron replied, "If you can answer my questions, you can go there."

The *bachur* agreed.

Reb Shalom asked him, "It is better to be a human, or is it better to be an animal?"

The *bachur* replied, "Animals eat outdoors, they rummage through the garbage, they never wash up... It is certainly a greater honor to be a human being."

Reb Shalom showed him that there is another way to look at things. Animals lead tranquil lives. They find their meals wherever they go. They don't get into *machlokes*. They never have to take

medication. But, on the other hand, humans have financial problems and get into disputes, one day with one person and the next day with another..."

"I never thought about that," the *bachur* said. "Perhaps it is better to be an animal. I wish I were an animal."

Reb Shalom told him, "You don't have to worry about that. You are a perfect animal." Because if you can't control your urges, you are no different than an animal."

A priest claimed that he trains animals to be just like humans. Reb Yonoson Eibshitz *zt'l* disagreed, "An animal will never be a human being."

The priest suggested that they debate the matter in public. The priest will display his trained animals, and Reb Yonoson Eibshitz will try to prove that they aren't genuinely human-like.

Shortly before the debate, Reb Yonoson Eibshitz was engrossed in learning Torah and didn't notice that a mouse jumped into his open snuffbox. When he closed the snuffbox, the mouse was trapped inside.

A lavish meal was served at the debate, and the waiters were trained cats! They walked on their two hind feet, carrying trays in their palms, and serving the guests. It was incredible!

Reb Yonoson took out his snuffbox to sniff some tobacco. The mouse jumped out. The cats immediately dropped their trays laden with food and ran after the mouse.

The debate ended right there. Cats remain cats.

An animal remains an animal, but a person can say "no." He has the ability to control himself.

Saying No to the Internet

The way to merit that the *Shechinah* should dwell in you is, ושכנתי בתוכם, read as ושכנתי בתוך ם. The ם is closed from all sides. Hashem resides among those who close themselves off from all bad influences.

Chazal (*Megillah* 2:) say, "The ם and the ס of the *luchos* stood with a miracle." We can explain that these two letters are closed from all sides, hinting that one must make boundaries and block himself from foreign influences. However, one can't do that alone without Hashem's help. Therefore, בגנס היו עומדים, they stood in the *luchos* miraculously. You need a miracle to succeed in this realm.

Some people claim that they can see and hear things on the internet and social media, and it won't affect them. Let them study the following Midrash (*Koheles Rabba* 1:4):

Apikorsim held many religious debates with Reb Yehudah ben Nikosa. They would ask him questions, and he would answer. Once, Reb Yehudah told them, "Let's conduct one more debate, and that debate will determine once and for all who is right. Whoever wins will have permission to beat his opponent over the head with a hammer." They agreed to those terms.

Reb Yehudah ben Nikosa won the debate, and he did to his opponents as agreed. Reb Yehudah's students told him, "Rebbe, Heaven helped you! You won!"

He replied, "Please daven for me because I used to be like a chest filled with precious gems, and now I was emptied out, and I'm filled with *ashes*." He meant to say that he felt he was affected by hearing their *apikorsus* and false ideas.

Even a holy *Tana* becomes affected when he hears heresy, so what can we say? And when we must use the internet, we must be cautious that we don't empty our reservoir of pearls and diamonds and fill ourselves with ashes instead.

Why is specifically the month of Adar doubled in a leap year and not any other month? The *Kedushas Levi* (ד"ה טעם *Shekalim*) explains that each month represents another tribe. Adar corresponds to Yosef. Yosef's *shevet* branched out to become two *shevatim*, Menasheh and Efraim. Therefore, sometimes there are two Adars. Since these months represent Yosef, who epitomizes *kedushah*, these months are the ideal time for attaining purity.

Shabbos Shekalim

In the Gemara, the translation of שקל is to take. The *Chidushei HaRim zt'l* said that *Shabbos Shekalim*,

is a *zman mesugal* for one to take himself with both hands (*Imrei Yehudah*).

In other words, it is a time for change, a time when one can take himself in his hands and begin anew.

Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer *zt'l* looked forward to this time of year when we read the four *parshiyos*. "I want to meet with the Eibishter," is how he expressed it (*Imrei Pinchas* 4:225).

The Rizhiner Rebbe *zt'l* said, "During the [Shabbosim of the] four *parshiyos*, each Yid can become attached to the *Shechinah*. Each week represents another letter of Hashem's name (הוי"ה)." *אור פינד*

This is what we say in the *yotzros* of *Mussaf* on Shabbos Shekalim, *אור פינד* עלינו אדון נשא, we request that Hashem shine the light of His countenance on us. It is a very special time; however, it is up to each individual to awaken

himself. Otherwise, the days and weeks will pass, and we won't take with us what we could.

The Kedushas Levi compares it to someone who was granted permission to enter the king's treasury and take whatever he wants. "Woe to the person who sleeps that day!"

Reb Mordechai is a travel agent who travels often. Once, he had enough points to travel first class just by adding one hundred shekels to his ticket. So he grabbed the opportunity since he always wished to experience first-class travel.

Reb Mordechai isn't wealthy, but he felt like a millionaire during the flight. He had a comfortable seat (he kept playing with all the buttons trying to find the right position) and was sitting among the wealthiest people on board.

This wealthy feeling began in the airport. He

didn't have to wait in line with everyone else. There was a special agent for the rich and fortunate people like himself who fly first class.

A Yid, flying in economy class, wanted to see who was flying in the first-class cabin. Perhaps it was just curiosity, and maybe he wanted to make financial connections with wealthy people, but whatever his motives, he waited for a time when the stewards didn't notice, and slipped into the first-class section and looked around.

When he saw Reb Mordechai, he said, "Oh, it's just that shlepper!"

Reb Mordechai commented that at that moment, he felt like a poor man, like a deflated balloon. He was pretending to be wealthy, and now he was called poor, a shlepper which was closer to the reality of who he really was.

Reb Mordechai said that he realized then that it isn't sufficient to *pretend* to be wealthy. If you want to feel rich, you must actually **be** rich. There needs to be a drastic increase in your bank account, or people will recognize that you are "just that shlepper."

The *nimshal* is, Shabbos Shekalim is approaching, a time when we can "take ourselves in our hands," a time we can do *teshuvah* and improve our ways. However, if you don't change and remain the same, you will remain "just that shlepper."

Salvation in the merit of *Shabbos*

We quote once again the Medresh (*Tanchuma Tisa* 3):

Moshe said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam! When I die, no one will mention me!"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied, "I swear, just as

you are now standing and teaching them *parashas Shekalim* and you raise their heads, so will it be every year: When the nation reads this *parashah* before Me, it is like you are standing there and raising their heads."

What does it mean to have a raised head?

When a person experiences hardship, his shoulders droop, and he walks bent over. But when we read this *parashah*, Moshe lifts our heads, and we stand erect. This means, on this Shabbos, all our problems will be resolved.

The truth is, every Shabbos has this *segulah*. The Shem MiShmuel (*Shlach* 5677) writes in the name of his father, the Avnei Nezer *zt'l*, "For all problems, the salvation comes from Shabbos. Even if someone has an ill person in his home, if he can refrain from complaining and from thinking about his

troubles, he will certainly be healed."

He proves this from the following Chazal (*Shabbos* 12.): "When one visits the sick on Shabbos he says, שבת היא מלזעוק ורפואה קרובה לבוא, 'Shabbos we don't shout, and the *refuah* is coming quickly.' Reb Meir would say, יכולה היא שתרחם, and Rashi explains that the merit of Shabbos can bring you compassion, by honoring Shabbos and refraining from having *tzaar* on this day."

The Gemara discusses an ill person. However, it also applies to all kinds of troubles and problems. If one doesn't have *tzaar* on Shabbos, this in itself will bring him Hashem's compassion, and the *tzaar* will disappear (*Shem MiShmuel*).

Masuk m'Dvash (Reb Yitzchak Parchi 6) writes, "We saw with our own eyes people who had a *tzarah* before Shabbos, and on Shabbos they forgot about

their *tzarah* entirely, and were happy with Shabbos, as it is proper to be happy on Shabbos. They didn't have any distress or worries on Shabbos because of their *tzaros*, and they merited that they were saved from their troubles in miraculous ways."

In his later years, Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman came to live in Eretz Yisrael. He traveled by ship with all his possessions. They docked in Haifa, but it was close to Shabbos, and he couldn't take his bags with him. The officers told him, "If you leave them here, everything will be taken away. You won't have anything."

Nevertheless, Reb Yaakov Yosef remained in a happy state of mind during that Shabbos and didn't think about the significant loss he was sure to incur.

Even after Shabbos was over, he didn't rush to the port at the first zman

Motzei Shabbos. Instead, he waited for the zman of Rabbeinu Tam, as he did every week, and then headed to the port.

When he arrived, he noticed a guard watching over his bags. "They told me to stand here," he told Reb Yaakov Yosef. All his luggage remained untouched. Shabbos protects those who honor it.

On Shabbos, one is supposed to feel *נאילו כל* *בלאמתך עשויה*, as if you have nothing to take care of, and everything is perfect in your life (Rashi, *Shemos* 20:9). When one practices this on Shabbos, it actually becomes so.

The Menoras HaMeor (*אלנאקר"ה, ה"ב פ"ח*) tells a story of a woman that had two children who fell into a pit on Shabbos. She waited until her husband came home from the *beis knesses*. When he came, they ate and drank, and when they finished the meal, she said,

"If you want, I will tell you something."

"Go ahead."

She said, "For ten years, I was guarding two gold crowns. Now, the owners are asking for the crowns back. What should I do? Should I return the crowns, or shouldn't I?" "Return them."

She said, "Your two sons fell into a pit and died. Now honor Hashem and don't be *mechalel* Shabbos." (She meant, "Don't be sad on Shabbos.")

They weren't sad that Shabbos. When it was dark, they went to the pit to remove their children and bury them. In the merit that they didn't have *tzaar* on Shabbos, the children came out of the pit alive and well.

Everyone should find ways to be happy on Shabbos and avoid being sad. Shevet HaKahasi (vol.3 180) writes that Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l*

didn't put on new shoes on Shabbos. He first wore them on the weekdays so that they would be broken into a little before Shabbos. He didn't want to feel the discomfort on Shabbos. We should also seek to avoid feeling distress on Shabbos. Shabbos is (*Bamidbar* 10:10), *יום שמחתכם*, a day of joy, and when we are happy on Shabbos, the *tzaros* don't return.

Refuah is one of the salvations that come from being happy on Shabbos. However, the Torah tells us other ways we can merit *refuah*. In *parashas Beshalach* it states (15:26), ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול ה' אלקיך... ושמרת כל חוקיו כל המחלה אשר שמתים במצרים לא אשים, עליך כי אני ה' רופאך, "If you hearken diligently to the voice of Hashem...and observe all His decrees, then any of the diseases that I placed in Mitzrayim, I will not bring upon you, for I am Hashem, your healer." Rebbe Itzikel of Skver *zt'l* said that this is a difficult remedy (שארפע)

(רעציפט). One must keep the entire Torah, and then he has a *refuah*.

In *parashas Yisro*, the nation received the Torah, and everyone was healed. But that is also a difficult recipe for a *refuah*, because one must accept the yoke of the entire Torah.

But in *parashas Mishpatim* it states (21:19), רק שבתו יתן ורפא, *irfa*, all one needs to do is שבתו יתן, *irfa* and he will have a *refuah*.

Salvations on *Shabbos Shekalim*

We've seen that every *Shabbos* grants us salvation, and this is especially so on *Shabbos Shekalim*.

The גנוי ישראל from Rebbe Yisrael of Chortkov *zt'l* writes, "Every *Shabbos* of the four *parshiyos* brings down bounty to the world... On *parashas Shekalim*, comes down the bounty for *parnassah* and wealth..."

Similarly, the Ateres Yeshuah (*Moadim, Mishpatim, Shekalim*) writes, שבת שקלים, מוסוגל להמשכת פרנסה, "*Shabbos Shekalim* is *mesugal* for attaining *parnassah*."

The Ateres Yeshuah concludes with a Rashi at the beginning of *parashas Mishpatim*, and this is how he reads Rashi's words: אמר לו הקב"ה למשה, לא תעלה על דעתך "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe, 'Don't think it is sufficient that you teach them Torah, alone. You have to be *mashpia parnassah* to them, too, because, אם אין קמח אין תורה, without *parnassah*, there is no Torah. לכן נאמר אשר תשים לפניהם, בשלחן הערוך ומוכן לאכול לפני האדם, You must give them a set table, prepared to eat. You must bestow *parnassah* to Klal Yisrael."

The Mishnah Berurah (*siman* 685) explains the reason we read *parashas Shekalim*:

"The first *parashah* (of the four *parshiyos*) is *Shekalim* in commemoration of the half-shekel they were

obligated to give to buy the *korban tamid* for the entire year... Starting from Nisan, they must bring *korbanos* from new donations. Therefore, we read Shekalim in Adar [to remind] everyone to bring their shekels on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. Today, we read about it in the Torah, and וּשְׁלֹמֵה פְּרִים שְׁפֵתֵינוּ, reading about it is considered as if we also brought the *shekalim*."

The *korban tamid* is related to our daily tefillos. Chazal (*Brachos* 26:) tell us that Shacharis corresponds to the *tamid shel shachar*, the morning *korban tamid*; *minchah* corresponds to the *tamid shel bein ha'arbavim*, the afternoon *tamid*, and *maariv* corresponds to the flesh of the *korbanos* that burned at night on the *mizbeich*.

The Imrei Yosef of Spinka said that since the *shekalim* prepared the *korbanos* for the entire year, similarly, on this Shabbos, we can prepare the *tefillos* for the entire year. We can

daven on this Shabbos that Hashem answer our tefillos that we will say throughout the coming twelve months (from Nisan to next year's Nisan).

The brothers Reb Meir and Reb Zanzvil Kahana z'l from Drogmeresht came, for the first time, to the Imrei Yosef of Spinka. They came for Shabbos Shekalim, in 5643. They hoped to get their salvation from this great tzaddik, as both were *baalei yesurim*. Reb Meir didn't have children, and his wife was ill. Reb Zanzvil had children, but they were always sickly and weak.

Reb Meir spoke with the Imrei Yosef on *erev Shabbos* and expressed his distress that he doesn't have children and that his wife is ill. The Imrei Yosef told him to give a *pidyon* of one hundred gold coins and he will have a *yeshuah*.

There wasn't time for Reb Zanzvil to speak with the Rebbe on *erev Shabbos*, but during the Friday night *tish*, when chassidim

customarily pledge to give wine for the Rebbe's *tish*, the Rebbe blessed Reb Zanvil that his children should have a *refuah sheleimah*. And the Rebbe added that on Shabbos Shekalim one could request that all one's tefillos be answered (he told them the explanation we wrote above).

Needless to say, both of the brothers had their salvation. They became devoted chassidim of the Imrei Yosef.

In *Megillas Esther* it states (*Esther* 7:8), ופני המן חפו, "Haman's face was covered." The Alshich HaKadosh explains that the ancient law of Persia (and of many other countries) was that if a person convicted to death managed to catch a glimpse of the king, he was pardoned. When Achashveirosh's anger was aroused on Haman, someone quickly covered Haman's face, so

Haman wouldn't see the king's face and be pardoned. As we said above, during the weeks of the "four *parshiyos*" we merit seeing Hashem's face, *keviyachol*. As we say on Shabbos Shekalim, אור פניך עלינו אדון נשא. When one sees the King's face, all his sins are pardoned.

Furthermore, it states (30:13), ...זה יתנו כל העובר על הפקודים. The Yerushalmi writes that זה יתנו כל העובר על הפקודים means "all those who transgressed Hashem's commands" (and sinned with the *egel*). With the *machatzis hashekel*, לכפר על, נפשותיכם, they will have atonement. Similarly, we attain atonement on this Shabbos.

The Sfas Emes (*Shekalim* תרל"ג) explains that this atonement is also applicable in our times, because we *desire* to give the *machatzis hashekel*, and that is sufficient to attain atonement.⁸

8. The Sfas Emes (*Shekalim* 5633) writes, "Chazal say that we should read *parashas Shekalim* now, even though we can't bring *korbanos*.

A Fiery Coin

Midrash Tanchuma (9) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu took a coin of fire from under His throne, He showed it to Moshe and said, זֶה יִתֵּנוּ, 'This is what they should give.'" It seems that Moshe didn't understand which coin should be given until Hashem showed it to him. This raises a few questions: (1) Why didn't Moshe understand what a *machatzis hashekel* is? Is it difficult to understand which type of coin should be used? (2) Why was the coin under Hashem's throne? (3) Why was it a fiery coin and not a silver coin?

We can explain that Moshe didn't have difficulty

understanding what a *machatzis hashekel* is. Moshe's quandary was how a half-coin could accomplish so much? Why can such a small donation cause זְקִיפַת רֹאשׁ, that the heads of the Jewish nation will be raised? In our discussions, we discussed two types of זְקִיפַת רֹאשׁ. One explanation is that the *tzaros* disappear, and Klal Yisrael can raise their heads with wealth and pride. Another explanation is that with this mitzvah, Klal Yisrael can use their minds to overcome temptation and choose to do Torah and mitzvos. Moshe's question was, how can this inexpensive and relatively simple mitzvah accomplish so much?

It seems that our desire to bring *korbanos* is accepted, just like in the past, because the *korbanos* were accepted [primarily] due to the yearning and the desire of the Jewish people.... This devotion and the yearning exists until today - and perhaps even stronger than before because we want to bring *korbanos* again like we had in the past. This is the entire purpose of creation; to yearn for Hashem from amidst the darkness."

Hashem showed Moshe a fiery coin to imply that it is the fire and the *hislahavus* that Klal Yisrael have when they perform this mitzvah, which is so precious to Hashem. Hashem keeps this coin under His throne because *hislahavus* is precious to Hashem.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* was once in Germany, and he heard the rav of a beis kneses ask in his *drashah*, "Why did Hashem show Moshe a מטבע של אש, a coin of fire? Hashem could have shown Moshe a silver coin! The answer is Hashem did not only show him the size and weight of the coin. Hashem showed him how the coin should be given. It

should be given with a fiery *hislahavus*.⁹

This explains why we give a half-shekel and not a whole shekel. This also explains why the Torah tells us (30:15), העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעיט ממוחצית השקל, "The wealthy shall not give more and the destitute shall not decrease from a half-shekel." If the primary part of the mitzvah was for financial purposes, why is it not a mitzvah to give a whole shekel, and why can't the wealthy give more? The answer is that the specialness of this mitzvah is not the value of the coin given. It's the emotion that come along with the mitzvah.¹⁰

9. The Chidushei HaRim asked the Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* how this rav perceived this true interpretation. The Kotzker Rebbe replied that the German Yidden excel in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, and in that *zechus* they can comprehend such explanations.

10. Some explain that we give half of a shekel to teach us that Hashem wants us to do whatever we can, even if we can't finish the good deed. We do what we can, and Hashem completes the deed for us.

The Yeitav Lev *zt'l* asked, why does a person need to do *teshuvah*

Towards the end of *parashas Mishpatim*, it states (24:17), מראה כבוד ה' כאש אוכלת, בראש ההר "The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the mountain-top before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael."

The *Kedushas Levi* explains, "If a person wants to know whether Hashem enjoys his service, he should see if he has in his heart a yearning and *hislahavus* to serve Hashem like a burning fire. If he does, this is a clear sign that Hashem enjoys his service. Heaven helps him and sends into his mind holy thoughts [of *hislahavus* so Hashem can enjoy his mitzvos]. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, ומראה כבוד ה' the sign to know

whether he sees Hashem's honor and that Hashem is happy with his service, the test is, כאש אוכלת, if his heart is burning with *hislahavus* to serve Hashem."

Once upon a time, there was a very wealthy person. The only thing that matched his vast wealth was his stinginess. He would often pride himself with his *yichus*, telling everyone that he is a descendant of the Magen Avraham.

Once, the rav of the community spoke with this wealthy person and tried to convince him to give money to *tzedakah*. The rav's passionate plea would have opened anyone's heart, but the stingy man's heart remained cold and

for his *aveiros*? Why can't he claim that he was an אנוס (that he sinned against his will) because no one wants to commit *aveiros*. It is the *yetzer hara* and the weakness of human nature that causes people to sin.

But his excuse isn't entirely valid because he could have done the best he can. He is guilty for not performing his maximum. This is hinted at in the words (30:12-13), ונתנו איש כופר נפשו לה'... מחצית השקל, he needs atonement because he didn't even give half a shekel. He didn't even do what he was able to.

unmoved. Finally, the rav told him, "You aren't an *einikel* of the Magen Avraham!"

The man was upset, "Why do you say that I'm not a descendant of the Magen Avraham? Did you ever check my *yichus*? And besides, what's it your business? And what does it have to do with anything we spoke about until now?"

The rav replied, "Everyone who opens up the *Shulchan Aruch* knows that you can't learn Magen

Avraham without the commentary *Machatzis HaShekel*. They go together. I tried for a half hour to get a half-shekel out of you, but I failed. So, if there is no *machatzis hashekel*, I know the Magen Avraham is also not here."

We are all descendants of Avraham Avinu. And since the *magen Avraham* is here, there also should be the *machatzis hashekel*, which means that we need to have *hislahavus* to do Hashem's will.¹¹

11. Once, the Kedushas Yom Tov *zt'l* attended a rabbinic convention together with his young son, who later became renowned as Reb Yoel of Satmar *zt'l*. One of the rabbanim noticed how the future Satmar Rebbe was praying with great *hislahavus*. As he prayed, he made unusual body movements. The rav came over to him, and asked him whether it was Purim today (because he found his body movements humorous). The Satmar Rebbe replied, "If I knew that I would meet with Haman, I would have brought along a *grager*." Because being cold by *tefillah* and by *avodas Hakadosh* is the trademark of Amalek.

Someone went to immerse himself in a river during the winter. He broke the ice, and went into the water. But it was so cold, the water over his head turned to ice before he came out. The Yesod Ha'Avodah heard about it and said, "He should have said *Nishmas*...." The heat generated by the excitement of reciting *Nishmas* would have melted the ice.