

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Shlita

Shmini - Parah



בס"ד

Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings

Shmini - Parah

Kashrus

The Chasam Sofer once asked two community activists to set up a meeting with the mayor of Pressburg. "The issue is urgent, so schedule the meeting immediately."

The delegates asked the mayor's secretary to schedule a meeting for that day, but the secretary replied, "All slots are filled for today. You can't get an appointment on such short notice. If you want, we can schedule it for next week."

The delegates explained to the secretary that the matter was urgent and couldn't be postponed.

It wasn't easy, but with determination and effort, a meeting with the mayor was arranged for that very day.

They entered the mayor's room, and the

mayor graciously offered them a cup of coffee.

"No, thank you," they replied.

"Why not?" the mayor asked. "Is it because it isn't kosher?"

That was the reason. The milk wasn't *chalah Yisrael*.

The mayor went into a rage. "If I offer you a drink, you should accept it!" he said.

As he was ranting and raving, the secretary opened the door and asked the mayor whether he had a cup of coffee.

"No. The mayor replied angrily. "I was about to, but these fellows ruined my appetite. I offered them a coffee, but they declined because of kashrus."

"Good," the secretary replied. "I'm glad you

didn't have a coffee because the milk is contaminated. Some people who drank from this milk got sick, and the doctor checked the milk and determined that it is filled with unhealthy germs."

The mayor immediately changed his tone of speech, and he spoke with the two delegates respectfully. He told them, "I always admired the rabbis of the Jewish nation for their superior wisdom. I forgot about that of late, and I considered banishing all the Jews from Pressburg. But now that you reminded me of the Jewish sages' wisdom, I will cancel that decree."

The two delegates returned to the Chasam Sofer and told him what happened at the meeting. The Chasam Sofer replied that there was a *kitrug* in heaven on the Jewish community because they weren't careful enough with kashrus and with חלב עזרים. In the merit of the delegate's *mesirus nefesh* to

keep the laws of kashrus, the decree was abolished. (Heard from Reb Elchanan Halperin zt'l of Radumishla, who heard it from his father-in-law, Reb Shmuel Unsderfer zt'l, a descendant of the Chasam Sofer.)

The halachos of kashrus are discussed this week. We must be cautious with kashrus for two reasons. One is that we don't want to eat non-kosher, not even accidentally. As the Or HaChaim (*Vayikra* 11:43) writes, "Klal Yisrael should be careful not to eat non-kosher foods, not even by accident because accidentally and purposely are the same regarding this matter, for even by accident, one becomes impure."

The second problem applies even when a person guessed correctly, and the questionable food he consumed turned out to be kosher. Nevertheless, his lax attitude causes him to lose his heavenly protection. Because those who are cautious about relying only on the best *hechsherim*, and

don't take any chances, receive *siyata dishmaya*, and Hashem helps them eat kosher, always. But if one is lax, he loses his divine protection.

This is alluded to in the words (11:44), והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים. As the Or HaChaim writes, תעשו גדרים וסייגים לבל תטמאו ובוזא אני מבטיחכם שתהיו קדושים, "Put safeguards and precautions that you shouldn't become impure [with non-kosher food] and I guarantee that you will be holy [and protected from eating non-kosher]."¹

Similarly, Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "One can transgress many *aveiros* with food. There are the forbidden fats (חלב), blood, insects; there's also טבל, כלאים and other prohibitions. But if a person is always careful,

to the best of his ability, and always checks the food before he eats it, Hashem will help that the food he eats will be kosher, and he will not sin, even accidentally."

The Be'er Mayim Chayim (Chayei Sarah ויאמר אברהם) bemoans how people aren't careful with kashrus. He writes, "In our generation if someone claims to be a *shochet*, people trust him. They don't check him out to find out whether he is reliable. And if someone brings wine, milk, fish, or foods that need to be checked for worms, or any other food that may have a kashrus issue, people say, 'The person who brought it is a religious Yid. So why should we suspect that it

1. Being careful with kashrus is also *mesugal* to be protected from the gentile nations. Therefore, the *pasuk* concludes, בבל ולא תטמאו... בכל, "You will not become impure... by the insects..." and the Or HaChaim writes, "The *pasuk* is hinting that by keeping this mitzvah, the nations of the world, who are referred to as שרצים ושקצים הרומשים על הארץ, insects and rodents that crawl over the earth, will not rule over the Jewish nation."

isn't kosher? But if someone asks them for a loan, they suddenly speak differently. They don't trust anyone before verifying that he is trustworthy because they fear he might not repay the debt. This is because money is the most important thing in the world for them, and Mitzvos are less important."

The Be'er Mayim Chaim describes how Avraham Avinu was the exact opposite. When it came to financial matters, he trusted Eliezer wholly. But when it came to mitzvos, such as to find a *shidduch* for Yitzchak, he didn't trust Eliezer until Eliezer swore to him that he would do as he instructed him. The Be'er Mayim Chaim writes, "The Torah testifies about Avraham Avinu, אברהם אהובי, 'Avraham who loves me.' Avraham didn't love anything, only Hashem's *mitzvos*. Everything else paled in comparison. He permitted Eliezer to oversee his wealth, but he didn't trust him when it came to mitzvos."

This week's *parashah* also discusses the prohibition of eating worms and bugs. As it states (11:43), אל תשקצו את נפשותיכם בכל השרץ השרץ ולא תטמאו בהם ונטמתם בהם, "You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping creature that creeps, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, that you should become unclean through them."

The Or HaChaim elaborates, "A person must be extremely careful not to eat anything that might be infested with worms. Especially in recent generations, the atmosphere and the earth have become polluted (spiritually), and everything that grows has worms and bugs. Therefore, the cautious should be aware."

Many chassidim have the custom to eat *shalashudes* in the dark. This custom began in the past when there wasn't yet electricity. Friday night there were candles and lamps, but by

shalashudes time, the candles were long extinguished, so they sat at *shalashudes* in the dark. There is something extraordinary about singing inspirational songs in the dark. My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, spoke longingly for this custom. He said he would do the same but was concerned that he won't see what he was eating in the dark. There might be an insect in his food, and he won't know about it.

Hakaras HaTov

Many readers have seen the famous photograph of Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l* giving a dish of milk to a cat. Here is the story behind the picture:

Bachurim of yeshivas Kfar Chassidim brought in a cat to catch the rats and mice nibbling at their food and getting into their belongings.

After the mission was accomplished, the *bachurim* wanted to send the cat

away. However, Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l* (the *mashgiach* of Kfar Chassidim) told the *bachurim* they must first show the cat *hakaras hatov*.

That picture of Reb Elyah giving milk to the cat is how he showed *hakaras hatov* to the cat.

The Yerushalmi (*Terumos* 8:3) relates that someone invited a *talmid chacham* to join him for a meal. The *talmid chacham* was surprised when the host brought in his dog to eat together with them.

The *talmid chacham* asked, "Is there a reason you are disgracing me?"

The *baal habayis* replied, "*Chas v'shalom!* It's just that I owe *hakaras hatov* to this dog. Once, kidnappers came to the city to catch people and sell them as slaves. One of the kidnappers wanted to take my wife. This dog bit him, and the kidnappers fled. Now, I must honor this dog."

Because *hakaras hatov* is owed even to cats and dogs and inanimate objects. We must return the kindness that we receive.

The *Shita Mikubetzes* (*Bava Kama* 92:) writes, "A student of the Ri Migash z'l wrote the following:

"The Gemara (*Bava Kama* 92:) says, בִּירָא דְּשִׁתִּית מִיְנִיהָ לֹא תִרְמִי בִּיהָ קֵלָא, 'Don't throw stones or other objects into a well that you drank from.' Don't disgrace or harm it because you benefited from it. If you benefited from something, it is improper to damage it.

"Rabbeinu (R'i MiGash) told a story that happened with his *rebbe*, the Ri'f. Someone asked the Ri'f to preside over a case related to a bathhouse. The Ri'f refused emphatically, and this was the reason:

"There was a time when the Ri'f z'l was ill and went to the home of a person who had a bathhouse. The Ri'f bathed there; it was beneficial for his health. The owner of the bathhouse

told the Ri'f to stay in his home until he was completely cured. The host honored the Ri'f immensely the entire time he stayed at his home.

"Time passed, this host lost his money, was fell deeply into debt, and had to sell the bathhouse to pay back his debts. The Ri'f said, 'I won't rule on anything that has to do with the bathhouse, such as its sale, evaluating its worth, and the like, because I enjoyed this bathhouse.' He said this about a bathhouse, which doesn't have any feelings."

The Ri Migash explains that if the Ri'f was careful not to judge a bathhouse, how much more must one be cautious not to be the judge for a human being who helped him. He writes, "It would be wrong to judge the person who did you a favor. Whoever does, he has left the path of *mussar* and *derech erez*. Chazal say, לֹא לִידוֹן אִינִישׁ לֹא, 'A person shouldn't judge

someone he loves nor someone he hates.' There are two reasons you shouldn't judge someone you love: One is because you might bend the judgment in favor of your friend you love. Even if you can be cautious with your soul and you can judge correctly, nevertheless, it is wrong to judge your friend because you will be, משלם רעה תחת טובה, paying back bad to someone who did kindness with you."

The Ri MiGash concludes, "Hashem bestows perfect goodness upon us. *Kal v'chomer*, it is proper that we praise Hashem with perfect praises, and we shouldn't do anything that will get

Hashem angry, and we shouldn't do anything that Hashem hates."

The Or HaChaim (*Bereishis* 20:9) writes, שאין אדם מתחייב רע בעולם כמשלם רעה תחת טובה, "No one deserves punishment like a person who repays bad for a favor he received."²

There was a time that the Steipler Gaon's sefarim weren't sold in stores. In America, Reb Dardak was in charge of selling the Steipler gaon's sefarim. Eventually, the Steipler gaon's sefarim were being sold in stores (like all sefarim), and Reb Dardak's services were no longer needed.

One day, the Steipler received a letter from Reb Dardak. At that time, the

2. The Or HaChaim is referring to the time that Avimelech took Sarah to his home and he and his household were punished severely. Avimelech said to Avraham (*Bereishis* 20:9), מזה עשית לנו, "What have you done to us?" The Or HaChaim explains that Avimelech was asking, "What favor did you do for us, for which you would deem me as paying you back bad for good? Because only such a sin (of paying back bad for good) deserves the punishments they endured.

Steipler had stopped replying to letters. He was weaker and was world-renowned as the *gadol hador*, and he couldn't answer the many letters people sent him. But for Reb Dardak, the Steipler decided to make an exception. He wrote up a letter and brought it to Reb Dardak's father's home - Reb Chaim Shmaryahu Dardak from Bnei Brak - asking him to send it to his son in America.

Reb Chaim Shmaryahu was surprised that the Steipler wrote the letter and that he made an effort to bring it to his home.

The Steipler explained, "I don't write letters anymore, but I made an exception this time. I didn't want your son to think that I only wrote him when I needed his service, and now that I don't need his help, I stopped writing to him."

Reb Chaim Shmaryahu assured the Steipler that he would send the letter.

A few days later, *erev Shabbos*, the Steipler was once again knocking on Reb Chaim Shmaryahu Dardak's door.

"Did you send the letter yet?" the Steipler asked.

"No."

"Good. I wrote up another letter, and I want you to send this one."

Astounded once again, Reb Chaim Shmaryahu asked, "Is this letter different than the first letter you gave me?"

"No. They are exactly the same. I didn't want you to send the first letter because I wrote it for the wrong reasons. I wrote the first letter so your son shouldn't think negatively of me. But I should have written it because I have *hakaras hatov* to him for distributing my *sefer*. Therefore, I wrote a second letter. The words are the same, but the intention is different."

A major topic in recent news is which country will take in Ukrainian refugees.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma*, *Shemos* 16) teaches, "When one opens his house for you, you owe him your life. You are obligated to him more than you are obligated to honor your father and mother."

The Midrash explains that Yisro opened his home for Moshe, and therefore, Moshe was very devoted to him. When Hashem asked Moshe to take the Yidden out of Mitzraayim, Moshe replied, "Ribono Shel Olam, how can I leave Yisro without first asking his consent? Yisro opened his home for me, and he treats me like a son." Despite the urgent need to save the Jewish nation, Moshe didn't want to leave

without Yisro's consent. Hashem permitted Moshe to ask Yisro's permission.

When Yisro came to the desert, Moshe Rabbeinu went out to greet him. The *Seforno* (*Shemos* 18:7) writes that Moshe Rabbeinu was like a king, the honored leader of Bnei Yisrael, and it wasn't appropriate for Moshe to go out to greet Yisro. But Moshe had *hakaras hatov*, so he went anyway.³

The Yidden left Mitzrayim armed, as it states (*Shemos* 20:18), וחמושים, "עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים", "Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim with weapons." The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe*, *Beshalach*, וחמושים) asks if they carried weapons, why did the sea

3. The *Seforno* writes, "Moshe didn't refrain, due to his high rank, to go greet someone who did him a favor when he was in need. Similarly, it states (*Esther* 2:20), ואת מאמר מרדכי אסתר עושה, "Esther did as Mordechai told her." We also find this attitude with Yosef with his brothers, after Yosef became king. The opposite is (*Bereishis* 40:23), ולא יסף, "The *sar hamashkim* didn't remember Yosef."

When someone does you a favor, you should have *hakaras hatov*, even if right now you have a higher rank and position.

need to split for them? They could have raised their arms and fought the Mitzrim!

The Chasam Sofer explains that 210 years earlier, the Egyptians did them a great favor. There was a hunger in the world, and Mitzrayim opened their doors for Yaakov and his offspring. They owed *hakaras hatov* to the Egyptians. It was, therefore, improper for them to raise arms against the nation that once helped them.⁴

The Mitzrim afflicted and enslaved the Yidden, and the favor the Mitzrim did for the Yidden was so long ago! Nevertheless, the Torah obligates us to have *hakaras hatov*. It would be wrong to use weapons on Mitzrayim, against a nation that once did them a favor. How cautious we must be

with the obligation of *hakaras hatov*!

The Good is in Accordance with the Bad

Practicing the middah of *hakaras hatov* towards people trains us to be grateful to Hashem for the kindness He bestows upon us.

Furthermore, *Hakaras hatov* is in accordance with the kindness received. For example, one person won twenty dollars in a lottery, and another won two million dollars. Of course, they should both praise Hashem, but it is expected that the one who won two million dollars should praise Hashem more than the person who won twenty.

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Divrei Eliyahu*) writes that this concept is true with

4. Rashi (*Devarim* 23:8) writes, לא תתעב מצרי מכל וכל, אע"פ שזרקו זמריכם ליאור, "Don't be totally disgusted with the Mitzrim, although they threw your first-borns into the Nile. Why? Because they provided you with shelter when you were in need."

regards to praising Hashem for the bad. We praise Hashem for the bad because we believe that it too is for the good. And if something very bad happens, *chalilah*, we should praise Hashem even more because within the great suffering an even greater *chesed* is concealed.

In the Vilna Gaon's words: והטובה היא לפי ערך הרעה, "The good is in accordance with the extent of the bad."

The Vilna Gaon explains, "If a person loses a silver coin, he should praise Hashem like he found a silver coin. If he loses two silver coins, he should consider it as if he found two silver coins. The same goes for every bad thing that happens to him; he should recognize that the bad is good."

The Meor Einayim (*Lech Lecha*) writes, "According to the extent of the kindness that Hashem plans to give him, so will be the extent of the [hardships] that will precede it. If the kindness is great, the difficulties that

precede it will also be severe. When one believes this, he will surely praise Hashem for the bad just as he blesses Hashem for the good because they are a prelude to immense *chesed*. If a person is wise and keeps his eyes open, he will see the good that follows the hardship."

So, one should keep his eyes open, and he will often find the kindnesses that follow life's hardships and suffering. And after a really painful experience, he should expect an even greater good, because והטובה היא לפי ערך הרעה, "The good is in accordance with the extent of the bad."

A relative of Reb Eizik Shor of Slabodka *zt'l* broke her foot and was upset that she had to stay home for a long time until her foot healed. Reb Eizik Shor visited her and tried to give her *chizuk*. He asked, "Do you remember the pain of pregnancy and childbirth?"

"I remember."

"Are those bitter memories or happy memories? I'm certain they are happy memories because they brought you a child who gives you so much *nachas*. Similarly, all suffering is like childbirth because something very good comes from it. We must believe that it is so." He explained to her that although it is hard for her to remain home, something good will come from it.

An askan was on the receiving end of verbal attacks from those who opposed the views he followed. One day he complained to Rav Shach about the hardships he goes through. Rav Shach *zt'l* told him, "ישועת ה' כהרף עין", in a moment all your *tzaros* can go away. And in the meanwhile, follow Chazal's counsel of not answering back (see *Gitin* 36:)."

In the middle of the conversation, Rav Shach brought him a cup of tea with a teaspoon of honey. Rav Shach said, "Bees frighten people, sometimes

they sting, but they give us sweet honey. Similarly, regarding those bothering you, believe that something good will come from it."

Destined

Even when a person harms himself due to a wrong decision, he should believe that what happened was *bashert*. Hashem placed in his mind to make that choice, so it is for the best.

A couple was delighted with the home they had just bought in Monsey because the location and the price were better than they expected to find. They rushed through the closing process, and on the first night after the purchase, they invited their family for a *chanukas habayis*.

The next morning, they saw in the local paper that another home was put up for sale, just around the corner from the one they bought – and it was being sold for a much better price!

Now they regretted rushing to buy this house. They kept on telling themselves, "If we had bought that other house, we would have saved so much money."

This man knew that if anyone could give him *chizuk* it was his rebbe, Reb Mordechai Shwab *zt'l* (brother of the renowned Reb Shimon Shwab *zt'l*).

Reb Mordechai told him the following story:

"Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* once told me about a *shidduch* he arranged and that he regretted making that *shidduch*. He told me all the details, and then he concluded, 'But what happened was *bashert*. It was destined that I should make this mistake!'" Because even when we harm ourselves due to unwise choices, that was also planned and pre-arranged in heaven. It is Hashem's plan, and it is for our good.

Reb Mordechai added, "I'm certain you bought the

house that was *bashert* for you. My proof is that you only learned about the other house a day after you bought yours. Why didn't you hear about it earlier? Because you were destined to buy your house! There's no reason for regrets."

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kuzmir *zy"a* taught that a person takes thousands of steps each day, and one must believe that every step was destined from heaven. If one doesn't believe this, then in the morning when he recites, המבין מצעדי גבר, "Who prepares the steps of man," it is a *brachah l'vatalah* (a *brachah* said in vain). This means that every step and move and decision we make is destined, arranged, and planned by Hashem.

Sometimes we go somewhere, and things don't work out the way we planned, and we wish we never went there. Nevertheless, there is no reason for regret. Hashem is המבין מצעדי גבר. Hashem sent

you there. It is where you had to go.

Imagine a king asking someone to go to a foreign country to perform a mission. The person is loyal to the king, and he is happy to do this mission. He readies himself for the trip, but when he comes to the port, he sees the ship departing. He missed boarding the ship by a minute. The next boat will be in a half-year.

He will have to travel by foot through forests and by horse and buggy through long roads. The trip will take months.

He is very disappointed that he came late to the port, and he feels that the long trip isn't part of serving the king. It is something that could have been avoided.

But had the king told him from the onset that he should travel by land and not by sea, he wouldn't be upset with the long route. He would be happy that he

is carrying out the king's wishes.

We must know that wherever we go and whatever happens to us, it is *bashert*. The King sent you there. This is what Hashem wanted. With this awareness, there is no room for regret.

Rebbe Chaim of Tzernovitz zy"l, author of *Be'er Mayim Chaim*, repeated a divine vision he saw one Friday night.

Many *neshamos* stood before the *beis din* in heaven. The *beis din* just informed them that they must return to the world as *gilgulim*. The *neshamos* complained, "We go down to the world, fail in our mission, and then we are sent back down to the world. This cycle keeps on repeating itself. What is the purpose? What will be with us? We don't want to go to the world again. We will probably fail this time around, too."

The court couldn't answer, so they went to a

higher beis din and an even higher beis din, but they didn't know how to respond either.

Finally, the neshamos placed their plea before Hashem Yisbarach, Himself. Hashem told them, "Go down to the world. This time will be different. Hashem's presence has become very concealed in the world, and therefore, when you do bad, the punishment is less severe because the court understands the difficulty of your test. And when you do good, your reward is immense because you chose good despite the concealment.

"But there is one thing you must avoid. If you are cautious with this matter, you have nothing to fear. You must never say, 'I should have...' If you avoid saying those words, you will only gain by going back to *Olam Hazeih*."

This is what we must learn. We have to stop saying, "I should have."

Don't say, "I should have gone there." "I should have been more careful with that." "I should have invested in that stock." Because everything is for the good, and even what you do to yourself due to your choices are also for the best.

If you avoid saying "I should have...", you passed the test of this world.

Benefits of Yesurim

Or Hachayim writes, "All the descriptions of the *parah adumah* represent *dinim* (hardships). It's red, which is the color of harsh *din*. In fact, it must be completely red; it can't even have two black hairs. Even the horns and the hooves have to be red. It may not be black. It certainly can't be white (because white represents *chesed*). Another feature of the *parah adumah* is, אשר לא, עולה עליה עול, it never carried a yoke on its neck. This is because the yoke removes *din*. As Chazal (*Brachos* 5.)

say, יסורין ממרקן כל עוונותיו של אדם, the hardships cleanses from all sins, and sins are *din*. The *parah adumah* has never to have had any hardships, so all the *dinim* are on it, and they were never sweetened through the hardship and toil. Then the cow is burned in a fire, and fire is *din*. All these aspects of *din* become concentrated in the ashes of the *parah adumah*, and this removes the *tumah* from the man who came in contact with a human corpse." In short, the *parah adumah's* ashes represent a strong force of *din* – like a magnetic force – and it

therefore attracts all *dinim* to it. When the ashes are sprinkled on the person who became *tamei*, the *tumah* flees from him. This is because *tumah* is *din*, and the *tumah* gravitates to the force of *din* of the ashes.

This reminds us that when one endures hardships, it mitigates and removes *dinim*. Minor discomfort can save a person from far greater *dinim*, *chalilah*.

Therefore, trust in Hashem and believe that everything is for the good, for it is indeed so.⁵

5. Chazal (*Avos* 4:30) say, ועל כרחך אתה חי... ועל כרחך אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון, "You are alive against your will... and you stand before the heavenly court against your will." I once heard that this refers to someone who isn't happy with his life. He feels, על כרחך אתה חי, "I am alive because I was forced to be alive. But I really don't want to be alive." If one has that attitude, ועל כרחך אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון, you will be brought to court in heaven and judged for that. Because a person should be happy with his life. You must believe that your life is good for you because it is the life Hashem planned for you.

There was a Slonimer chassid who lived in Teveria called Reb Mordechai (Motke) Lider zt'l. From time to time, Reb Motke undertook the very long trip to travel to Slonim, Lithuania, to be

The Meor Einayim (*Lech Lecha*) writes, "If one doesn't find the kindness that follows suffering, the purpose of the hardships was certainly to release him from his sins so he that can merit Olam HaBa. There is no greater kindness than that! Because one moment of pleasure in the

next world is better than the entire Olam HaZeh, with all its pleasures. Also, there is no greater kindness than if through the hardships a person becomes closer to Hashem and becomes more afraid of Him. A wise man should think about these matters."

by his Rebbe, the Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l*. (In those days, this was an extremely long trip.)

Reb Shmuel Salant *zt'l*, the Rav of Yerushalayim, asked him why he takes such long trips, and what would he lack in his *avodas Hashem* if he would remain in Teveria. Reb Motke replied:

The Mishnah (end of *Sotah*) states, משמת ר' מאיר בטלו משלים, "When Reb Meir was *niftar*, it became *batel*, annulled, the people who knew how to tell parables. משמת בן עזאי בטלו שקדים, when ben Azay was *niftar*, it became *batel* truly diligent Torah scholars, who study with *hasmadah*." The Mishnah lists other things that became בטל over time. Then the Mishnah writes, משמת רבן גמליאל הזקן בטל כבוד התורה, ומתה מרהר ופרישות, when Raban Gamliel the elder was *niftar* purity and *prishus* died." (*Prishus* is divesting oneself from unnecessary pleasures.) Notice that in the final statement, it says, מתה מרהר ופרישות, purity and *taharah* died. The Mishnah doesn't say that it became *batel*, as it did in the other statements. Instead, it states that *taharah* and *prishus* died.

Reb Motke explained that this means that perhaps people still have *prishus* and *taharah*, but they do so with a heavy heart, like something they don't really want. Reb Motke said, "I travel to Slonim because there I learn how to have *taharah* and *prishus* with *simchah*. Because also *prishus* should be alive and kept with joy. It shouldn't be dead.

Shabbos Parah

Some *poskim* say that the reading of *parashas Parah* is a Torah obligation.

The Torah (*Bamidbar* 19:21) calls the *parah adumah*, חקת עולם, "an eternal law." How is *parah adumah* eternal? The ashes of the *parah adumah* were still around in the times of the *Amoraim*, and they would use it to purify themselves. But what about our generation? How can we keep *parah adumah* today? The *Aruch HaShulchan* (685:7) answers that the Torah tells us that when we can't make a *parah adumah*, we have a mitzvah to read *parashas Parah*. In this way, the mitzvah is eternal, even today.

The *Avodas Yisrael* says it is alluded to in the words (*Bamidbar* 19:1-2). זאת חקת התורה , אשר צוה ה' לאמר , "this is the rule of the Torah that Hashem commanded to say." This indicates that there is an obligation to read this *parashah* and, וישראלה our saying the *parshah* will be considered

as if we brought the *parah adumah*."

The *Yerushalmi* says, "Parashas Parah is טהרתן של ישראל, the purity of the Jewish nation."

The *Beis Aharon* adds, "One must believe that just as the ashes of the *parah adumah* purify, today, everyone becomes purified when *Parshas Parah* is read — each person according to his level."

The *Sfas Emes* (*Parshas Parah* end 5641) clarifies, "The purity we refer to is purity from sins."

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* proves from the *haftarah* that *parah adumah* is about becoming pure from *aveiros*. The *haftarah* is always based on the weekly Torah reading. This Shabbos the *haftarah* says (*Yechezkel* 36:25), וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל טמאתיכם, "I will throw purifying waters on you, and you will be cleansed from all your impurities," and it refers to purity from sin. What does purity from

sin have to do with *parah adumah*? This proves, says Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen, that reading *parashas Parah* purifies us from *aveiros*.

The Paradox

Shlomo HaMelech said (*Kohes* 7:23), אמרתי אהכמה והיא "I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me." The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 19) elaborates, "Whoever is occupied with the *parah adumah*, from the beginning to the end, he and his clothes become *tamei*. Yet, the *parah adumah* purifies those who are *tamei*! We wonder why *parah adumah* causes tumah to those who handle it when it is itself a purifier should? Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'This is my halachah. You may not question it.' Reb Yitzchak said, Shlomo said I understand the entire Torah, but the *parashah* of *Parah Adumah* is distant from me."

As the Rambam (*Parah Adumah* 5:1) writes, "Whoever deals with the *parah adumah*,

from the beginning to the end, their clothes become *tamei*. It states about the one who slaughters the *parah* and the one who throws in the cedar wood (*Vayikra* 15:13), וכבס בגדיו ורחץ, 'He must immerse his clothes and his flesh.' Regarding the one who burns the *parah adumah* it states (*Bamidbar* 19:8), והשורף, 'The one who burns it shall immerse his clothing in water, 'and it states (*Bamidbar* 19:10), וכבס, 'The one who gathered the ash shall immerse his clothing.' These sources teach us that whoever is involved in the preparation of the *parah adumah*, from the beginning to the end, their clothes become *tamei* and they need to *tovel* and for the sun to set before they become *tahor*."

Yet, *parah adumah* purifies from *tumas meis*, the severest kind of tumah. How can a source of purity cause tumah?

But this shouldn't surprise us, because there

are several aspects of Yiddishkeit that seem like contradictions, and the answer is always that it all depends on the time and place.

One example of this principle is the process of *teshuvah*. There are two conflicting approaches to *teshuvah*, and they are both correct, each at the right time.

The paradox is whether one should do *teshuvah* gradually, grow step by step, or make a singular firm decision to improve his ways and never return to his bad ways again.

These are indeed two approaches, and both are necessary and correct when utilized at the right times.

Another contradiction is humility vs. pride. Once again, both are holy paths, and each is good when used correctly and at the right time.

Teshuvah: Gradual vs. Immediate

In the *yotzros* of *parashas Parah* we say, מִי יֵתֵן טָהוֹר מִטָּמֵא, ⁶לֹא אֶחָד. This can be translated, "How does one become pure? How does one stop sinning? The answer is ⁶לֹא אֶחָד, by saying "No!" once and for always. ⁶לֹא אֶחָד, say "no" once, and you won't need to say no again.

To explain this idea, we share the following:

An alcoholic recognized that his drinking was

6. Literally, it is read as a question: "Who is the one who can make something *tamei* become *tahor*? Isn't it the one Hashem?" Only Hashem can perform this wonder to make something *tamei* and turn it around and make it pure.

We add that the same thing occurs when we do *teshuvah*. Hashem does wonders and removes the impure *aveiros* and makes everything good. ⁶לֹא אֶחָד, only Hashem can do that.

destroying his life, so he decided never to drink again. Around ten in the morning, he became thirsty for a drink, but he controlled himself and didn't take it. At noontime, he started walking towards the bar, his old habits overtaking him. Midway, he reminded himself of his resolve and stopped himself. He wouldn't take a drink, and that was final. He returned home.

He had several other tests that day, but he overcame each challenge. Ten o'clock at night, he told himself, "I had a very good day today. I deserve a drink to celebrate." So he went off to the bar and got drunk.

Tomorrow, if he decides once again to stay clean, he will need to say "no" again. Why? Because his first resolve wasn't strong enough.

But the *teshuvah* we are talking about in the *yotzros* is לא אחר, when one says "no," once and for always.

This is indeed an approach to teshuvah, but there is also the gradual approach.

The Midrash (*Tanchumah, Behaloscha* 10) says, "The Jewish people said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'Ribono shel Olam, You know the great power of the *yetzer hara*... [How can we conquer him?] Hashem replied, 'Send the *yetzer hara* away, step by step in this world, and I will totally remove the *yetzer hara* in the future. Today, improve in one thing; tomorrow, improve a bit more until you acquire a second nature."

This Midrash refers to the gradual approach to *teshuvah*.

When one sets out on becoming a better person, he isn't always able to make one final and firm decision to change. Often, one needs to change gradually, step by step, day after day. If he doesn't give up, he will succeed.

The Beis Avraham of Slonim zy"l, compared this to someone who drinks a cup of wine. It seems like nothing happened. He isn't drunk. He isn't even dizzy. Then he drinks a second cup, and then a third until he's intoxicated. Now he recognizes that the first cup also contributed to the end result. Similarly, when one overcomes the *yetzer hara* once, nothing seems to have changed. He seems to be the same person as before. But it isn't so. Something has changed. If he keeps at it, one step at a time, he will see that he has become a new person.

The *Tanya* (27) teaches:

"Whenever one is victorious over his *yetzer hara*, even for just a short moment...for example, he desires to eat, but he pushes it off for an hour or even for less than an hour, and during that time he studies Torah... Or when one remains quiet and doesn't say what he strongly desires to say...even if it is merely for a brief moment...

it sanctifies him... As Chazal say: 'When a person sanctifies himself a little bit below, Heaven sanctifies him a lot from above.'

So, two things happen when one improves step by step:

(1) Each time he overcomes the *yetzer hara*, he gradually becomes a better person.

(2) Each small step in the right direction is significant because this small deed grants him *siyata dishmaya*. Hashem will sanctify him and help him win over the *yetzer hara*.

Humility vs. Pride

Another paradox is humility and pride. Which approach should one use for avodas Hashem? The answer is that both are important, and each has its place.

An עץ ארז, cedarwood, and an איזב, hyssop grass, are thrown into the burning *parah adumah*.

Rashi (*Bamidbar* 19:6) explains, "The cedar is the tallest tree, and the hyssop is the smallest plant. This hints that someone who was haughty and sinned should make himself small like hyssop, and he will be forgiven."

The ideal of humility is also discussed in the *yotzros* of Shabbos Parah. As we say, לבל יתגאה מתגאה כארז, "One shouldn't be proud like a cedar tree."

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos* 33:) teaches: The ashes of the *parah adumah* represent humility, the water that is sprinkled alludes to tears. When there is humility, regret and tears, one becomes purified from all his sins.

However, there is a place for holy pride in Yiddishkeit, too.

As the Beis Yisrael of Gur *zt"l* said. "Misguided humility is worse than *gaavah*."

We must know that Hashem cherishes all our good deeds.

This is the reason the *parah adumah* included ארז, cedarwood, which represents *gaavah*. Sometimes that is needed to become pure. Yet, there is also the ארבה, the hyssop grass, which represents humility. This is because there are times for modesty, and there are times when you should employ some *gaavah d'kedushah*, to consider yourself special. When one figures out when and where to use each attribute (pride and humility), he has attained the purity that the *parah adumah* represents.

The Rizhener *zt'l* explains that if a person focuses on his qualities and good deeds, he can become a *baal gaavah*. On the other hand, if he focuses on his faults and sins, he can become sad. So what should he do? The answer is that he has to alternate according to his circumstances. If he feels

slightly arrogant, he should focus on his faults so he can be humble. And if he feels deficient and insignificant, he should think about his qualities and realize his importance.

As it states (*Divrei HaYamim* 2, 17:6), וַיִּגְבַּהּ לָבוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי ה', "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem."

The Rizhiner said that this lesson is hinted at in *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 4:7):

הֲלֹא אִם תֵּיטֵב, if you will focus on your good deeds, שָׂאתָ you can become a *baal gaavah*. וְאִם לֹא תֵיטֵב, but if you focus on your bad deeds, לִפְתָּח חֲטָאתָ רֹבֵץ you might become sad. So what

should a person focus on? The solution is, נַע וְגַד תַּהֲדִיחַ, בארץ, to waver back and forth with these two thoughts, according to your need.⁷

For *avodas Hashem*, one must know how to alternate and use the correct attribute at the right time. There are moments arrogance is Hashem's service, and there are times for humility; there are times for the gradual approach to *teshuvah*, and there are times when one should say "no" once and for all

This is represented by the *parah adumah* that

7. The Noam Elimelech writes, "Hashem Yisbarach rejected the tall mountains and chose to give the Torah on Har Sinai, the lowest of them all. This teaches us, to always be humble. But humility can lead to depression, and that is a great impediment to *avodas Hashem*. Therefore, the Torah warns that one must always be happy, because the *Shechinah* doesn't reside where there is sadness. This is the meaning of, אֲדַל מוֹעֵד, and *moed* is happiness, because *moed* means Yom Tov..."

This Noam Elimelech is related to our discussion. One needs humility, but one also needs happiness. One should learn how to incorporate both into his *avodas Hashem*.

causes both *tumah* and *taharah*. The *parah adumah* reminds us that everything has its place. The same deed can be in one place the root of purity and at other times the root of *tumah*. The wise need to find the attribute that is appropriate for each situation.

Torah

The *pasuk* says (*Bamidbar* 19:19), והזה הטהר על הטמא ביום השלישי וביום השביעי... וטהר "The pure person shall sprinkle onto the *tamei* person on the third day and on the seventh day...and then he will become *tahor*."

Tzaddikim have said that the third and seventh day represent Torah. The third day represents Torah, as the Gemara (*Shabbos* 88.) says, "Baruch Hashem Who gave us a Torah of three (Torah, *Neviim*, *Kesuvim*) to a nation of three (*kohanim*, *Leviim*, *Yisraelim*) by the third (Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the third child) on the third day (of *shloshes yemei hagbalah*) and in the third month (*Sivan*)."

The sprinkling on the third day refers to Torah because Torah purifies us.

The sprinkling on the seventh day also represents Torah, as Chazal say, "All opinions agree that the Torah was given on *Shabbos*."

This tells us that the purity of *parah adumah*, which in our generation means to be pure from sin, comes through studying Torah.

The Or HaChaim Hakadosh teaches: A non-kosher kitchen utensil (pots, pans, etc.) becomes kosher by purging it in boiling water. An even more potent form of kashering is cleansing the utensil in a fire. Torah is fire as it states (*Yirmiyahu* 23:29), הלא כה דברי, כאש, "Behold My words are like fire," and it burns away all the *tumah*.

The Or HaChaim (*Ki Sisa*) writes: "Torah protects, forgives, and increases one's merits. Even if one has many sins, when one

studies Tora it cleanses him."

There are many facets to Torah. There is Mishnayos, Gemara, Mussar and Chassidus etc., and each must be learned in its right place and time.

Years ago, there were two ways to heat an oven, either with coal or with straw. Straw creates a larger fire, but the straw is consumed quickly, and the stove becomes cold again. Coals produce a smaller fire, but the heat lasts longer. Tzaddikim said that this describes the difference between studying *mussar* and studying Gemara. *Mussar* inspires the person like a raging fire, but the inspiration soon dissipates. But when one studies Gemara, the fire can remain burning for a long time.

All parts of Torah are important. One needs Mishnayos, one needs *mussar* and *chassidus*. But we must remember the importance and the purity

that comes from Gemara. What one gains from toiling in Gemara can't be substituted with other parts of Torah.

Rebbe Shlomo Karliner *zy" a* said that Gemara comes from the word *gumri*, coals, since the Gemara is like burning coals that burn away all *tumah* and ignites our hearts to Hashem.

Rebbe Shmuel Kaminka *zy" a* once spoke to his students about the importance of studying a *blatt* Gemara. He said, "With a *blatt* Gemara, one comes out of the *blotta* (the mud, meaning the *yetzer hara*)."

One of his students was inspired by this counsel and quickly went into the adjacent room to find a Gemara to study. He didn't find a Gemara, but he found a Mishnayos. He studied a chapter and then returned to hear more Torah from Reb Shmuel Kaminka. Rebbe Shmuel said, "He thinks he can cleanse himself with a

chapter of Mishnayos like the purity that comes from a *daf* Gemara."

And, yet, as we wrote, all parts of the Torah are needed. As the lesson of the parah adumah that we mentioned above, there is a time and place for each attribute and each part of Torah.

Emunah

The reward for believing in Hashem is enormous.

Chazal say (*Gittin* 57), "The descendants of Haman taught Torah in Bnei Brak." How did Haman merit this? The Shem MiShmuel explains: It was a reward for Haman's single moment of *emunah*.

The Midrash (*Esther Rabba* 10:5) says that when Haman was leading Mordechai through the streets of Shushan, he said (*Tehillim* 30:8), ה' ברצונך העמדת להררי עוז הסתרת פניך הייתי נבהל. Metzudas Dovid explains, "Now I see that everything is from You. When You wanted

me, You gave me greatness and power. And when You conceal Your face from me because of sin, I was afraid of the upcoming *tzaros*."

Chazal tell us that Haman said these words. At that moment, he recognized that the humiliation he was enduring came from Hashem and that when he had honor, it was also from Hashem. It was a righteous thought, a moment of *emunah* – albeit for a moment –therefore, he merited having descendants who taught Torah in public.

Every year, Parshas Parah, Rebbe Henoch of Alaxander zy" a told a story that the Chozeh of Lublin zy" a related:

During the era of the Rishonim, it was common for the Catholic priests to summon Yidden to a religious debate in front of a tribunal. Their motive was to prove their religion and legally force the Yidden to accept it.

A priest once came into a Jewish village and, with permission from the local government, announced that someone should come forward to debate with him. This time, the loser of the debate would be thrown into a river and face their death. The court said, "There will be no second chances and no appeals. Whoever loses the debate will be drowned immediately."

The Yidden were very afraid and davened to Hashem for salvation.

The date of the debate was quickly approaching. No one wanted to be chosen to challenge the priest because everyone was scared that the Yid would lose the debate and be thrown into the river.

A simple tailor volunteered to take on the contest. This tailor was unlearned – which made his chance of success against the scholarly priest slim, but since no one wanted to take on the

challenge, the community had no choice other than to accept his offer and pray for his success.

When the priest saw the tailor standing before him, he was confident that he would easily win this debate, and so he said to the tailor, "You can ask the first question." The tailor fearlessly said, "What does *אני יודע* mean?"

The priest replied, "I don't know."

The tailor raised his hands in triumph and shouted, "I won! I won the debate! The priest doesn't know." All the Yidden that were there cheered loudly.

The jury promptly lifted the priest and drowned him in the nearby river. They didn't listen to the priest's shouts and excuses because the instructions were that there be no appeals. The loser was to be drowned immediately.

The Yidden rejoiced. Their tefillos were answered. They asked the

simple tailor how he thought of this clever question. The tailor replied, "I studied a Yiddish translation on *Rashi*. *Rashi* writes איני יודע, and the translator writes "*ich veis nisht*" (I don't know). So I figured that if the learned author of this *sefer* didn't know the meaning of איני יודע, then this goy won't know the answer, either."

The Chozeh told this story to show how a simple, unlearned tailor can win a debate against a learned priest because for *emunah* one doesn't need wisdom.

Simplicity is the key factor of *emunah*.

Rashi writes (*Bamidbar* 19:2), "The Satan and the nations of the world ask the Yidden, 'What is this mitzvah (of *parah adumah*)? What are the reasons for it? The Torah writes חוקה, it is a law. It is My decree, and you don't have permission to think about it.'" We don't understand the mitzvah, but we keep it without understanding. This is the meaning of *emunah peshutah*, to believe in Hashem and His mitzvos, even when we don't understand.