

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Behar



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Behar

Shemittah

This year is Shemittah. The laws of *shemittah* are discussed in this week's parashah. (25:3-4), שש שנים תזרע שדך...ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ, "For six years you may sow your field...but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land..." The *Chinuch* (mitzvah 84) explains that this mitzvah reminds us that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

Shemittah also teaches us that *parnassah* and sustenance come from Hashem, not from our hands' work. How else did the millions of people who lived in Eretz Yisrael survive if all the fields were

left barren every seventh year?

The Torah discusses this predicament. (25:20) וכי תאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעית, הן לא נזרע ולא נאסף את תבואתינו "If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we will not sow and not gather in our crops!"

Hashem answers, וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה השישית ועשת את התבואה לשלש השנים "I will command My blessings for you in the sixth year, and the crops will be sufficient for three years." In other words, Hashem replies that *parnassah* comes from Hashem, not from the work of our hands. Therefore, there is no reason to worry. Hashem has ways to support us.¹

1. Chassidim traveling home after spending an inspirational Shabbos with Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl *zt"l* were repeating

the *diorei Torah* they heard. "We never had such a good Shabbos," they said.

An ignorant chassid nodded his head in agreement. "You're right. I never had such an inspirational trip like this one."

The chassidim wondered what he meant because they knew that he couldn't follow the Rebbe's deep *diorei Torah*.

He told them about the conversation he had with the Rebbe. "The Rebbe asked me to tell him my *seder hayom* (daily schedule). I told the Rebbe that the first thing I do each day is go to the marketplace. When I'm finished with my business, I go to shul to daven. Rebbe Mordechai told me that it isn't proper to do so. He insisted that I should begin the day with tefillah. I told the Rebbe that I would lose too much business. He told me the following story:

"There was a *melamed* who couldn't find any children to teach near his home. The only position he found was to teach the children of a wealthy man who lived far away.

"He went there, and after half a year, he put the money he earned – 300 silver rubles and 80 *groschen* – into his pouch, and guarding the pouch very carefully set out on the long journey home.

"Friday arrived and, he was still on the road, so he stopped at an inn for Shabbos. What should he do with the money? A half-year's wages is not something to take lightly. He was tempted to keep the money on him throughout Shabbos, but he decided that it wasn't proper to do so, and with a quaking heart, he entrusted his money to the hotelier. If the hotelier wasn't honest, a half-year's work far from home would be for naught.

The entire Shabbos he wondered whether he did the right thing, and if he will ever see his money again.

"Immediately after Shabbos, he asked the hotelier for his pouch and breathed a sigh of relief when the hotelier gave it to him.

"But there was still a possibility that the hotelier stole some coins. So, he sat down at a table in the inn's dining hall and counted out the money. He began with the rubles. He stacked them on a table

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* got married when he was fourteen years old, and every day his *rebbeztin* would go to her father-in-law, Rebbe Mordechai of Zvhil, and he would give her some money to buy whatever they needed.

One day, Rebbe Shlomke told his wife, "We believe that our *parnassah* isn't from my father, but from Hashem. Therefore, I decided not to take our daily allowance from my

father. Let's trust in Hashem, and Hashem will support us."

A few days passed, and there was no food in the home.

Rebbe Shlomke told his wife, "Perhaps I was wrong not to accept help from my father. Hashem chose to support us that way, so who am I to say I want my *parnassah* to come in a different way."

and counted out exactly three hundred silver rubles, the amount that should be there. Then he began counting eighty copper *groshen*.

"Someone saw him counting the *groshen* and shook his head in disapproval. 'If the hotelier is dishonest, he would have stolen silver rubles. If he didn't, you can be certain he didn't steal the copper *groshen* either.'

"The Rebbe concluded, 'Every morning, Hashem returns your *neschama*. Don't you see that He is taking care of you? He is caring for your life, your health, for all your needs. If He cares for these, you can be certain that he will supply you with *parnassah* as well. There is nothing to fear. Daven early in the morning, and then go about your business. Hashem will support you in this way too.'

The chassidim listened to this story in astonishment and agreed that he had an even better Shabbos than they.

So she went to her father-in-law for some money. He said, "I noticed you weren't here for a few days, so take a silver ruble this time."

Later that day, two wealthy chassidim came to visit Rebbe Mordechai of Zvhil and then went to Rebbe Shlomke's home to wish him mazal tov on his recent *chasunah*. While they spoke, one of them took out a silver ruble and played with it. Rebbe Shlomke understood that he planned to give him the ruble as a *chasunah* gift. But when they finished their conversation, the man forgot that he wanted to give the gift and returned the coin to his pocket.

Rebbe Shlomke understood that if they hadn't taken money from his father, they would have received that silver ruble from the wealthy chassid. He realized that Hashem would indeed support them, even if they didn't go to their father for the

allowance. *Parnassah* comes from Hashem, and Hashem has many ways to help us.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

There was a person who had a problem with his eyes; he saw everything slanted. He lived in a small town, and he thought the houses were collapsing because he saw them on a slant. But they were tiny houses, and even if they fell, it wouldn't be a great tragedy.

Then he moved to a large city with skyscrapers. He shouted, "Be careful. Run away! The buildings are falling."

People panicked and started running away.

One wise person said, "There is no reason to run. All we need is an eye doctor. Is there an eye doctor here?"

People didn't understand how an eye doctor would stop the

buildings from falling. An eye doctor came forward, checked his eyes, and discovered that his eyes were the source of the problem. The problem wasn't with the buildings, but rather with his eyesight.

The *nimshal* is, that people have crooked eyes. They panic, they don't see how they will support themselves, etc., but it is all because they don't see matters correctly. When you see the world correctly, and know that *parnassah* is from Hashem, you will never worry.

When the Or HaChaim HaKadosh *zy'a* lived in Morocco, he taught his community, "The week has six workdays. It's sufficient to work on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Leave Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday for Torah. I promise you that your *parnassah* won't suffer because of it."

His community followed his advice, and

indeed, they had *parnassah* just like before when they worked all week long. They saw that they could spend a substantial amount of time learning Torah each week, and Hashem would support them. This went on for many years.

When The Or HaChaim moved to Eretz Yisrael, the Moroccan community gradually began to work more. Eventually, they were back to a six-day workweek.

But they admitted that the extra working days didn't bring them greater financial success. They were just as well off when they followed the Or HaChaim's counsel *הוי מממעט בעסק ועסק בתורה*, to work less and to study Torah. They realized that *parnassah* is from Hashem, and Hashem can support them when they work less, too.

Ona'as Devarim

This week also discusses the prohibition of *ona'as*

devarim, causing pain and distress to your fellow man with your words. (25:17) ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלקיך, "Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow, and you shall fear Hashem..." Rashi writes, "This *pasuk* prohibits אונאת דברים, that one shouldn't harm his fellow man, or give him bad advice."

Sefer HaChinuch (*mitzvah* 338) writes, "It is proper for people to be careful that their words do not insult others, even indirectly. The Torah is very stringent with this prohibition. For many people, painful words hurt more than

financial harm. One must also be cautious not to harm children with words (except when it is necessary for education purposes). This applies to one's own children, as well, and to all people in his household. Those who are soft towards children and do not cause them sorrow will merit life, blessings, and honor."²

Once, a child was noisily running about the Chazon Ish's room, disturbing everyone present. One of the people present told the child, "If you don't stop, I will tell your *rebbe* in cheder."

2. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59) says, "אונאת דברים, to hurt people with words is worse than אונאת ממון, cheating people financially. Shaming someone is comparable to murdering him. Three groups of people go to Gehinom and never leave: Someone who commits adultery, someone who embarrasses his friend in public, and someone who calls his friend a derogatory nickname. Those who embarrass others in public lose their share in Olam HaBa. It is better to be thrown into a furnace than embarrass your friend in public. One must be especially cautious from אונאת אשתו, from offending his wife because her tears come quickly, so the punishment comes quickly, too. All sins are punished by messengers [angels] besides אונאת דברים [which Hashem punishes Himself]."

The Chazon Ish told him not to say that to a child. "A child is distressed when you say such things, and it a transgression of לא תונו איש את עמיתו, the prohibition of saying harsh, unkind words to one's fellow man."

The Midrash (this week's *parashah*) writes, "Rebbi made a *seudah* for his students and served them soft tongue and hard tongue. The students ate the soft tongue. Rebbi said, 'My children, also when you speak, choose the soft tongue.'"

The Yerei'im teaches, "Just as there is *onaas devarim* (the aveirah of harming others with words), there is also *onaah* with facial

expressions." This means you must look at people respectfully and with admiration, not scornfully and with contempt. Your fellow man can read your body language, and even if you speak kindly, you will be punished for displaying unfriendly facial expressions. This is also part of the prohibition of לא תונו איש את עמיתו.³

The *Chinuch* writes, "It is impossible to list every example of embarrassment and affront that one should avoid, so everyone must be wise and cautious as he understands... Chazal gave us several examples [of *onaas devarim*] to understand just how careful we must be."⁴

3. People say (*Bereishis* 49:6), כי באפם הרגו איש, it's possible to kill someone with your nose. If you turn up your nose in a derogatory manner, you killed your fellow man's mood, and sometimes you ruined his life.

4. As a child, Reb Avraham Fisher *shlita* was once playing with the cats outside Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil's *zt'l* home. The Rebbe came out and warned him to be careful not to hurt the cats.

We must be compassionate even to animals, and all the more

never cause our fellow man distress or heartache.

In Yerushalayim, there lived a tall, overweight, ignoramus called Yaakov. He wasn't welcome anywhere. He wasn't even permitted to use the local *mikvehs* because he had a foul odor. But he was welcome at Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil's home. Rebbe Shlomke said, "If the people of Yerushalayim would permit Reb Yaakov to use the *mikveh*, the Yidden in Europe wouldn't suffer so much [in the Holocaust]."

Rebbe Shlomke's home was open to all. People said that the only thing that showed that he was the *baal habayis* was that when people came in, he would ask them whether they wanted bread with jam.

Once, a person came to Rebbe Shlomke's home, and Rebbe Shlomke offered him bread and jam. The slightly deranged man retorted, "You can eat bread and jam! I want pita with eggs."

Rebbe Shlomke went to the grocery to buy pita and eggs. (This was perhaps the only time Rebbe Shlomke went to the store.) He fried the eggs for his guest, and when the man finished his meal he said, "And what about the jam?"

Rebbe Shlomke brought out the jam and asked him how much he wanted.

"The entire jar," the man replied, and Rebbe Shlomke gave it to him.

There was a *bachur* from Chevron who slept in Rebbe Shlomke's home. He asked the Rebbe to wake him up at six in the morning.

"I can't do that," the Rebbe said.

The *bachur* woke up at six o'clock and saw the Rebbe was already sitting at his table, learning Torah.

The following night, the *bachur* asked Rebbe Shlomke once again, to awaken him at six in the morning.

"I can't do that," Rebbe Shlomke replied.

The *bachur* again awoke up at six and saw that Rebbe Shlomke was already awake.

The *bachur* asked Rebbe Shlomke why he doesn't wake him, since

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak Weiss *zt'l* (the Rav of Yerushalayim and author of *Minchas Yitzchak*) was married three times. This is his inspiring story, which he himself related:

When he was young, a *shidduch* was suggested to him. The girl and her family lived far away. It was hard for the parents to travel there, so they sent a reliable *shaliach* to check

he sees that the Rebbe is anyway awake at that time. Rebbe Shlomke handed him some money and said, "Buy yourself an alarm clock if you wish, but I won't wake you. Everyone feels a bit uncomfortable upon awakening in the morning. Even those who want to wake up early feel uneasy the moment they wake up, and I don't want to cause another Yid distress, not even for a short moment."

A rav came to the *tish* of Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* for the first time to experience what it was like. He saw many poor and bitter people seated around Rebbe Shlomke's table. One guest had a long-time complaint that the other guests get to take *cholent* before him, and by the time it is his turn he receives a smaller portion than they received. Rebbe Shlomke told him that this Shabbos he can take *cholent* first, so he will definitely get enough. The guest filled his plate with *cholent* and then, he began filling another dish. The other guests were upset and demanded that he allow them to take *cholent*. He ignored them and continued filling his plates. They rebuked him again, and then the poor man did something disgusting. He spit into the pot, making the *cholent* inedible for everyone else.

The visiting rav watched this episode and said to Rebbe Shlomke, "Is this a *tish*? We didn't hear any *divrei Torah*. All we saw was bad *middos*."

Rebbe Shlomke replied, "We can learn a lot from this *tish*. We learn that even when something doesn't go the way we want, we accept it and remain silent."

out the girl and her family and determine whether the girl was a fitting match for their son. The *shaliach* returned and said that it was a good match, and Reb Yaakov Yitzchak was engaged to be married to that girl.

When the wedding date drew near, the Weiss family traveled to the *kallah's* town for the *chasunah*. When Reb Yaakov Yitzchak's mother saw the *kallah* for the first time, she was very disappointed. It wasn't a proper match for her son at all. She wanted to terminate the *shidduch*. (According to halachah, it was permissible to break this *shidduch* because the *shaliach* was sent to arrange a fitting *shidduch*, and this wasn't suitable at all.) Nevertheless, Reb Yaakov Yitzchak said, "Perhaps I will divorce her with time, but right now, I don't want to embarrass her."

They were married and had one son, Reb Berish. Unfortunately, his wife was killed in a war. Reb

Yaakov Yitzchak married the daughter of the Rav of Vasloy *zy'a*. When she was *niftarah*, he married the daughter of the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz *zy'a*, but he didn't have children from either of them. His only child was Reb Berish, born to the woman he didn't want to shame.

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak said, "Doctors told me that it was impossible for me to have children. Berish was a miracle. I'm certain that I merited this miracle as a reward for not embarrassing a Jewish girl."

Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer's went to visit a sick friend. Rebbe Pinchas had his friend promise that after his demise he would come back down to this world to tell him what happened to him in heaven.

After his friend's demise, he appeared to Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer and said, "Throughout my lifetime, I never caused pain or

distress to anyone. It was therefore decreed that I would die without pain.

"When my soul was leaving my body, I heard my doctor say that I need to sleep deeply for a very long time. I didn't realize that this sleep was my death. Then I heard the doctor say, "Place him on the floor. He needs to warm up." I was placed on the floor, as is done to the dead, but I still thought I was alive.

"Then the doctor told people to take me outdoors to get some air. This was actually my funeral, but I didn't realize that. Until I was buried, I didn't know that I had died. It was a painless and sorrow-free death. After I was buried, *malachim* came to punish me. However, since I never hurt another Yid, *malachim* of *rachamim* arrived and brought me straight to Gan Eden."

This tzaddik never caused pain to his fellow

man in his lifetime and was rewarded that he didn't have pain at his demise or in his grave.

The generous deeds of *tzedakah* of Rebbe Shayale Kerestirer are well known. A lot of money passed through his hands, but he didn't take any of the money for himself. He gave it all to the needy. Once he was traveling to Tzanz to be at the Tzanzer Rebbe's grave on the *yahrtzeit*, the 25th of Nisan. Rebbe Shayale was weak (it was a few days before he was *niftar*, on the 3rd of Iyar). The *gaba'im* thought it would be easier for Rebbe Shayele to travel in a car rather than by horse and buggy, but Rebbe Shayale refused, saying, "It's a shame to use Yiddishe *gelt* for that."

Many people were at the Tzanzer Rav's *kever*, and someone accidentally stepped on Rebbe Shayela's foot. The Rebbe was in great pain, and the *gab'im* wanted to order a car for the ride back, but once

again Rebbe Shayela said, "It's a shame to waste Yiddishe gelt on that," and he traveled back in a horse and buggy in immense pain.

Back in Kerestir, he was very weak. He said, "Don't call a doctor because it won't help." He explained, "There were Rebbes and rabbanim in Tzanz who were jealous when they saw my entourage and that people pushed to get close to me. Their *ayin hara* caused me to be weak."

Rebbe Shayela added, "Last year in Tzanz, I also received an *ayin hara*. But we had trouble entering

Hungary, which annulled the *ayin hara*." (The border police stopped Reb Shayale's entourage and caught several of them carrying money illegally over the border. Rebbe Shayela's distress from that episode saved him from the *ayin hara*.)

One gains from distress. It can cure *ayin hara* as well as many other illnesses and problems. So, although it is a severe *aveirah* to insult or harm your fellow man if you are on the receiving end of shame and insult, recognize that it is for your benefit. It will save you from much greater problems.⁵

5. Rebbe Shayela Kerestirer *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah *hachnasas orchim*.

It states (*Breishis* 4:3-4), וישע ה' אל הבל ואל מנחתו ואל קין ואל מנחתו לא שעה. Rebbe Shayale explained, וישע means שעה, hour. וישע ה' אל הבל means there is a שעה, a time, for הבל פיהם, for Torah and *tefillah*. One set times for when he studies Torah and when davens, and it isn't necessary the entire day. However, ואל קין, which קייען in Yiddish means chewing, לא שעה, there is no designated time. One can't tell a hungry person, "I have a certain time when I do *hachnasas orchim* and that time passed, so I can't help you now." Rather, for קין to give food for Yidden, לא שעה, be available 24 hours a day to help the hungry.

Sefiras Ha'Omer

The topic of yearning and desire leads us to the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer*. The *Sefer HaChinuch* (306) writes, "We are obligated to count the *omer*...until the day we receive the Torah to demonstrate our strong desire for this special day... It can be compared to an enslaved person who counts the days leading up to his freedom. He is always counting: 'When will I be freed?' Counting demonstrates yearning and desire to reach that time."⁶

The Midrash states:

When the Yidden left
Mitzrayim, Moshe

Rabbeinu told the nation that they would serve Hashem at Har Sinai. The nation asked, "When will that be?"

Moshe told them it would be in fifty days, and they counted the days. The Ra'n (*Pesachim* 28.) writes that our *sefiras ha'omer* is to commemorate the counting of the Yidden in the desert when they aspired to *matan Torah*.

There is a great lesson here. It teaches us that we should continue to yearn and desire even when we fall from our levels. Let's consider the fifty days between *yetzias Mitzrayim*

6. The Chinuch asks, if we are counting to show our anticipation for Shavuos, why don't we count how many days are left until it is Shavuos? Why do we count how many days passed?

He answers that in the beginning of *sefiras ha'omer*, there are many days until Shavuos. If one were to say, "There are forty-nine days until Shavuos and mattan Torah" this would distress him. It will be hard for him to wait so long for this desired day. Therefore, we count the days that passed. It is easier for us to count that way. And since we began the count counting the days that passed, we count all days of *sefiras ha'omer* in this manner.

and *matan Torah*. They weren't all glorious days. They were full of spiritual ups and downs.

It states (*Shemos* 17:3-4), וילן העם על משה ויאמר למה זה העליתנו ממצרים להמית אתי ואת בני ואת מקני בצמא, "The people complained against Moshe and said, 'Why did bring us up from Mitzrayim, to kill me and my children and my livestock through thirst?'"

Instead of trusting in Hashem, they cried and complained until Moshe feared for his life. He said עוד מעט וסקלוני, "A bit more and they will stone me!"

There were other negative episodes in the desert during those forty-nine days between *yetzias Mitzrayim* and *matan Torah*.

Amalek attacked the nation in Refidim. The *Yalkut Shimoni* (17:263) writes, אין רפידים אלא רפיון ידים לפי שרפו ידיהם מדברי תורה לכך בא השונא עליהם, "The translation of Refidim is weakness, and it

implies that the nation was negligent with studying Torah. This is the reason why Amalek came."

They even sinned in the Yam Suf as it states (*Tehillim* 106:7), וימרו על ים בים סוף, "They rebelled at the sea, at the Yam Suf."

It wasn't all glorious; they had many spiritual downfalls. Yet, they counted each day towards *matan Torah*. Let this be a lesson for us that we should never stop yearning. Even if we are not acting exactly as we should, don't lose hope and never stop pining for a time that we will merit to serve Hashem properly.

Hashgachah Pratis

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* would say, "When you experience *hashgachah pratis*, tell it to others! Let people know Hashem's wonders."

On this note, we share a *hashgachah pratis* story. The

purpose of telling this story is to praise Hashem and teach us to notice *hashgachah pratis* in our lives.

A wealthy person in Bnei Brak lived on the third floor of an apartment building. He was getting older, and it was hard for him to climb the three sets of stairs each time he came home, so he had an elevator installed in his building. He agreed with the neighbors that they wouldn't have to pay for the installation of the elevator, but if the elevator breaks down, everyone would chip in to pay for the repairs.

Once, the buttons that operate the elevator doors broke. An elevator technician fixed it, and everyone in the building paid their share. It was a significant sum.

The wealthy person was *niftar* a couple of years ago. Shortly after his *peterih*, the elevator broke down again. This time the doors opened and closed, but the elevator

wouldn't move from its place. The doors worked, but everything else was broken.

The neighbors realized it would cost a lot of money to fix it. Since no one in the building really needed the elevator (the one who needed it wasn't alive anymore), they decided that the elevator would remain out of order in the meantime.

The wealthy man's first *yahrtzeit* was approaching, and his family planned to have a *yahrtzeit seudah* in his old apartment. The rich man's son felt that they should fix the elevator since many guests will come, including rabbanim and respectable people. He ordered a mechanic to look at the elevator.

The mechanic opened the door and found a child inside!

A few hours earlier, this child was playing with the elevator's buttons, opening and closing the doors, when suddenly the doors

closed and wouldn't open again. The child shouted and cried, but no one heard him. The mechanic came just in time to save the child's life.

(The mechanic never fixed the elevator. When the wealthy man's son heard the outrageous amount it would cost to fix it, he decided to forgo the luxury. So, the mechanic came primarily to save the child and put a lock on the elevator so that such stories shouldn't happen again.)

When we hear this story, our hearts shout out, "How great are Your ways, Hashem!" Indeed, miracles happen to us all the time, we just need to get into the habit of recognizing them.

In *parashas Lech Lechah*, the Torah tells how Avraham won a war against four mighty armies. Chazal say that Avraham threw earth at the armies, and the earth miraculously turned into arrows.

The people of Sedom witnessed this miracle, but

in *parashas* וירא we find them sinning and acting corruptly. Reb Eliyahu Lopian *zt'l* learned from this that one can witness great wonders and *hashgachah pratis* and remain the same.

The solution is to bring the awareness from the mind to the heart. As Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz *zt'l* taught, וידעת היום והשיבות אל לבבך, bring the awareness of your mind to your heart because the distance between mind and heart is greater than the distance between heaven and earth

Desire

It states (*Tehillim* 105:3), "Rejoice the hearts, those who yearn for Hashem." The *pasuk* doesn't say, "Rejoice the hearts of those who *serve* Hashem," rather, "Rejoice the hearts of those who *want* to serve Hashem." Because to want to serve Hashem is the greatest level.

The Noam Elimelech (*Vayeira* ד"ה או יאמר פירוש הפסוקים) writes, "Hashem's primary will is that a person should *desire* to do His will. The main service is the heart."

The Shem MiShmuel (*Korach* 7765) writes, "My father *zt'l* [author of *Avnei Nezer*] told me that if a person desires Torah and mitzvos, he won't go to Gehinom. And if he does go to Gehinom, I guarantee that he will fly out of there like an arrow."

Among the praises of Avraham Avinu found in the Torah are his *hachnasas orchim* and that he passed the test of *akeidas Yitzchak*. Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen *zt'l* notes that both episodes are more about Avraham's desire and less about his actual deeds. Avraham didn't really perform *hachnasas orchim* with the *malachim* because *malachim* don't eat! And a *malach* told Avraham that he shouldn't sacrifice Yitzchak, so *akeidas Yitzchak* didn't really occur, either. So, we see that

Avraham is praised for *wanting* and *trying* to perform these mitzvos. This is because the yearning of the heart is the primary *avodas Hashem*.

The Midrash (*Mishlei* ch.12) says, "Whoever lies on his bed and thinks, 'Tomorrow I will do a *chesed* for *ploni*,' will merit rejoicing with the *tzaddikim* in Olam HaBa." He earns Olam HaBa for *wanting* to do a deed of kindness, even if he wasn't able to actually do so. It's the good intentions that are most important.

The Midrash (*Shmuel Rabsa* 3) tells, A *bas kol* announced, "A child will soon be born, he will be named Shmuel, and he will be a *navi*." All parents in that era called their newborn sons Shmuel, hoping that he would be the child destined to be the *navi*.

And an amazing thing happened. All children named Shmuel merited prophecy at least once

during their lives. The Chida said that this is implied in the words (*Tehillim* 99:6), שמואל בקוראי שמו, which implies, "Since they were called Shmuel, they merited prophecy."

Only one Shmuel (the child of Chanah and Elkanah)

became the *navi* the *bas kol* intended. Why did all other Shmuel's merit prophecy? It is because the parents wanted, hoped, and prayed that they should merit a child a *navi*, and it occurred. Their desires came to be.⁷

7. There was a chassid who wanted with all his heart to serve Hashem, but always failed. He said to his Rebbe, the Nesivos Shalom *zt'l*, "I think when I am *niftar*, they will write on my tombstone, 'Here lies the aspiring person (בעל השאיפות).'"

The Nesivos Shalom told him, "If I see a tombstone in a cemetery inscribed, 'Here lies the *baal hashe'ifos*,' I will stop there to stay a few chapters of *Tehillim*."

Two people were on a mountain. One was walking up and the other was walking down. Initially, it appeared that the person on top of the mountain is higher. However, soon, the one on top was at the bottom and the one at the bottom reached the top. This is because the level isn't as important as where one is headed. One's plans and desires are most important.

There were some rooms called *lishkos* built alongside the walls of the Beis HaMikdash. Some of the rooms had the holiness of the Beis HaMikdash and some didn't. It wasn't the location of the rooms that determined the status of the rooms. Sometimes, a room was in the area of the Beis HaMikdash, yet it wasn't holy, and there were rooms that were outside the perimeter of the Beis HaMikdash and they were holy. Its holiness was determined where the door opened to.

The Mishnah (*Maaser Sheini* 3:8) states, "A *lishkah* built within the area of the Beis HaMikdash but its door opens up outside the Beis

Growth from the Struggles

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A father told his son, "There's a great king who lives far away from us, and I want you to have the privilege of meeting him."

The son set out on the long journey to meet with the great king, but after travelling many days, there was still no sign that he was getting closer. "Maybe I should give up," he thought. But then he told himself, "I came so far. I'm certainly near."

He kept on traveling until he saw ahead of him many armed soldiers. He was afraid of them, so he returned home.

His father told him, "When you saw the soldiers you were very near to the king's palace."

The *nimshal* is that people strive to connect with the King of the world, but after many days and years of trying, there is often a feeling of distance. They didn't attain the connection they sought. They are ready to give up, but they tell themselves, "I tried for so long; I am

HaMikdash, that room doesn't have the holiness of the Beis HaMikdash. However, even if the room was built outside the Beis HaMikdash, but the doors open to the Beis HaMikdash, that room is holy like the Beis HaMikdash..."

This tells us that it isn't so much where one is, rather where one is heading.

Reb Shalom Shwadron *zt'l* would teach this Mishnah in his *drashos* and explained that if one works outside the beis medresh but is always looking and yearning to be in the beis medresh, it is like he is always in the beis medresh. But if a person is in the beis medresh, but he wishes he could be outside the beis medresh, it is like he is outside.

certainly closer than before. I'll keep on trying."

But then there are tests. It becomes tough for him to serve Hashem. He might even be tempted with *aveiros*. The person becomes afraid, despairs, and gives up. "Apparently, *avodas Hashem* isn't for me," they say. They don't know that at those difficult moments, they were right before Hashem's palace. If they

pass these tests, they will find the sweet holiness they sought for so long.⁸

We try to avoid tests, as we pray every day, ואל תביאנו "Don't bring me to a test" however when a test does confront you, don't lose hope. Don't feel that you are on a low level. The tests are for our good. They are opportunities for growth and attaining great levels.

8. It states (*Tehillim* 124:7), נפשנו כציפור נמלטה מפח, "Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunters' snare..." When fish escape a net, they swim beneath it. When a bird escapes a trap, it flies above it. Dovid HaMelech compared us to a bird that soars above the traps, because when we are tested, we can reach the highest levels.

Once, an orphaned *bachur* complained to the Pnei Menachem of Gur zt'l, "Why can't I be like all my friends who have a much easier life?"

The Pnei Menachem told him that there are cars and there are tanks. If you want comfort, a car is a better means of travel. But a tank can drive over rocks and hilly, unpaved terrains. The tank's clumsy apparatus, which is its handicap as far as comfort is concerned, are its advantage when it comes to traversing tough terrain.

The Pnei Menachem said to the *bachur*, "You are going through hardships now, but things will turn around and each hardship will become your strong point. One day, you will have strengths that others don't."

The Alter of Navorduk *zt'l* told the following parable:

A worm was in an oil lamp, seeking to get out.

It climbed up the nose of the lamp to its opening, but then it felt the heat of the flame, so it quickly backed down. Then it met with the oil, which also wasn't an option. The worm went up and down between these two dangers until the exhausted worm

fell into the oil and drowned.

This parable reminds us not to back down when things get tough. Instead, we should face the challenges, and battle with them because they are keys to freedom and growth.

Avos d'Reb Noson (3:6) states, "[Performing the mitzvos] once with *tzaar* (hardships) is equivalent to a hundred times without hardships."⁹

9. A *bachur* once came to the Chofetz Chaim complaining that he has a weak mind, and after a month of learning Torah, all he accomplished was one page of Gemara. The Chofetz Chaim asked him what page he was up to, and he replied that he was up to דף ג. The Chofetz Chaim corrected him, "You are up to page 103) (ק"ג)."

The *bachur* thought the Chofetz Chaim didn't hear him, so he repeated that he is on page ג. The Chofetz Chaim said, "Chazal (*Avos d'Reb Nosson* 3:6) say, 'Better once with hardships, than a hundred times without hardships!' So, if you studied one page with hardships it's equivalent to studying one hundred pages with ease. Therefore, we can say that you are up to page 103."

This lesson also applies to those who don't find joy in studying Torah. Due to their struggles to learn Torah, each page is like a hundred pages and each hour is like a hundred hours.

Chazal (Eiruvin 54.) say, חש בראשו יעסוק בתורה, "If your head hurts, study Torah." You shouldn't stop learning when your head hurts or

Similarly, the *Sefer Chasidim* (145) states, "When one triumphs over his *yetzer hara*, the reward will be greater than the reward given for a hundred mitzvos (performed without hardships)."

Chazal say, לפום צערא אנרא, "The reward is in accordance with the hardships." This statement is in Aramaic and not in *lashon hakodesh*. Why is that? Also Kaddish is in Aramaic. *Tosfos* (*Brachos* 3.) writes, "We say Kaddish in Aramaic because it is a beautiful praise, and we don't want the *malachim* to understand it and be jealous of us." Similarly, we can explain that the phrase, לפום צערא אנרא is written in Aramaic because it is a great praise for the Jewish nation, who battles their *yetzer hara* and overcomes their challenges. We mention this praise in Aramaic because we don't

want to rouse the jealousy of the *malachim* (who aren't tested).

The Midrash (*Koheles* 3:15) states, "טוב is the *yetzer tov*, and טוב מאד is the *yetzer hara*." This Midrash is referring to the *pasuk* about Creation (*Bereishis* 1:31), וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאוד, "Hashem saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good."

How can the *yetzer hara* be טוב מאד, very good? Because if it weren't for the *yetzer hara*, there would be no pain, no challenges, and as a result, no growth and gain.

The *Ketzos* (*Shev Shmatsa, hakdamah* 6, quoting *Mahara'm Almushneinu*) writes that geniuses are generally the people who have some flaw in their thinking process. They need to get around the foolish part of their mind, and that makes

when you have some other difficulty or disturbance because these are the moments when your Torah is most valuable.

them very wise. People who have straight minds aren't geniuses.

He compares it to spraying droplets of water over a bonfire. The fire becomes even stronger as it tries to overcome the opposition. Similarly, those who have a problem in their thinking process are forced to find ways to overcome that obstacle, and that makes them even wiser.

This is alluded to in the *pasuk* (Koheles 10:1), יקר מוחכמה, "A person who is respected because of his wisdom, it is due to a drop of foolishness."

The same is with *avodas Hashem*. When *avodas Hashem* is smooth sailing and easy, a person isn't forced to grow. But when he is challenged and finds ways to overcome his challenges, that elevates him very high. Therefore, the Torah calls the *yetzer hara* טוב מאד. The *yetzer hara* makes a person טוב מאד extremely good.

Chazal (*Yoma* 69:) tell us that the Anshei Kneses HaGedolah sought to destroy the *yetzer hara*. (*Nechemyah* 9:4), ויזעקו אל ה' בקול גדול, "They called out to Hashem in a loud voice..." and they prayed that Hashem remove the *yetzer hara* from them. They said, "Woe to us! This *yetzer hara* destroyed the Beis HaMikdash, burned the *heichel*, and killed all the *tzaddikim*, and he is still dancing among us. Why did You give us the *yetzer hara*? You gave it to us so we should receive reward. We prefer not to have the *yetzer hara* and its reward."

A paper fell from heaven stating אמת, true, implying Hashem agreed that the *yetzer hara* wasn't good for them. They fasted for three days and three nights and the *yetzer hara* came out of the *kodesh kodashim*. The *navi* [Zecharyah] said to the Jewish people, "This is the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zarah*..." and they captured that *yetzer hara*. This is the reason we don't desire to

worship *avodah zarah* as the people in the era of the first Beis HaMikdash did. The *yetzer hara* was captured, and its power was taken from him.

The Anshei Kneses HaGedolah said, "Since this is an *eis ratzon*, an auspicious time for our tefillos to be answered, let us also get rid of the *yetzer hara* for *arayos*, forbidden marriages." The Gemara concludes that they succeeded in getting rid of the *yetzer hara* for *arayos* with close family members.

It seems that destroying the *yetzer hara* was a wonderful accomplishment for the Jewish nation. They

no longer have a *yetzer hara* for *avodah zarah*, and also the *yetzer hara* for *arayos* has been tamed somewhat. However, the Chazon Ish *zt'l* said that these victories are nothing to be proud of. It would be better if we had the *yetzer hara* and overcame it through battling it. It was necessary to eliminate the *yetzer hara* to protect people from sins. Still, it is certainly better when the *yetzer hara* rages within people and people conquer the *yetzer hara* with their good choices.¹⁰

It is written (*Shir HaShirim* 7:2), *מה יפו פעמך בנעלים*, "How beautiful are your feet in your shoes." The word *בנעלים*

10. When a father travels overseas for a prolonged period of time, he will often return home with nosh for his children, something they can't get at home. It wouldn't be interesting for the children if he brings home regular nosh that they can buy in their local grocery store, near their home. It has to be something unique, something new.

The *nimshal* is, in heaven, Hashem has *malachim* who serve Him with perfection. Hashem created man and put him on earth because He wants something new, something that doesn't exist in heaven. The novelty of a human being is that he has many *yetzer haras* yet he overcomes all obstacles to serve Hashem.

can also mean "going up." The Gemara (*Succah* 49:) explains that this *pasuk* is praising the Jewish nation for their mitzvah of עליה לרגל, when they would go up to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year, for Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos.

Reb Yaakov Yosef, the Magid of Vilna *zt'l*, explains that the literal translation of בנעלים, shoes, also relates to the Gemara's interpretation of עליה ברגל (going up to the Beis HaMikdash). He explains that when the

Jewish nation walked up to the Beis HaMikdash, they naturally wore their shoes. Before entering the Beis HaMikdash, they took their shoes off because *Chazal* (*Brachos* 9:5) say, "One may not wear shoes on Har HaBayis." The *pasuk* emphasizes that the beauty of the Jewish nation was when they were wearing their shoes while walking up to the Beis HaMikdash. That part of the mitzvah was more special than standing shoeless in the

Chazal tell us that Moshe understood how all the utensils of the Mishkan should appear, but he didn't understand how the menorah was supposed to be. Hashem told Moshe to throw a block of gold into fire, and it miraculously became a menorah. Which aspect of the menorah didn't Moshe understand? I heard that this is because the menorah was made from pure gold; it didn't have any wood at all. Wood represents the *yetzer hara*, challenges. Moshe didn't understand why Hashem would have *nachas ruach*, pleasure, from any mitzvah that is perfect like gold, without any challenges or *yetzer hara* at all.

In contrast, the *aron* was made of three boxes. The inner and outer boxes were made of gold while the middle box was made of wood, representing the *yetzer hara*. The *aron* is named for the middle box, as it states (*Shemos* 25:10), ועשו ארון עצי שטים, "They shall make an *aron* from wood" because the main part of *avodas Hashem* is overcoming the *yetzer hara*.

courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash.

This is because going up to the Beis HaMikdash entailed many difficulties. Their minds kept telling them they should return home to protect their possessions. But they strengthened themselves in Hashem who promised (*Shemos* 34:24), ולא יחמוד איש את ארצו בעלותו ליראות את פני ה' אלוֹקֵיךְ "No man will desire your land when you go up to appear before Hashem, your G-d, three times a year." On the way to the Beis HaMikdash the *yetzer hara* would tell them, "What will be with your crops? What will happen to your cattle? Who will protect them? You must return home immediately." But they would strengthen themselves in their belief in Hashem, and in Hashem's promise ולא יחמוד איש את ארצו, and they would continue on to the Beis HaMikdash.

When a person finally arrived at the Beis HaMikdash and merited to bask in Hashem's holy

presence, he was so uplifted and joyous that he wasn't thinking about his wealth anymore. The joy of the mitzvah made everything else trivial. Now all he wanted was to be in the Beis HaMikdash with Hashem.

Which part of the mitzvah עליה לרגל was most precious to Hashem? Was it while traveling, when he constantly needed to strengthen himself with *emunah* and *bitachon*, or was it when he was standing in the Beis HaMikdash's courtyard, basking in Hashem's presence? The *pasuk* tells us the answer: מה יפועמך בנעלים, "How beautiful are your feet *in your shoes* [when you went up to the Beis HaMikdash]." It was when you were traveling and still wearing your shoes when you were battling your *yetzer hara*, which was most beautiful for Hashem because it's the struggle that Hashem most cherishes.