

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Balak



בס"ד

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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Torah Wellsprings

Balak

In Hashem's hands

Towards the end of his life, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* said, "I can swear that when a person moves his tiny finger or his eyeball, it is all from Hashem's strength. We cannot pick up a piece of straw without Hashem's strength" (*Toras Avos, Emunah u'Bitachon* 22).

The Lechovitzer Rav *zt'l* would often say, "Without Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it is impossible to cross the doorway. With Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we can split the sea" (*Toras Avos, Emunah u'Bitachon* 7).

We aren't fully aware of this truth. We think we can do things on our own and only need Hashem's aid for something beyond our strength. However, the fact is that we cannot do anything without Hashem.¹

Let's consider the ability to speak. We think speech is entirely in our control as it states (*Tehillim* 12:5), אשר אמרו ללשוננו נגביר שפתנו אתנו מי אדון לנו, "Those who have said, 'We have control over our lips. Who rules over us?'"

Bilaam discovered that he wasn't in control over his speech. Although he

1. The Divrei Yechezkel of Shinov *zt'l* said that when it comes to making a *chasunah*, people think they can cover the smaller expenses on their own, but don't know how they will cover the bigger expenses. But I see it the opposite way. I understand how he will get money for the larger expenses, because he knows he can't manage on his own, so he trusts in Hashem. But for the smaller expenses, he doesn't rely on Hashem, so how will he get the money?"

wanted to curse the Jewish nation, he was unable to. He told Balak (23:12), הלא את, אשר ישׁים ה' בפי אתו אשמר לדבר, "Whatever Hashem puts in my mouth, that I shall speak."

The Ramban writes, "The purpose of the miracle [of the talking donkey] was to teach Bilaam that Hashem enables one to speak, and He can make one silent." Therefore, he shouldn't try to curse the Jews because Hashem will not allow it, as indeed occurred.

On the *pasuk* (22:28), ויפתח, "Hashem opened the donkey's mouth," the Midrash (ילמדנו) writes, "Hashem can cause a donkey, whose mouth

was closed until then, to speak, and Hashem can close the mouth of [Bilaam] who until then was able to speak so that he won't curse Bnei Yisrael."²

We have seen that speech is in Hashem's hands. What about movement? Can a person travel and go wherever he wants? Bilaam discovered that this, too, is in Hashem's hands.

The first time Balak sent messengers to invite Bilaam to come to him, Bilaam replied (22:13), לכו אל ארצכם כי, "Go to your land because Hashem refuses to allow me to go with you." The Ramban explains that here Bilaam

2. A middle aged man told me that when he first got married, there were many uncomplimentary things he wanted to say to his in-laws and to his brothers-in-law, but the words didn't come out of his mouth. Several times, something stopped him from saying what he wanted to. Looking back, he realizes that this saved him much anguish. His unkind words would have created an argument and the negative results might have continued until today, *chalilah*. He thanks Hashem for not letting him say what he shouldn't.

admitted that he is in Hashem's hands.³

Later, Hashem permitted Bilaam to go, but even then, Bilaam discovered that he couldn't travel if Hashem didn't let him. Several times the donkey stopped, and Bilaam beat his donkey in frustration. (22:27) ותרא האתון את מלאך ה' ותרביץ תחת בלעם ויחר אף במקל "The donkey saw Hashem's

malach and crouched beneath Bilaam. Bilaam's anger flared, and he struck the donkey with his staff."

Just like the Lechovitzer said, "Without Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it is impossible to cross the doorway. With Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we can split the sea" (*Toras Avos, Emunah u'Bitachon* 7). We can't travel or go anywhere without Hashem's strength.⁴

3. See *Rashi* (22:13) who writes that this time Bilaam tried to conceal that he was under Hashem's rule. "[Bilaam] was haughty, and he didn't want to reveal that he is under Hashem's control." Therefore, he told them that he can't go with them; he could only go with more respectable messengers.

4. One *motzei* Shabbos, the Chofetz Chaim informed his congregation that he will be moving to Eretz Yisrael that week, and he said his goodbyes to them.

Someone came over and asked the Chofetz Chaim, "Why didn't you say *im yirtzeh Hashem*?" A person can't be certain that he will travel. If Hashem doesn't permit it, it won't happen.

That week, the Chofetz Chaim's fell ill, and he couldn't travel to Eretz Yisrael. This is as we explained: We cannot travel or do anything without Hashem.

A group of people arrived at the train station just to see their train pull out of the station. "We came a minute too late," said one of them.

A villager once visited the large city and watched in awe as cars sped down the thruway. Then, suddenly, one car slowed down, stopped, and all the other cars piled up behind it.

The villager asked, "Why did he stop? Does he have *ruach hakodesh* to know when to go and when to stop? And why do the other cars allow him to get away with this?"

The person pointed to the traffic light. "When the light turns red, the cars stop, and when it turns

green, they will drive again."

The villager learned that (a) the car didn't stop by choice. It was forced to stop there. (b) The stop won't last forever. (c) The stops are favorable because they prevent accidents.

Similarly, sometimes we experience "stops" in our lives. For example, a person runs a profitable business, earns a lot of money, and suddenly things stop. He must know that (a) the stop didn't happen by chance. (b) the stop isn't forever, (c) and

"We didn't come late," replied the other. " We arrived two hours early."

"What do you mean?"

"Since we didn't get on that train, it is obvious that we are supposed to travel with the next train, which leaves in two hours. So, we arrived two hours early."

People get angry when there is heavy traffic on the road, and the like. But are they acting any different than Bilaam who beat his donkey for delaying? When you know that everything is from Hashem, you will not become angry.

the stop is certainly for his benefit.⁵

5. In parashas Yisro it states (Shemos 18:1), וישמע יתרו... את כל אשר עשה, "Yisro heard... everything Hashem did for Moshe and for Yisrael His nation." Those miracles inspired him to convert to Yiddishkeit. A similar pasuk is written in this week's parashah (22:3): וירא בלק... את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי, "Balak saw... everything Yisrael did to Emori." He also saw and heard about the miracles. But for Balak, instead of desiring to convert, he wanted to curse the Jewish nation.

The vast difference in their reactions is due to whom they attributed the miracles. Yisro understood that the miracles came from Hashem, as it states, את כל אשר עשה אלקים, "everything Hashem did..." Whereas, for Balak it states, את כל אשר עשה ישראל, "Everything Yisrael did." He thought the wars were won by man, and not by Hashem. He didn't recognize that Hashem performed those miracles.

The Zohar (vol.3 199:) states that the first two letters of בלק and בלעם spell בלב, confusion. The final letters spell עמלק. This is because when one is confused, he falls into the hands of Amalek.

The Nesivos Shalom zt'l (of Slonim) teaches that Haman also understood that he can only harm the Jewish nation if they lose their yishuv hadaas. Therefore, he sought to confuse them and to put them into state of panic. As it states (Esther 9:24), כי המן... השב על, "Haman...thought to annihilate the Yidden, so he drew lots to confuse and destroy them." He first wanted להומם, to confuse them because he knew that then he will succeed to לאבדם, destroy them.

The Imrei Chaim zt'l said that the custom is that the parents walk the chasan and kallah slowly to the chuppah. This is to tell the young couple that they can walk. They don't need to run. They are beginning their life together in a world where people are always rushing. We walk them calmly, to teach them that everything is in Hashem's hands and with Hashem's help, everything will work out well. There is no need to rush.

Hashem's Messages

The Meor Einayin (Likutim כי ביה"ה צור עולמים) writes, "Sometimes a *rasha* wants to commit an *aveirah*, but something comes up that prevents him from doing so. This is also from Hashem. Hashem conceals Himself in those obstacles, hoping the person will repent. But, nevertheless, man has free will."

This happened to Bilaam. When Bilaam went to curse the Jewish nation, he was prevented time and again. His donkey walked off the road, crushed Bilaam's foot into a wall, and then sat down in the middle of the road, refusing

to budge. The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* notes that the words מלאך ה' are written ten times in these *pesukim* because the angel tried to stop Bilaam ten times. Rashi (22:22) writes, "It was a *malach* of compassion, sent to prevent Bilaam from sinning." Bilaam should have realized that Hashem was stopping him, but he didn't get the message until Hashem opened his eyes and he saw the *malach* with its sword drawn.

Bilaam said (22:34), חטאתי, כי לא ידעתי כי אתה נצב לקראתי בדרך, "I have sinned for I didn't know that you were standing opposite me on the road."⁶

6. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*) says, "Bilaam was a wise *rasha* (רשע ערום). He knew that *teshuvah* shields against punishment. Whoever sins and says, חטאתי, no *malach* can harm him."

The Sifsei Tzaddik writes that Bilaam wasn't repenting *leshem shamayim*; he didn't regret his bad intentions. But he admitted that he sinned, and that saved him.

The Beis Yisrael *zy'a* said that it's a mitzvah to repeat this *vort*. When you admit that you sinned and you say חטאתי, you have just removed a lot of the sin.

Why did Bilaam say that he sinned? Wouldn't everyone beat their donkey when it stops for seemingly no reason? As the *Sefer Chassidim* (153) asks, "There is nothing wrong with hitting a donkey. When the donkey crushed Bilaam's foot against the wall, why should he have refrained from hitting the donkey?"

The *Sefer Chassidim* replies, "Bilaam should have understood that Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't want him to curse the Yidden." The disturbances on the road should have prompted him to reconsider his path.

The *Shlah* elaborates, "When a person should know, he is guilty if he doesn't know. Hashem gave intelligence to mankind for this purpose - so he should know and understand. Bilaam should have understood that his

donkey wasn't acting that way without cause."

Similarly, the *Kedushas Levi* writes, "When something surprising happens to those who fear Hashem, they understand that Hashem is telling them how they should proceed. If they are in the middle of doing something and suddenly something unusual occurs, they realize that Hashem is telling them to stop. When Bilaam encountered something unusual - his donkey sitting down on the road, which is something it never did before - he should have stopped to think. Had he done so, he would have realized Hashem wants him to return."

Bilaam thus acknowledged *חטאתי*, "I have sinned." He should have understood that Hashem doesn't want him to curse the Jewish nation.⁷

7. The *Ramosaim Tzofim* (Eliyahu Rabba 3:8) writes that on Shabbos parashas Balak Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zy'a explained Bilaam's

sin for hitting the donkey exactly as the Sefer Chassidim (that he should have recognized that Hashem was preventing him from going. He said this explanation without knowing that it was already written in Sefer Chassidim).

The Ramosaim Tzofim writes, "After Rebbe Bunim's Shabbos afternoon nap, the Rebbe asked me to read Sefer Chassidim to him. I took the Sefer Chassidim and asked him where I should read. He said, 'Open the sefer and read wherever it opens up to.' I did so. I read to him siman (153). It was exactly the lesson he had taught in the morning. He told me to stop reading, and explained, 'The author of Sefer Chassidim came to me this afternoon in my sleep, and told me to read his sefer. I didn't know why. Now I understand.'"

There was a Yid who moved to China for business. Once, while visiting in Europe, he made a stop at the Chofetz Chaim's zt'l home.

"How are our brothers in China faring?" the Chofetz Chaim asked.

"There are almost no Yidden there," the merchant replied. "There are millions of goyim, but only a handful of Yidden, and they are all very weak in their Yiddishkeit."

The Chofetz Chaim gave him his sefer Nidchei Yisrael and said, "I wrote this sefer specifically for the Yidden who live in such places, distant from Torah centers. When you go back to China, bring this sefer to them. It will be good for them."

The Chofetz Chaim continued, "And what else is new in China?"

"There was a tsunami," the man replied. "Thousands of people died."

"Oy, we must do teshuvah," the Chofetz Chaim exclaimed.

"Why must we do teshuvah?" the merchant asked. "As I told you, there are almost no Yidden in China, and only goyim died. The catastrophe was for them, not for us."

The Chofetz Chaim replied with a mashal:

"Many people were gathered in a hall to listen to speeches. Most of the audience were goyim, with only a few Yidden there, but the speaker at the podium was talking in Yiddish. Who was he

The Earth's Eyes

Balak (22:5) said about the Jewish nation, הנה כסה את עין הארץ, "Behold, they cover the earth's eyes." We can explain that עין הארץ means the way most people look at the earth. עין הארץ, the eye that most people use to look at what occurs in the world. They look with the eyes of nature. But the Jewish nation כסה את עין הארץ cover that eye and acknowledge that

everything happens by Hashem's *hashgachah*. Balak said, "The Jewish nation doesn't see the world like everyone else. They claim that everything is *bashert* and pre-ordained."

Balak said (22:5), הנה עם יצא ממצרים, "Behold a nation left Mitzrayim." Bilaam corrected him and said (23:22), א-ל מוציאם ממצרים, "Hashem took them out of Mitzrayim." As Rashi writes, "You said, 'Behold a

speaking to?"

"Obviously he was speaking to the Yidden," the merchant replied.

"Why do you say so? I told you that most of the audience were goyim."

"True, but he spoke in Yiddish. Goyim don't understand Yiddish."

"Exactly," the Chofetz Chaim agreed. "Similarly, when Hashem does something in the world, who is Hashem speaking to? Do you think He is speaking to the goyim who don't pay attention to His messages? He's speaking in a language that only Yidden understand, because they believe that everything is from Hashem. So when the tsunami occurred, Hashem was speaking solely to the Yidden!"

Hashem has many ways of communicating. One way is when Hashem prevents a person from sinning. This is Hashem's way to tell the person that he should refrain and improve his ways.

nation left Mitzrayim.' But they didn't leave on their own. Hashem took them out."

It states (23:23), כעת יאמר, ליעקב ולישראל מה פעל א"ל. The Divrei Yisrael *zt'l* (Moditz) explains that יעקב represents Yidden at a lower level, and ישראל represents Yidden on a higher plane (see *Or HaChaim, Bereishis 47:28*). The *pasuk* says, כעת יאמר ליעקב, Yidden at a lower level say כעת that everything happens according to the times and by chance. ולישראל, but the tzaddikim who are at a higher level say, מה פעל א"ל, that everything happens by Hashem's decree.

A *bachur* asked the Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l* of Lubavitz, "We don't see Hashem, so how do we know that He's here?"

The Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l* wrapped his hand in a towel and waved his hand all around. Then, he asked the boy, "Who is moving the towel?"

"The Rebbe's hand."

"Do you see my hand? How do you know that my hand is moving the towel?"

"I don't see your hands, but the towel isn't moving on its own. From the towel's movements, I see that your hand is moving it."

The Rebbe replied, "Similarly, we don't see Hashem, but we see the entire world functioning, the grass growing, animals living, people surviving, so we know that Hashem is behind it all."

Reb Gad'l Eisner *zt'l*, the renowned *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Gur, suffered the horrors of Auschwitz and lost his only daughter in the war, but his *emunah* remained intact.

To describe to the students how hard it was to have *emunah* in that era, Reb Gad'l took a bottle cap from the table, hid it in his hands, and asked his student, "If someone would

come into this room and search for the bottle cap, would he find it?"

"No," the student replied. "He wouldn't think to look in your hand. He will look all over the room for it and not find it."

Reb Gad'l said that this is how it was during the Holocaust. There were people who searched for Hashem but couldn't find Him. This is the reason so many people fell away.

Reb Gad'l asked, "If someone knows that I am holding the cap in my hands, would he search for it?"

The student replied that he wouldn't search for the bottle cap because he knew it was concealed in Reb Gad'l's hand.

Reb Gad'l explained that his *emunah* remained firm throughout the Holocaust because he didn't search for Hashem. He knew Hashem was there. Had he searched, he

wouldn't find Him, but he had no doubts that Hashem was with him.

With this analogy, Reb Gad'l explained to his students how he retained his *emunah* during those difficult times.

Following is another approach Reb Gad'l shared with his students to describe how he found Hashem even during the Holocaust: "If someone lost a diamond worth millions of dollars in a dark room, would he stop searching for it because it is dark and hard to find? Of course not! He would crawl on his hands and knees and feel the floor until he found it. Similarly, when darkness covered the earth during the Holocaust, and it was hard to find Hashem, I knew that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was there. So, I continued searching for Him, despite the difficulties."

On Shabbos, we sing, "שכרו הרבה מאוד על פי פעלו", "His

reward [for keeping Shabbos] is very great, according to what he does." Is the reward very great (שכרו הרבה מאוד), or is the reward according to what he does? These two phrases seem contradictory.

The Divrei Yisrael explains that the song refers to the reward for *emunah*. שכרו הרבה מאוד, he will receive a great reward because he believes על פי פעלו that everything that happens in the world is על פי, by Hashem's decree.

At the end of the shacharis we say אין כאלקינו, followed by the *parasha* of *ketores*. Chazal (*Yoma* 26.) say that *ketores* make us wealthy. The Noda b'Yehudah (*Orach Chaim* 10) adds that this is the reason we say אין כאלקינו before the *ketores* so that we should remember when we become wealthy that it is from Hashem and not by the strength of our hands.

Chazal say that three things become stronger as

they age: fish, snakes, and the *chazir*. We wonder why does the Gemara share this information?

Iyun Yaakov explains that the Gemara reminds us that everything comes from Hashem, not through our *hishtadlus*. This also applies to health. It is important to eat healthy foods. That is the *hishtadlus* we do for good health. But we must remember that if we are healthy, it wasn't because of the diet or *hishtadlus*, but because of Hashem's will.

Fish, snakes, and *chazir* eat unhealthy foods. Fish get nourishment from water, alone, snakes eat earth (עפר לחמו), and the *chazir* eats garbage. Therefore, logically, they should be weak. But they are very strong, and as they get older, they become even stronger. How does this happen? Because ultimately, it isn't healthy food that makes us strong, but Hashem's decree.

We should be cautious with our health and what we eat because we are obligated to make *hishtadlus*. Yet, the results are in Hashem's hands alone.

The Satmar Rebbe's *gabai*, Reb Yosef Ashkanazi *zt'l*, once came to a wealthy person to collect money for the Rebbe's court. The rich man asked, "How much money are you expecting to receive from me?"

Reb Yosef Ashkanazi was a clever man and didn't speak much. He raised his hand, showing five fingers.

The man replied, "What? Five thousand dollars? Isn't three thousand enough?"

Reb Yosef replied, "Ok. Let it be three thousand dollars."

The wealthy man gave that amount.

When Reb Yosef showed five fingers, he actually meant to ask for five hundred *dollars* (which was a large sum of money in those days). But due to Yosef Ashkanazi's silence, he earned six times that amount.

And the lesson is that *parnassah* doesn't come from *hishtadlus*, rather it comes from Hashem. So sometimes you can do less *hishtadlus* and earn more.⁸

8. The CEO of a houseware manufacturing company in England was looking to hire a salesperson. Yehoshua M., an experienced salesman, applied for the job, and the CEO hired him on a trial basis. The CEO said, "If you succeed in making new connections, you will remain with us. If you don't, we will have to seek someone else."

Yehoshua asked, "How many new sales are you expecting?"

"I reckon in two months time you should have made enough connections to sell forty thousand pounds worth of merchandise

per month."

"I'll try my best," Yehoshua answered.

Each industry has its own set of challenges and tests, so before Yehoshua began his new position, he asked his rav for halachic guidance.

The rav said, "If, when speaking to a potential customer, you discover that he is currently using a Jewish supplier, you mustn't convince him to switch and buy your products. That would be *hasagas gouv*, taking away your fellow man's source of income. If you ever come across such a situation, you must forfeit the sale."

Yehoshua began his job, and succeeded to make several good connections. Being a talented salesman, he knew how to meet prospects and convince them to try his company.

There was one particular large store that he was having a difficult time getting into. When he finally got the big boss on the phone, the owner said, "We already have a supplier, and we are satisfied. We're not looking for changes."

Yehoshua explained that he could supply the same quality products for less money, but the man didn't want to hear of it.

Yehoshua didn't let up. After two weeks of trying, a meeting was arranged between them.

After understanding the needs of the store, Yehoshua told the storeowner, "We can supply you with the products you need for two thousand pounds, each month."

The storeowner was very happy with this prospect, as it was substantially less than what he was paying until then.

"Let me show you what we were paying now," the storeowner said, as he took out his notes. Yehoshua didn't want to look at the invoices because he knew that if he sees the name of a Jewish supplier, he would have to back out of this good deal. But his curiosity got the better of him. He glimpsed at the invoice and saw the name of the supplier on top of the page. It was a Jewish supplier.

"I'm sorry," Yehoshua said, "but I can't close this deal. It's against

my principles."

The CEO was surprised. He never heard of a religion that doesn't allow closing good deals. This potential client immediately took out his phone and called Yehoshua's boss. "You have a strange salesman here," he shouted in the phone. "He had the opportunity to get a monthly account for two thousand pounds, and he threw it away..."

The factory owner was upset with Yehoshua, and Yehoshua explained to his boss the conditions his rabbi set for him. "Why don't you find yourself a different rabbi? Someone more lenient?"

Yehoshua replied, "I'm sorry, but I must remain loyal to my religion."

A few weeks passed, and Yehoshua's probation was almost up. So far he managed to make thirty-eight thousand pounds of new sales per month. He was still two thousand pounds short, and time was running out. His *yetzer hara* was telling him, "Why did you listen to your rav? This might cause you to lose your job." But then his *yetzer tov* told him that he did the right thing. "Everything will work out," he told himself. "I won't lose out from following halachah."

As these thoughts were passing his mind, he received a phone call. "You don't know me," an unfamiliar voice said, "but I'm a salesperson in the same field as you. But unlike you who works for a company, I work on my own. I buy in bulk from one of the large manufacturers, and I sell it to stores. One of my clients is the store you visited a few of weeks ago. You didn't want to deal with him because you didn't want to take away my *parnassah*. I'm impressed by your integrity. I decided that from now on I will only buy products from your company. If you agree, I will order fifteen thousand pounds worth of household products per month from your company." And that is what they did.

Yehoshua said to his boss, "When I lost the two thousand pound sale, you thought we were losing money. At first, I also thought so. But now we see that one never loses out by observing the Torah. The profits are always greater, even in this world."

The Joy of the Mitzvos

ויפתח ה' את פי האתון (22:28) ותאמר לבלעם מה עשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה של רגלים, "Hashem opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Bilaam, 'What did I do to you that you hit me three times?'"

On the words שלש רגלים Rashi writes, רמז לו, אתה מבקש, לעקור אומה החוגגת שלש רגלים בשנה, "The donkey was hinting to Bilaam, 'You are trying to uproot a nation that celebrates three *yomim tovim* each year!"⁹

The donkey said, "How can you consider destroying the Jewish nation? They are so special! Three times a year, on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos, they go up to Yerushalayim to celebrate the *yomim tovim* in the Beis HaMikdash!"

The Jewish nation performs many mitzvos. The donkey could have

said, "How dare you try to uproot a nation who puts on tefillin and keeps Shabbos," or something like that. What is unique about the *regalim*?

The Mishnah (*Avos* 5:5) lists ten miracles that occurred in the Beis HaMikdash. One of them is, ולא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום, "No one ever said, 'There's no space for me to sleep in Yerushalayim.'" Millions of Yidden were *oleh l'regel*, yet there was always room for everyone. Everyone had a place to sleep, and that is miraculous!

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (vol.2 234) explains this Mishnah differently. The miracle wasn't that there was room for everyone, rather the miracle was that no one complained, despite the crowded conditions in Yerushalayim during the

9. The donkey said רגלים instead of פעמים, hinting to the שלש רגלים, three annual holidays.

holidays. According to this explanation, it was indeed crowded in Yerushalayim due to the millions of people who came to be *oleh l'regel*, but no one ever complained. ולא אמר אדם לחברו "No one ever complained and said, 'There's no place for me to sleep in Yerushalayim.'" They made do with whatever was available. And that everyone had this attitude was nothing less than a miracle.

How did they attain that level? Generally, when people are cramped and uncomfortable, they complain.

The Chasam Sofer writes, "They loved Hashem immensely. Furthermore, Hashem implanted joy in their hearts when they were in Yerushalayim. Therefore, no one ever said it was crowded. As the saying goes, 'When our love was strong, we were able to sleep on a knife's blade'..."

The Chasam Sofer mentions two points: (a) They loved Hashem immensely. (b) Hashem planted joy in their hearts. And with such love and joy, nothing could bother them. It was cramped, but no one cared so much to complain.

The Rebbe of Kotzk *zt'l* adds that this is what the donkey was telling Bilaam when it said, כי הכיני זה של רגלים, which hinted to Bilaam that he was trying to do the terrible deed by uprooting a nation that celebrates the three *regalim*. The message to Bilaam was, "You don't compare to the Jewish nation. When you were in a *מקום צר*, a narrow place; you felt some discomfort, so you beat your donkey. You couldn't bear any pain or discomfort. The Jewish nation, on the other hand, endures extremely cramped conditions in Yerushalayim on the holidays, and no one complains!"

There is pain and distress in the world; no one can deny that. But when one loves Hashem, and similarly, when one discovers the joy and pleasure of serving Hashem, the problems and discomfort are hardly noticed.

Imagine a person who had just won a million-dollar lottery. At that moment, he forgets about all of his problems. Perhaps a minute earlier, he was moping over some issue, but now that issue no longer matters because his joy is so great. This is the joy that an *oved Hashem* has all the time!

Someone asked the Noda b'Yehudah, "How did it happen that you became the *gadol hador* and not me? We learned together in the same cheder, and I don't remember that you were so much smarter than me."

The Noda b'Yehudah asked him, "Were you ever extremely happy?"

The man replied that it happened once when he won the lottery.

The Noda b'Yehudah responded that he has that same degree of joy each time he puts on tefillin.

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* said, "There was a Yid in Zvhil who had more pleasure from putting on tefillin than the greatest *baal aveirah* has with his *aveiros*." (Chasidim understood that Rebbe Shlomke was referring to himself.)

The Divrei Shmuel of Slonim *zt'l* said that when he has a problem, he studies a *daf* Gemara and then the problem doesn't bother him. When the problem is more severe, he studies two *blatt* of Gemara. "And if the problem is very severe, I study three *blatt* of Gemara. After three *dafim* of Gemara, there isn't a problem in the world that

can bother me." The joy of Torah filled his heart, and automatically all life problems vanished in its bright light.

On Succos, Rebbe Shlomo Leib of Lenchana *zt'l* was discussing with his chassidim how the entire world isn't worth a *krechztz*. Just then, a bench broke and fell on the rebbe, and he emitted a *krechztz*. One of the chassidim asked him why he *krechztzed*. "Didn't the Rebbe just say that the entire world isn't worth a *krechztz*?"

He replied, "That's true. The world isn't worth a *krechztz*. But when it hurts, one *krechztzes*."

So, we can't say that people won't have any problems at all. "When it hurts, one *krechztzes*." Furthermore, it is impossible to constantly be filled with joy and pleasure from the mitzvos. The Meor Einayim writes that until Moshiach comes, everyone will have ups

and downs. However, it is certain that when one touches the joy of Yiddishkeit, even if just a drop, his life becomes enjoyable, and his problems become less bitter.

There is a *bachur* who would discuss his problems with one of the renowned chassidic Rebbes of our generation. The Rebbe tried giving him *chizuk* but was usually unsuccessful. The *bachur* was just too bitter. Once, the Rebbe said, "When your primary problem becomes understanding a *tosfos*, all other problems won't bother you anymore."

The *bachur* replied, "But because of my *tzaros*, I don't have peace of mind to immerse myself in Torah study."

The Rebbe urged him to try.

The *bachur* tried. He immersed himself in Torah and discovered a new joy in his life.

Most of us know there is nothing more enjoyable in life than a good tefillah, a *blatt* Gemara, and performing mitzvos. We know this because there are times when we experience it. Nothing in this world compares to this bliss. But to feel these pleasures, one needs to immerse his thoughts in Torah and tefillah. When a person achieves this mental state of devotion, he will experience infinite joy and happiness.

Unfortunately, some people consider Torah and mitzvos a chore or a penalty rather than a pleasure and opportunity. They never experienced the joy and satisfaction that's there, and they wished they didn't have to perform these daily or annual chores.

Consider the following *mashal*, told by Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* (with some variations):

A servant served his king with devotion and *mesirus nefesh*, and after this servant died, the king decided to reward the servant's offspring.

The king sent the servant's son a message that he should come to his royal treasury with two large bags and fill them with whatever he desired.

The son thought, "The king doesn't know me. It can't be that he means my benefit. It must be that the king wants to clean up his treasury, and he hired me to do the job for him. Well, I have no interest in being the king's custodian."

He came to the treasury with two bags over his shoulder, as the king ordered, but he didn't work hard. He refused to take the heavy items (such as the large bars of gold). Instead, he took light objects and lazily placed them into his bags.

Ten minutes later, the guard entered and

announced that his time was up. It was time to leave the treasury.

The son threw the lightweight bags over his shoulder and proudly walked out of the treasury. He was glad that he didn't fall for the injustice that the king forced on him. But later, he cried bitterly when the king informed him that he could keep whatever he put in his bags.

The *nimshal* is as follows:

We are the offspring of the holy *avos* Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who served Hashem loyally with *mesirus nefesh*. Hashem loves them and wants to do kindness to their offspring. This is the reason He commanded us to keep the Torah and mitzvos. These are the precious gems that are in Hashem's treasury. However, unwise people don't believe Hashem loves them and wants their good. They feel that the Torah and mitzvos

are chores and burdens they should try to avoid.

They avoid doing the hard mitzvos and even the easier ones they perform with laziness, and they don't grasp the opportunities available to them. The day will come when they will cry over the lost precious opportunities.

As we explained, when we recognize the joy and pleasure in the mitzvos, it is easier to endure life's difficulties. Who can be upset while filling huge sacks of precious gems in Hashem's treasury?

The Jewish nation experienced this joy when they were in the Beis HaMikdash for the *yomim tovim*, and therefore, no one thought of complaining about the cramped quarters where they stayed. They were very happy with their lot.

Bilaam, in contrast, couldn't tolerate a moment of discomfort. How

different he is from the holy Jewish nation. The donkey told him, "How can you think of annihilating a nation that loves Hashem and is so joyous with their service that they don't even feel any discomfort?"

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei (22:29) writes, "Bilaam should have been shocked when he heard the donkey speak. He should have realized that it was from Hashem to stop him from carrying out his plans. But because of his cruel and evil nature and his passionate desire to curse Klal Yisrael, he didn't think about what occurred. Bilaam conversed with the donkey as someone talks to a friend..."

Bilaam was so focused on his hatred that he didn't recognize what was happening around him. So too, the Jewish nation's love for Hashem, and their joy in Torah and mitzvos, sidetrack them to the extent that they overlook the hardships around them.

The Beis Medresh

It states (24:5), *מה טובו אהליך*, יעקב, "How good are your tents, Yaakov." The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 105:) says that the tents refer to the batei midrashim and batei knesiyos.

Similarly, it states (*Bereishis* 25:27), *ויעקב איש תם יושב*, אהלים, "Yaakov was a righteous person who sat in the tents," and Rashi explains that he sat in the tents of Torah. The Rema m'Pano explains that the Jewish nation is praised for *sitting* in beis medresh, *יושב*, אהלים, even when they aren't davening and learning. They deserve reward just for spending time in the beis medresh.

The Rema m'Pano writes, *כי גדולה היא ישיבת בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות אפילו [מבלי] תורה*, *ובלא תפילה*, "Because it is a great deed to sit in beis knesses and beis medresh, even without Torah and tefillah."

Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 151:1) states that if someone comes into a beis medresh for his own purposes, such as to call someone, he shouldn't leave immediately. Rather, ישהה מעט ואחר כך יצא שהישיבה בהם "He should stay in the beis medresh for a short time and then he can leave because sitting in a beis medresh is a mitzvah. As it states, אשרי יושבי ביתך, fortunate are those who sit in Your house."

Chazal (*Succah* 52:) say, אם פגע בך מנוול זה משכחו זה המדרש "If you are confronted by the *menuval*, the *yetzer hara*, draw him into beis medresh." Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Minchas Shlomo, Succah*) asks that משכחו זה המדרש implies that you should draw the *yetzer hara* into the beis medresh. So what did we accomplish if the *yetzer hara* is still with you in the beis medresh?

The answer is that when the *yetzer hara* is in a beis medresh it isn't the same

yetzer hara as outside. The *yetzer hara* has many names. It is only called מנוול outside the beis medresh. In the beis medresh, the *yetzer hara* takes on a tamer nature.

The Chareidim (פס"ו אות א) writes, "One should spend most of the day and night in the beis kneses and beis medresh, and he will find solace and joy. Chazal say, the batei medresh are like an orchard for tzaddikim and a prison for *resha'im*."

This is as we explained above: The wise find joy and pleasure in Torah and mitzvos while the *resha'im* consider it a punishment.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 6:) says, היוצא מבית הכנסת אל יפסיע היוצא מן הכנסת אל יפסיע גסה, "When one exits the beis knesses, he shouldn't take large steps." Rabbeinu Yonah (*Brachos* 3.) explains, "Large steps indicate that he is leaving a place that he doesn't want to be there to go to a place of relaxation. But it is the

opposite because the beis kneses, the place of tefillah, is *menuchah*, solace, and one should be happy to be there."

Stuck in a traffic jam, some drivers got out of their car and stood next to their vehicles.

Someone came out of his car and asked his fellow drivers why they had left their cars.

They replied, "We are anyway not going anywhere. Why should we sit idly in the car?"

He replied, "Your cars are air-conditioned, and you can listen to music or, even better, a Torah *shiur*. Being in the car is more comfortable than standing in the hot sun."

This is one of the reasons we should always strive to be in a beis medresh, even when we aren't necessarily davening or learning. It is better to be there than to be subject to the heat of the

yetzer hara that roams outside the beis medresh.

The same applies to yeshivos. Some *bachurim* don't learn much in yeshiva, and people wonder why they should stay there. The answer is, what is the alternative? To be outside the beis medresh where the *yetzer hara* runs rampant? It is generally safer to be in yeshiva.

Furthermore, when he is in the yeshiva, he will learn *something*. And perhaps one day, things will turn around, and begin studying Torah in earnest. Therefore, advising someone to leave a yeshiva is not a simple call.

In *parashas Shemos*, the Torah (*Shemos* 7:12) tells us that Aharon's staff swallowed the sorcerer's staffs. The Baal HaTurim says that this miracle happened again in *parashas Korach* (17:21) when Hashem instructed Aharon and the *nesi'im* to place their staffs in Ohel Moed, and the one

whose staff will blossom will be the *kohen gadol*. Also, this time Aharon's staff swallowed the other staffs. The Baal HaTurim writes, "And when they came to pick up their staffs, Aharon's staff spit them out. This is the reason the other staffs didn't grow flowers." They didn't blossom because they were swallowed up in Aharon's staff.

The question is that it should be that the other staffs didn't blossom because they weren't placed there by the one whom Hashem chose to be the *kohen gadol*. Why did Aharon's staff need to swallow them, for them not to blossom?

Reb Meir Chadash *zt'l* explains that the nature of being in a holy place is that you will blossom there. If the staffs were in Ohel Moed, it is natural that they would bloom. Therefore, it was necessary for Aharon's staff to swallow the other staffs.

It states (*Bamidbar* 19:14), וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲדָם כִּי יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל, "This is the teaching regarding a man who died in the tent." The *pasuk* goes on to say that everything that is in a room together with a human corpse becomes *tamei*.

The *pasuk* also alludes to studying Torah in beis medresh with *mesirus nefesh*. As the Gemara (*Brachos* 63:) explains, "Torah doesn't exist other than by someone who kills himself in the tents of Torah. As it states, וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲדָם כִּי יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל, the Torah exists by those who are *moser nefesh* in the tents of Torah.

So, the same words refer to studying Torah with *mesirus nefesh* and to the *tumah* of a corpse, which contaminates the entire room. This is to teach us that just like *tumah* spreads through the entire tent, so, too, the *kedushah* of Torah permeates the whole room, and everyone in the room becomes sanctified from the Torah study that is

taking place there. This is why it is praiseworthy to be in beis medresh, even if you aren't studying Torah. You will be sanctified by the other Torah scholars studying there.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 105:) explain that we can understand from Bilaam's *brachos* what he really intended to say. He wanted to say precisely the opposite of what he said, only Hashem prevented him and turned his words around to be a blessing for the Jewish nation.

For example, when he said, *מה טובו אהליך יעקב*, he wanted to say that there shouldn't be batei midrashim, *chas veshalom*.

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* explains that Bilaam's didn't necessarily want to stop Yidden from studying Torah and tefillah. He tried to prevent them from doing these holy deeds *in the beis medresh*. He wanted the people to daven and study Torah at home. Bilaam

knew the great value of Torah and tefillah in the beis medresh, and this is what he hoped to prevent.

It was difficult for the Yesod v'Shores HaAvodah to walk in his old age, nevertheless, he would walk with *mesirus nefesh* to daven in beis medresh. His Rebbetzin said, "Why don't you bring a minyan to the home? It will be so much easier for you."

He replied, "You make kugel in your old pot because its walls carry a taste of all the kugels you made in the past, and you want those tastes to enter the kugel you are making now. The walls of the beis medresh are saturated with tefillos, and they enhance the tefillos we say there. I want to daven in a beis medresh, so the scent of those tefillos will enter my tefillah."

The *Zohar* (vol.2, 205:) is very strict about talking in the beis medresh. The Imrei Pinchas (*Seder HaYom* 60)

writes, "Reb Refael and Reb Binyamin Zev z'l [students of Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer] were very cautious not to speak anything the entire time that the chazan stood at the *amud*. This means they wouldn't speak from *Adon Olam* until *Aleinu*. They said that the severity of speaking in beis medresh (discussed in the *Zohar*) is specifically referring to speaking during the tefillah. When Reb Refael had something important to say, he took his fellow man outside the beis medresh, and they spoke there. However, on Shabbos, the prohibition of speaking is also before the tefillah begins. This is because the *kedushah* that prevails in the beis medresh on a weekday during the tefillah exists there on Shabbos even before the tefillah begins."

Rav Yeiva has a more stringent view. He says that the *Zohar's* strict warning against speaking in the beis medresh also

applies when it isn't the time for tefillah.

If it is hard, you may follow the more lenient view, but you certainly should be cautious not to speak *during* the tefillah. Bilaam said (24:5), מה טובו אהליך יעקב, "How good are your tents, Yaakov," and Rashi writes, על שראה פתחיהן, שאינן מכוונים זה מול זה, Bilaam said this praise when he saw that the tents of the Jewish nation weren't opened to one another. The Gaon Reb Aharon Tzvi Brisk zt'l explains that פתחיהן hints to the mouth (because the mouth is one of the openings of the body), and Bilaam praised them for not speaking during the tefillah. מה טובו אהליך יעקב!

Stay in the Jewish Camp

At the end of the *parashah*, we read about the tragic sin and plague that befell the Jewish nation, which was planned and instigated by Bilaam HaRasha. He told the

Moabites, אלקיהם של אלו שונא זימה, "The G-d of these hates adultery..." and he advised Moav to cause the Jewish people to sin with adultery.

Bilaam's words, אלקיהם של אלו שונא זימה, can be translated, "Hashem is the G-d of the people who hate adultery" because the Jewish people despise sins.

It states (25:1), וישב ישראל, בשטים ויחל העם לינות אל בנות מואב, "Yisrael settled in Shittim, and the nation began to sin with the daughters of Moav." Shittim/שטים is the name of the location, but it also means to stroll (as in *Bamidbar* 11:8, ושטו העם). The Or HaChaim writes, "The *pasuk* reveals the cause of the sin. It was because the nation strolled outside *machaneh Yisrael*, where the daughters of Moav were, because שטים means to stroll, as in the *pasuk* ושטו

העם (*Bamidbar* 11:8). This resulted in adultery."

Above, we discussed the holiness of a *beis medresh* and that one should strive to be there even when he isn't davening or learning Torah. The *kedushah* of the *beis medresh* will influence him and sanctify him. We likewise understand that we must avoid places of *tumah* because they can pull us down. The Jewish nation fell when they strolled into Moabite territory.

Vacation season has just begun, and we encourage people to stroll solely within מרחנה ישראל. Always go to a place where there's a minyan, ideally in a *beis medresh*, as well as good influences because wandering outside the Jewish camp leads to sin.¹⁰

10. We'll add that one should ensure that his home is a *machaneh Yisrael*. Today, one can be in his own home and not be at all within *machaneh Yisrael*, r"l.

Hashem's Salvation is Before You

It states (22:31), ויגלה את עיניו, בלעם וירא את המלאך, "Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes and he saw the *malach*." The *malach* was there beforehand, but Bilaam didn't see it until Hashem opened his eyes.

Similarly, the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 53:14) states, הכל בחזקת סומין עד שהקב"ה מאיר את עיניהם, "Everyone is blind, until Hakadosh Baruch Hu enlightens his eyes. As it states (*Bereishis* 21:19), ויפקח, אלוקים את עיניה ותרא באר מים, 'Hashem opened [Hagar's] eyes, and she saw the water-well,'" and she gave water to her ill son, Yishmael.

The well was there beforehand, but until Hashem opened Hagar's eyes, she didn't see it.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* (quoted in *Sfas Emes* חקת (תרנ"ט) explains that "All one's needs are always available for him, only the

human eye doesn't see them. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu opens his eyes, he sees."

The Sfas Emes explains that (in last week's *parashah*) Hashem told Moshe to speak to the stone so that the nation would see that the salvation was already there. The well and the water were prepared. All that was necessary was for them to recognize it. And this applies to all our needs. They are available to us; we just have to notice them.

Therefore, for the people waiting for Hashem's salvation, believe that salvation is in front of your eyes. Daven and trust in Hashem. He will open your eyes, and you will witness Hashem's great salvation.

Or HaChaim HaKadosh

The 15th of Tamuz is the *yahrtzeit* of the holy tzaddik and scholar, the Or HaChaim HaKadosh.

In the introduction to his sefer *Chefetz Hashem* he writes, "Know, my brothers, everything I studied in my lifetime was due to my love of Hashem and my thirst for His Torah, because I was bombarded with great tzaros from the day I was born. If I were to write all that I went through, even if all the oceans were ink [and all grass pens, the heaven parchment, and all people scribes], it wouldn't be enough."

Also, in the introduction to *Or HaChaim*, he writes about the many tzaros he suffered in his lifetime.

The Chida writes in *Shem HaGedolim*, "Reb Chaim ben Atar, the holy malach, originally from

Sali, Morocco, came to the holy city Yerushalayim at the end of 5502/1742. I had the privilege to study in his yeshiva [in Yerushalayim], and I saw his greatness in Torah... His holiness was wondrous. But due to the aveiros of the generation, he went up to heaven in Tamuz ת"ק"ג, at the age of forty-seven. He wrote חפץ ה', ראשון לציון, אור החיים, פרי תואר. His wisdom is witnessed in his sefarim, but that is only a tenth of his knowledge. The depth of his genius was amazing."

As we wrote above, his greatness in Torah wasn't the product of living a peaceful and tranquil life. His growth in Torah was a result of תורה מתוך הדחק studying Torah when it was difficult.¹¹

11. A talmid chacham wrote a sefer on Shas and brought it to Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l for a haskamah.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky reviewed the sefer, and he spent an especially longer time on a particular sugyah. Reb Yechezkel asked the author, "When did you study this subject?"

The scholar thought Reb Yechezkel disagreed with the chidushim

In the introduction to his first sefer, חפץ ה' on Shas, he writes, "I chose to call this sefer חפץ ה', because that is my sole purpose in life: to do Hashem's will."¹²

In his introduction to Pri Toar and Or HaChaim, he repeats that his intention is to do Hashem's will. He studied Torah l'shmah, bringing him to his extraordinary spiritual levels.

At the beginning of his sefer Rishon l'Tzion (printed

in Yerushalayim after the Or HaChaim's petirah) the chachamim of Yerushalayim write, "He had all levels: wisdom, perception (בינה), and fear of Heaven. Man can only see the external, but he appeared like a malach from heaven."

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l, the Ruzhiner zt'l, and other great tzaddikim praised the holy sefer Or HaChaim HaKadosh, and therefore it is a staple among many Yidden.

in that section, so he explained that he wrote this section when his son was in the hospital. "Due to my responsibilities and confusion of the time, the chidushim in this section aren't as good as the rest of the sefer."

Reb Yechezkel replied. "On the contrary, I think that these chidushim are on a higher level than the rest of the sefer. You studied this section with mesirus nefesh, so you had extra siyata dishmaya to reach true chidushim. This is as Chazal (Koheles Rabba 2:9) says, תורה שלמדתי באף עמדה לי, "The Torah that I studied with hardships were my success."

Reb Yeruchem zt'l, the mashgiach of Mir yeshiva said that people think that they must study Torah even when going through hard times. It is the opposite. (Iyov 5:7) אדם לעמל יולד, man was created for toil. You were created specifically for these times when it is hard.

12. חפץ ה' means "Hashem's will."

It is a truly remarkable sefer, and its scope encompasses all areas of Torah: pshat, remez, drush, and sod. There are in-depth Talmudic discussions and inspirational mussar lessons. In addition, the Or HaChaim's deep love for Hashem and the Torah is expressed in his holy writings.¹³

When the Or HaChaim HaKadosh first came to Eretz Yisrael, he settled in Teveria. He was once invited for a meal with Reb Chaim Abulefiya *zt'l*, but the Or HaChaim HaKadosh refused to eat anything. He said, "I feel *tumah* in this house."

Soon afterwards it was discovered that the maid had died. (At first, people

thought she had fallen asleep in the kitchen.) People started murmuring that the Or HaChaim is greater than Reb Chaim Abulefiya because he sensed the *tumah* while Reb Chaim Abulefiya apparently didn't.

To preserve the honor Reb Chaim Abulefia, the Or HaChaim left Teveria and moved to Yerushalayim.

There are different versions of the following story, and we will tell it as Reb Mottele Slonimer *zt'l* would say it:

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh arrived in a certain city and needed a place to stay for Shabbos, but he didn't know where

13. Here is one of his famous quotes (Devarim 26:1): שאם היו בני אדם מרגישים במתיקות ועריבות טוב התורה היו משתגעים ומתלהטים אחריה ולא יחשב בעיניהם מלא עולם כסף וזהב למאומה כי התורה כוללת כל הטובות שבעולם "If People would experience the sweetness and the good of the Torah, they would pursue it madly and passionately. The entire world filled with gold and silver would be like nothing to them, because the Torah has in it all the good of the world."

the kashrus was reliable. When he heard someone say *lekavod Shabbos kodesh* as he was preparing for Shabbos, the Or HaChaim felt confident that he could eat in that home.

That city had a special rav. At each of the three Shabbos meals, the community would gather at the rav's home, and the rav would repeat the *divrei Torah* he heard in heaven.

Friday night after the *seudah*, the Or HaChaim HaKadosh's host brought the Or HaChaim to the rav's home to hear his *divrei Torah*. At one point in the middle of the rav's speech the Or HaChaim corrected him.

The rav exclaimed, "I swear that you are Reb Chaim ben Atar (the Or HaChaim HaKadosh) because I heard this *dvar Torah* in heaven in the name of Reb Chaim ben Atar, and you said it exactly as I heard it."

After the morning meal and again at *shalosh seudos*, the Or HaChaim came with his host to the rav's home to listen to his holy *drashos*.

During *shalosh seudos*, the Satan appeared to the rav and said, "Finish *shalosh seudos* quickly. It's late."

"Why are you in such a hurry?" the rav asked.

The Satan explained that on Shabbos, all neshamos are released from Gehinom and enter Gan Eden. When Shabbos is over, they must be returned to Gehinom. "In this generation, Shabbos is marked over when the Or HaChaim makes havdalah on motzei Shabbos. But the Or HaChaim is here, conducting *shalashudes* together with you, and I can't bring the neshamos back to Gehinom."

After hearing the Satan's explanation, the rav decided to extend *shalosh seudos* even longer, so he

could help the *neshamos* in heaven.

The Satan kept returning to the rav, urging him to finish, but the rav ignored him.

Once, the Rav got angry with the Satan and said, "Take it easy! What's the big rush!"

Immediately after saying this, the rav asked for *mayim achronim*. They *benched* and finished the meal.

Why did the rav change his mind? The rav later explained that his anger lit the fire of Gehinom,¹⁴ so he knew that it wouldn't help to prolong *shalosh seudos*. So, they might as well *bench*, daven *Maariv* and say *havdalah*.

When Reb Mottel Slonimer told this story, he emphasized the severity of

anger as it ignites the fire of Gehinom.

The Chida hints that the Or HaChaim performed many miracles during the years he lived in Morocco. These miracles continue to occur for those who study his *sefarim* and visit his grave.

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* said that the Or HaChaim didn't have any children, so he placed his power of bearing children into the *sefer Or HaChaim*. Therefore, studying this *sefer* is *mesugal* for bearing children.

The son of Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz became ill, and his father accepted on himself to study a *daf* of *Or HaChaim* (as printed in the *Chumash* of Shkov) each day (*Imrei Pinchas, Shaar HaTorah*, 133).

14. Anger is Gehinom, as *Chazal* (*Nedarim* 21) say, "Whoever becomes angry, all forms of Gehinom rule over him."

Reb Shpraver of Brashov (author of אפרקסתא דעניא) *zt'l* didn't have any children, and his Rebbe, the Imrei Yosef of Spinka *zt'l*, advised him to learn a certain *vort* from the Or HaChaim, as a *segulah* to bear children. He studied that piece every day until he had a child.

Towards the end of Reb Shpraver's life, he lamented the fact that he forgot which piece of the *Or HaChaim* the Imrei Yosef advised him to learn.

The Lev Simchah of Gur *zt'l* heard this story and said, "The truth is that every piece of *Or HaChaim* is *mesugal* for having children, because the Or HaChaim didn't have children of his own, so he placed his power of bearing children into his *sefer*."

Reb Hillel Shlesinger *zt'l* didn't have any children, and doctors told him that it was impossible for him to bear children. One doctor said, "When

hair grows on my palm, you will have children."

But Reb Hillel Shlesinger didn't lose hope. He went to the *kever* of the Or HaChaim HaKadosh and made a kabbalah that he would study *Or HaChayim* each week as a *segulah* to have children. He was blessed with three daughters. One married Reb Moshe Halberstam *zt'l*, another married Reb Sender Freund *zt'l*, and the third married Reb Nochum Shapiro *zt'l*, three great scholars of Yerushalayim.

When one of the daughters was nine years old, she went to the doctor complaining of a cold. The doctor diagnosed her with diphtheria and immediately brought her into the operating room to save her life. (At that time, there was a diphtheria epidemic in Yerushalayim, and three girls from her class were already *niftar* from this disease.) Reb Hillel ran to the yeshiva of Harav Dushinsky and informed the *rosh yeshiva* of

his daughter's condition. Rav Dushinsky interrupted his *shiur*, and the entire yeshiva said *Tehillim* for Reb Hillel's daughter.

Reb Hillel Shlesinger made a *neder* that if his daughter recovers, he would bring her to the Or HaChaim's beis medresh, located in the Old City of Yerushalayim so she could light a candle there. (In Yerushalayim of those years, this was a renowned *segulah* for *yeshuos*.) He also promised that if she became well every week before Shabbos, he would light a candle *liluy nishmas* the Or HaChaim.

After the operation, his daughter recovered, and he kept his promises. (This daughter married Reb Moshe Halberstam *zt'l*.)

The Chofetz Chaim, Reb Chaim Ozer, the Chazon Ish, and other gedolim were at Vaad HaYeshivos meeting in Vilna in the home of the Greinaman family, relatives of the

Chazon Ish. The Chofetz Chaim noticed a Greinaman girl standing near the window, checking rice meticulously.

"How many times do you check the rice?" the Chofetz Chaim asked.

"Twelve times," she replied. "Our relative, the Chazon Ish, will be eating dinner with us, and in honor of this talmid chacham, I am checking the rice many times so that it will be the highest standard of kashrus."

The Chofetz Chaim blessed her with long life, to always have a clear mind, and that she should never need eyeglasses. (The Chofetz Chaim understood she had weak eyes because she was checking the rice near the window, where the sun shone in.)

All the Chofetz Chaim's *brachos* materialized. She never needed eyeglasses, was *niftar* at ninety-eight years old and was always

healthy. (The last day of her life, she wasn't feeling good. She went to the hospital, and before they could check her, her *neshamah* had already gone up to heaven.)

This girl was an orphan, and when she came of age, the Chazon Ish was her *shadchan*. She married the gaon, Reb Mordechai Shraga Feivel Eidelman *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish moved to Eretz Yisrael, and so did the Eidelman couple, who settled in Petach Tikvah.

Sixteen years passed since her wedding, and they were still childless. She came to the Chazon Ish and his Rebbetzin and expressed her pain that she was childless.

The Chazon Ish gave her a *brachah*.

She said, "I don't want a *brachah*, I want a promise that I will bear children."

The Chazon Ish lowered his head into his hands, and when he raised his

head he said, "I can't promise that."

She responded, "I was an orphan, and you were my *shadchan*. Now you must take responsibility for the *shidduch*."

The Chazon Ish put his down head again, and when he raised it he said, "For this, you need the strength of a *gadol*. Go to the *kever* of the Or HaChaim HaKadosh, and you will have your *yeshuah* there."

It was in 5704/1944, and she told the Chazon Ish that it wasn't safe to go to Har HaZeisim. The Chazon Ish replied, "I have no other solution."

On the fifteenth of Tamuz, on the Or HaChaim's *yahrtzeit*, she went to the Or HaChaim's *kever* at two in the morning with the Rebbetzin of Reb Beinisch Finkel *zt'l* (who was her relative). They poured out their hearts and prayed. Precisely nine months later,

on the 25th of Nissan, she had a son.

The hospital staff was shocked by the miracle. In those days, if a woman didn't have a child for sixteen years, it was impossible for her ever to bear children. Due to the excitement, a nurse accidentally dropped the child, and the child's life was in danger for several months. In the end, the child recovered and lived a long life.

In 5773, a great *rosh yeshivah* lost his eyesight, and doctors informed him it was impossible for him ever to see again. He asked his students to bring him to the *kever* of the Or HaChaim. At the *kever*, he vowed to learn *Or HaChaim*, as this is a renowned *segulah* for *yeshuos*. Some days later, he returned to the hospital, and the doctors discovered that the part of his brain connected to eyesight began to work again, which meant it was possible to restore his

vision, and they succeeded in doing so.

One year, a day after the Or HaChaim's *yahrtzeit*, someone I know called to tell me his salvation after accepting upon himself to study the Or HaChaim's commentary. For *parnassaah*, this man sells *sefarim*. He had 250 sets of *Or HaChaim*, plus several other *sefarim*, and was having difficulty selling them, causing him a financial loss. On the *yahrtzeit*, he traveled with some friends to the Or HaChaim's *kever*, discussing how studying *Or HaChaim* is *mesugal* for *yeshuos*. He immediately made a *kabbalah* to study *Or HaChaim*. The salvation came early the following day. Someone called him and said that he needed a large quantity of *sefarim*. His first order was for 250 sets of *Or HaChaim*!

Studying *Or HaChaim* is also *mesugal* for *teshuvah*. Whenever Reb Yaakov Yosef of Skver *zt'l* heard

about a *bachur* who needed *chizuk*, and was beginning to fall off the *derech*, he would advise people to learn with him Or HaChaim. He added that the section of Or HaChaim doesn't necessarily need to be discussing mussar or chasidus. Any piece of Or HaChaim is sufficient to bring people to teshuvah and improvement.

And who is greater than the gaon, Reb Meir Arik zt'l, who would study the entire commentary of the Or HaChaim, each week? He said that the first time he finished the entire *sefer*, he felt that he had become a new person.

It states (*Avos* 4:12), הוי מומעט בעסק ועסוק בתורה, "Work less and study Torah."

The Divrei Shmuel zt'l tells that when the Or HaChaim HaKadosh was rav in Morocco, he advised his community not to work six days a week. It is sufficient to work the first three days of the week

(Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday), and devote the rest of the week to studying Torah. The Or HaChaim promised they wouldn't lose money from this arrangement.

They followed his counsel and admitted they didn't earn less money than before. The time they dedicated to Torah didn't cause them to lose money.

A few years later, the Or HaChaim moved to Eretz Yisrael, and the people in Morocco gradually returned to their old customs of working six days a week. They thought this would increase their income, but they discovered that they had the same as in the past when they only worked three days a week.

They realized that the Or HaChaim's was right: Studying Torah doesn't detract from *parnassah*.

Reb Elyah Roth zt'l told the following story: The Or HaChaim HaKadosh was once a guest in the home of simple people who excelled

in the mitzvah *hachnasas orchim*. The Or HaChaim felt an aura of *kedushah* in their home and wanted to know its origin. "Could it be that they're hidden tzaddikim?" he thought, but after paying closer attention, he saw they were regular, good people.

As the Or HaChaim was pondering the origin of the holiness that prevailed in that home, he heard the family reminiscing about one of the guests that would visit their home from time to time. This guest was an older individual.

The Or HaChaim heard them tell the following:

The family honored him immensely — as they honored all their guests — and the old person would give gifts to each family member.

However there was a disagreement between the family and the old man. The family served Hashem

with fervor, and the old man would tell them that it isn't proper to serve Hashem that way. Once he said, "Why do you say *birchas hamazon* so loud? Hashem hears quiet *brachos* too. Your zeal makes your guests feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, as they feel they aren't as frum as you. In my opinion, it is wrong to recite *birchas hamazon* so loudly."

The family accepted his *mussar*, and they benched in silence. The old man was pleased that they listened to him and gave each of them another gift.

Sometime later, the old man returned, giving gifts to each family member as usual. On Friday night the family sang Shalom Aleichem, joyously and loudly and the old man became anxious and edgy once again. "There's no reason for all this enthusiasm!" he said nervously. "Say it silently!" and the family obeyed. The

old man gave them some more presents.

The old man showed up again on *erev Pesach* and distributed presents to the family members. The *baal habayis* greeted him joyfully and invited him to the Seder. The old man replied, "I can't be at your Seder if you're going to shout and act inhumanely. I will only join you if you agree to be silent at the Seder. Do as I teach you: Keep the fervor in your heart. Don't display it on the outside."

The *baal habayis* said he'd have to ask his wife. She said, "When he stole from our children the *birchas hamazon*, I kept quiet. Then he took away our *Shalom Aleichem*, and I also forgave him. But I refuse to give away the Seder night."

The old man became angry and said, "I shouldn't have given you all those presents since I see that you don't listen to me."

The *baal habayis* was worried the old man would ask them to give back all the precious presents, but his wife said to her husband, "Give back all the presents. I don't want them, and I don't want his false rebukes."

The Or HaChaim listened in astonishment and said, "Now I understand why there's a holy aura in your house. It is because you passed this great test. That man was the *yetzer hara*, trying to uproot your *temimus*. The *חכמת נשים*, the wife's wisdom, *בנתה ביתה*, saved your home."