



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

A Lesson From Up Close

מֵאֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֶיכֶם הַקְּרֹבִים אֵלֶיךָ אוֹ הַרְחֻקִּים מִמֶּךָ. (דברים יג, ח)

From the gods of the nations around you, those close to you or those far from you.
(*Devarim* 13:8)

The *pasuk* warns us not to listen if someone tries to get us to worship “the gods of the nations around you.” Then the verse adds: whether those gods are “those close to you or those far from you.”

This brings us to an obvious question:

What does it matter if they are close or far?¹

The prohibition on *avodah zarah* applies equally to local idolatrous cults and to distant ones. The *Gemara* answers:

The verse is telling you that from the nature of the close ones you can learn about the nature of the far ones.²

Rashi explains that someone who tries to get you

to serve other gods will usually talk about a distant idol that you are not familiar with and claim that it really eats and drinks. Therefore the Torah advises us to look at the local idols, with which we are familiar. Just like they are nothing, so the distant ones are nothing, too.

In other words, if you hear that in Tibet there are priests who practice renunciation of all worldly matters, and you start to think that maybe there is purity over there, just go down to the nearest church, and you will know what’s going on in Tibet.

If we want to know what idolatry was like in former times, we should familiarize ourselves with modern methods of duping people into false beliefs.

Let’s take the theory of evolution as an example. If this theory was true, then from 50 million years ago until today, as everything developed, there

¹ *Sanhedrin* 61b.

² *Ibid.*

would have to be all the stages. There would have to be half an eye, a quarter eye, etc. Let's consider the most advanced camera in the world (which, by the way, can't do even a millionth of what a child's eye does). If we would say that this camera evolved, there would have to be 50 million stages of development. But when it comes to evolution, one professor goes to Antarctica, finds a bone over there, and says, "Aha! I found the connection between man and ape!" and the whole world bows down to him and accepts every word.

אִמְרִים לַעֲץ אָבִי אֶתָּה – They say to wood,
"You are my father!"³

In ancient times, people said that wood and stone made the world. In modern times, a new idol has been discovered: "No one." No one created the world, they say. There never was such great denial of *Hashem*. The falsehood they put forward today is so ridiculous. From today's *avodah zarah* we can learn about the nature of all the idolatries that ever existed.

It is not hard to know the truth. It is as simple as could be. It is right out in the open for all to see. But *Hashem* created human beings with the ability not to see the truth even if it is right in front of their eyes. *Sefer Mesilas Yesarim* writes in his introduction that the more something is out in the open, the easier it is to be mistaken about it. If

someone wants to find the truth, it is right in front of his eyes. And if someone wants to miss it, he can do that, too. The first thing we need, in order to find the truth, is to be a judge [who sees the facts impartially,] and not a lawyer [who does everything he can to bend the facts to fit his client's claims].

Faith that *Hashem* created the world is even more solid than the ruling of a judge. When a judge sees that a case leans 90% one way and 10% the other, he rules according to the 90%. We, too, when we want to cross the street, and we have a green light, we walk out into the street, even though there is a small chance that a drunk driver could come barreling through the intersection. But the likelihood of this happening is negligible, so we go forward into the street, even though we are putting our lives at stake.

The truth of *Hashem* is not like this. Our faith is 100%, not 90% and not 99% percent. We can prove it to be 100% true.

If 100% is not enough for someone, and he argues that maybe it is like this, and maybe it is like that, suggesting illogical possibilities, he can deny *Hashem*. But he needs to know the reality. He is going against 100% certainty. The Torah is not built on 99%, but on 100%.

Anyone who looks at things impartially can recognize the reality that *Hashem* created the world. It cannot be otherwise. It is the only possibility that makes sense. ●

³ Yirmeyahu 2:27.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבודגד זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נדבת נדידהם ~ עשרת זקנים בני נשים והפארת נשים אבותם

Do Chesed Right

כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחָיֶךָ וְגו' לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ וְגו' כִּי פִתַּח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תַּעֲבִיטְנוּ דֵּי מַחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לוֹ. (דברים טו, ז-ח)

When there will be a pauper among you, from one of your brethren... do not harden your heart and do not close your hand... for you shall surely open your hand to him. And you shall lend him, on pledge, as much as he lacks. (*Devarim* 15:7-8)

This passage contains the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. We learn many important and wondrous *halachos* from these verses, as the Rambam details.¹

However, *Chazal* tell us that there is a *mitzvah* even greater than *tzedakah*.

Said R. Elazar: Doing *chesed* is greater than giving *tzedakah*. The Rabbis taught: In three ways, doing *chesed* is greater than *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* is with one's money, and *chesed* is both with one's self and with one's money. *Tzedakah* is for the poor, and *chesed* is both for the poor and the rich. *Tzedakah* is for the living, and *chesed* is both for the living and for the departed.²

Many of the *halachos* of *tzedakah* apply also to doing *chesed*, and they are very important *halachos*. We will mention one of them here.

The Rambam writes:

Anyone who gives *tzedakah* to a poor person, but he has an unpleasant expression on his face, and is looking down, even if he gives a thousand gold pieces, he has lost his merit and forfeited it. Rather, one should give to the poor person with a pleasant expression on one's face, happily, and commiserate with him over his troubles, as it says, אִם לֹא בִכִּיתִי לְקֹשֶׁה יוֹם עָגְמָה נַפְשִׁי – “If I did not cry for the unfortunate,

and my soul was not sad for the pauper.”³ And you should speak words of grace and solace to him, as it says, וְלֵב אֶלְמֶנָה אֲרַנֵּן – “I will gladden the heart of the widow.”⁴

If the poor person made a request of you, and you don't have anything to give him, you should appease him by talking to him. It is forbidden to reprimand a poor person or to raise your voice and yell at him, because his heart is broken and oppressed, and it says, נִשְׁבֵּר וְנִדְכָּה אֲלֵקִים לֹא תִבְזֶה – “A broken and oppressed heart will not be despised by G-d.”⁵ And it says, לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ – “To revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the oppressed.”⁶

Woe to he who shames the poor person, woe to him. Instead, one should be like a father to him, both in showing compassion and in speaking to him, as it says, אָב אֲנִי – “I am a father to the paupers.”⁷

This *halachah* applies as well to doing *chesed*. Let's say someone asks a certain favor of you, and you can't do it. Even if he isn't poor and needy as far as money goes, he is poor and needy regarding

1 *Mishneh Torah*, end of *Matnos Aniym*.

2 *Sukkah* 49b.

3 *Iyov* 30:25.

4 *Ibid* 29:13.

5 *Tehillim* 51:19.

6 *Yeshayahu* 57:15.

7 *Iyov* 29:16.

8 *Mishneh Torah* *ibid*.

the matter he asked you for, and his heart might be broken because of it.

This applies especially to people who work with the public, such as a school principal, teacher, government clerk, or even small store owner. Sometimes people ask for favors that cannot be granted. Nonetheless, we must remember that the requesters are poor in this matter, and we should keep in mind the words of the Rambam, “Woe to he who shames the poor person, woe to him.” The repetition of the word “woe” shows how serious it is.

Even when we see that the favor requested is no life-and-death matter, still it is written, “You shall surely open your hand to him... as much as he lacks.” Everyone has his needs and things that he lacks, and

Chazal say that even a horse to ride on and servant running ahead of him is considered a legitimate lacking for someone who is accustomed to this but doesn't have it.

This is surely true if someone comes and asks you to teach him Torah, or help him or his child get accepted in a Torah educational institution. Even if you can't help him, you need to be very careful not to shame him. You should rather speak pleasantly to him, encourage him and assist him. About this it is written:

וְהָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה הַצְדָּקָה שְׁלוֹם – The act of *tzedakah* was peace.⁹ ●

9 *Yeshayahu* 32:17.

PARSHAH TOPIC

Money

לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן. (דברים טז, ז)

Do not harden your heart and do not close your hand from your impoverished brother. (*Devarim* 16:7)

Tzedakah Connects

Money is the most material thing in the world. The whole world revolves around money. Everyone works for money and looks for money. Money expresses strength and power. With money you can't buy intelligence and health, neither can you buy a *daf Gemara*. But when it comes to material matters, money is the way to get them. As said *Shlomo Hamelech*, the wisest of men:

וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת הַכֹּל – Money is the answer to everything.¹

1 *Koheles* 10:19.

Money is also the great enemy of *kedushah*. It has the ability to disconnect us from *Hashem*, as it says:

פֶּן אֲשַׁבֵּעַ וְכַחֲשֵׁיתִי וְאָמַרְתִּי מִי ה' – Lest I be satiated and deny and say, “Who is *Hashem*?”²

Hashem is found where there is poverty and suffering, not where there is lots of wealth. *Hashem* is with a person who suffers.

עִמּוֹ אֲנִכִּי בְצָרָה – I am with him in his trouble.³

2 *Mishlei* 30:9.

3 *Tehillim* 91:15.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is with the lowly and the oppressed.

When we take that which is farthest from *ruchniyus*, which is money, and we use it for *tzedakah*, we are connecting up two opposing forces. We are bridging between heaven and earth; linking physicality with spirituality.

Tzedakah is the thing that connects most strongly between the physical world and the spiritual world.

Tzedakah Does Not Depend on Anything

With all other *mitzvos*, their reward depends on the person who performs the *mitzvah* act and the degree to which he is worthy of reward. Let's take the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents. The Torah promises a long life to someone who fulfills this *mitzvah*. But if he sins, he is liable to lose this reward.

It may be compared to a doctor who promises his patient that if he takes his medicine he will get better. But if the patient decides to swallow poison or jump off the roof, he can lodge no complaint against the doctor. The doctor's promise regarding the results of the medication is good only as long as the patient doesn't do things that are damaging to his health.

So it is when the Torah promises length of days to someone who honors his father and mother. This promise is good and reliable and capable of granting longevity. But it depends on the person refraining from other acts that shorten his life.

The *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is not like this. *Tzedakah* is like a respirator that gives life. A respirator doesn't give health, it doesn't heal illness, but it keeps a person alive. It doesn't let the soul leave the body.

וְצִדְקָה תְּצִיל מִמָּוֶת – *Tzedakah* saves from death.⁴

Regarding all other *mitzvos*, we are not allowed to test *Hashem*.

לֹא תִנְסֶה אֶת ה' – You shall not test *Hashem*.⁵

We do not have enough understanding to test *Hashem* regarding His promises. Who are we; do we comprehend the profound calculations of Heaven? Who knows if we have not forfeited our reward due to bad deeds? But there is one *mitzvah* by which we may test *Hashem*.

הָבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וְגו' וּבְחִנּוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת וְגו' אִם לֹא אֶפְתָּח לָכֶם אֶת אֲרֻבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם – Bring all the tithes to the treasury... and test Me through this... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven....⁶

We can test this and see for ourselves. If we give *tzedakah*, we will not lose out. Because this *mitzvah* doesn't depend on anything. It directly infuses life. Why? Because when we give *tzedakah*, we connect directly to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, to the Source.

America

An example of how *tzedakah* saves from death is the United States of America. America is not such a kosher country. Spiritually speaking, it is sunk deep, deep in the mud. But the people there live and enjoy all the pleasures of life. They are wealthy, they have houses, children, good lives. True, there are also problems, but generally speaking, life in America is good.

R. Baruch Ber Leibowitz once noted that America never fought a war on its own soil against a foreign country. It fought wars in other places, but not on American soil. And this is in the merit of *tzedakah*, because this country donates a lot.

However, we need to know that *tzedakah* only grants the right to life in this world. Here, they have it good, they have wealth and happiness, but when they depart to the world of truth, they will find out their true spiritual state. There, they might be surprised to find out how "impoverished" they really are.

The worst thing that can happen to a sick person is for the thermometer to break. If a person doesn't know how ill he is, if he doesn't have pains or other signs that something is wrong with him, he is in bad

4 Mishlei 10:2.

5 Devarim 6:16.

6 Malachi 3:10.

shape. He may walk around smiling and happy, but the day will come when his illness will surface, and it might be too late.

Pains, troubles and difficulties are like a traffic sign that tell a person to stop and take account of himself. When a person doesn't have a traffic sign, if he doesn't have tools that enable him to examine his true state of affairs, he is likely to end up at the gates of death.

This is an extreme example. But it illustrates the idea that *tzedakah* is a special *mitzvah* with special powers in this world. Its results do not depend on other factors.

Tzedakah is Practical

It says in the *Mishnah Berurah*⁷ that when we say the words **וְאַתָּה מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל** in the *Vayvarech David* passage of *Pesukei d'Zimra*, we should give *tzedakah*, thus fulfilling the idea conveyed in the verse:

אֲנִי בִצְדָק אֶחְזֶה פָּנֶיךָ – Through *tzedakah*,
I will see Your face.⁸

We will now explain what this means.

There is a *midah* of *Hashem* called *Malchus*. It signifies the actualization of all those matters that heretofore existed only in potential.

I once saw with my own eyes an incident that is a poignant illustration of this concept. A gathering of very wealthy Jews was once held to raise money for a certain worthy purpose. One of the participants, who was exceptionally wealthy, spoke with great emotion. He urged everyone to donate generously to this lofty cause. After someone gave a significant donation, the exceptionally wealthy man got up and said, "I propose that each person here should double that amount!"

It is embarrassing to tell the end of story, but even though during the speeches and *divrei Torah*, this wealthy man seemed full of *yiras Shamayim* and desire to help, when it eventually came time for him to make an actual donation, when he needed to take out his checkbook, he was unable to part even with

a cent. As far as I know, he still has not sent in his portion to the campaign.

This is something awesome to contemplate. He was the one who warmed everyone up to sign. He got every participant so excited about the campaign that they doubled the sum. He brought about such a *kiddush shem Shamayim*. He said that this will be a gathering like never was, never was so much money raised for a holy goal such as this. And everyone gave – except for him!

He couldn't. He was simply unable. He didn't know how to write a check. Suddenly he forgot everything he said.

Let's get back to our subject. Before we come before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in prayer, to see His face, so to speak, we need to take a few coins out of our pocket and put them in the *pushka*. We need to give some money, which is the thing most precious to a person. *Tzedakah* for the poor. Otherwise, there is no value to all the songs and praises that we sang to *Hashem* until now.

Tzedakah is a practical expression. It's not the few coins we give that will make us into *tzaddikim*. But it expresses something practically and actually. It shows that we have a real connection to *tzidkus*. We express this connection by giving what is hard for us to part with, and that is money. "Through *tzedakah*, I will see Your face."

When we take a coin or a bill and stretch out our hand to a poor person, this is *yichud Havayah*. We connect to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The giver's hand has five fingers. This corresponds to the *gematriya* of the letter *heh* of *Hashem's* Name. The five fingers of the poor person's hand represent another *heh*, as *Hashem's* Name has the letter *heh* twice. The outstretched arm of the giver represents the shape of the letter *vav*, and the little coin represents the small letter *yud*. This makes up the four letters of *Hashem's* Name.

When we perform this *mitzvah* we form a connection to the upper worlds, and this connection is not dependent on other factors, as we explained above. We bind ourselves to worlds of *kedushah* and *taharah*. ●

⁷ 51:19.

⁸ *Tehillim* 17:15.

Believe That These Days Are Awesome

The foundation of the whole Torah is *emunah*: faith in *Hashem*, faith in the Torah, faith in *chachmei Yisrael*. A Jew is obligated to believe even in matters that are above his understanding and far beyond the reach of his feelings.

One of the things we need to believe is that the month of Elul is a tremendous and awesome time. We know that our rabbis and teachers, *Gedolei Yisrael*, made a big deal of Elul. They were ardent about it. R. Yisrael Salanter remarked that all the days of the year need to be like Elul — and Elul itself is surely “Elul”!

People recount that R. Yisrael Salanter was enwrapped in great fear from Rosh Chodesh Elul on. Once somebody asked him, “What are you so afraid of? Is Elul a bear?”

R. Yisrael answered him, “Elul is more terrifying than a bear. *David Hamelech* declared, ‘Your servant has smitten the lion and the bear.’¹ David did not fear these animals. But he nevertheless said about himself, ‘My flesh stood on end from Your dread, and I feared Your judgments.’² David was seized by terrible fear of *Hashem’s* judgment on Rosh Hashanah!”

It is hard for us to understand this. People wonder to themselves, “What is all the panic about? I have been living for twenty, forty, even fifty years already. I am still alive... Why should I think that I will die right now?” And if so, what is the meaning of the plea composed by *Chazal* for the *tefilos* of these days: “*Zochreinu l’chaim, Melech chafetz bachaim* — Remember us for life, O King Who desires life”?

For this we need *emunah*.

And in fact that is what the Rambam so wonderfully states:³

We were commanded to believe in His fear, and to be afraid of Him. Not to be like those who deny *Hashem* and go along the way they see fit for themselves, according to chance. Rather, we should fear His punishment at all times. This is the meaning of “You shall fear *Hashem* your G-d.”⁴

Here we see that fear of punishment — the very fact that *Hashem* punishes people who transgress His will — is one of those things that the human mind does not truly grasp. We are commanded to have faith in it!

Furthermore, the *yirah* that this period requires of us is something even more profound and unfathomable. A person’s whole life is full of *Hashem’s chesed*. Our eyes see, our ears hear, our hands and feet function. We have food, water — it is all *Hashem’s chesed*. Millions of acts of *chesed*. “Though our mouths were filled with song as the sea, and our tongues with singing praise as the swell of its waves... we still would be unable to thank You... for one out of the thousand, thousands of thousands and myriad myriads” of kindnesses that *Hashem* does for us.

It is very hard for a person who is used to a life of *chesed* and *rachamim* to live in fear and dread of *Hashem*. He can’t grasp that now, on Rosh Hashanah, he is facing a judgment that will decide his whole future for better or for worse, and that now he can change things through his deeds. He can change things for himself, for his family around him, and for the entire Jewish people! Although he may have a hard time grasping this, he is obligated to believe that it is so. To know that *Hashem* is true and His Torah is true. And it is a truth of Torah that these are “days of awe.”

¹ I Shmuel 17:36.

² Tehillim 119:120.

³ Sefer HaMitzvos, positive mitzvah 4.

⁴ Devarim 6:13.

Fleeing from You, to You

There are two ways to come out winning in the fearful judgment of Rosh Hashanah. *Teshuvah*, which entails rectifying and improving deeds, can bring a person to be judged as righteous. But there is another way: to be in the “embrace” of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. We will focus on the second way.

At this time of year, a Jew feels the awesomeness of the days in his whole being: so to speak, he is being “embraced” in the arms of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and at the same time, he is being judged by Him. Both feelings, of closeness and fear, join together to envelop him. Thus, all his conduct in this month is totally different from that of the rest of the year. Concurrently, the fact that he is in the “embrace” of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* causes his judgment to be conducted completely differently. A Jew who draws close to *Hashem*, who fulfills יושב בסתר עליון — “He dwells in the shelter of the Most High, he lies in the shade of the Almighty,”⁵ has a way to rescue himself. As it says:

From You, I will flee to You.⁶

It is well known that early Torah sources say אלול stands for אני לדודי ודודי לי, “I belong to my Beloved, and my Beloved is mine.”⁷ Elul is a time of closeness with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. It cannot constitute merely a temporary friendship, for this is not called “beloved.” Thus, these days are the time to acquire a relationship with *Hashem*. We are saved from the judgment through the embrace of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, by building a closeness and connection with Him — which is the main *avodah* of these days.

This is one of the foundations of Judaism that have become so forgotten from us: our *Yiddishkeit*, our *mitzvos* and *tefilos*, are not just “buttons” that we need to press. Indeed, systems definitely exist. There are systems of *tefilah*, of Torah and of *siyata*

di'Shemaya. But the foundation of everything is “my Beloved” — a connection with *Hashem*, the *Elokim Chaim*. He is live and real.

Double Sin, Double Punishment and Double Consolation

The depth of this matter is expressed in the following *Chazal*:⁸

They sinned doubly, as it says: “Jerusalem sinned a sin.”⁹ They were smitten doubly, as it says: “She was smitten by *Hashem* doubly for all her sins.”¹⁰ And they receive a double consolation, as it says: “‘Be consoled, be consoled, My people,’ says your G-d.”¹¹

This requires explanation.

First of all, what does it mean that “they sinned doubly”? Second, what is the meaning of “they were smitten doubly”? *Hashem* always punishes measure for measure, no more. Furthermore, if they sinned doubly, then they were smitten for two sins. How is that called smitten “doubly”? Neither is the double consolation so clear.

The explanation is as follows. Every deed has two repercussions for the person who does it. For instance, let's say a person has a car and he wants it to serve him well. If so, he needs to take care of it. If he is negligent in the maintenance of his car and it breaks down, his deed contains both “sin” and “punishment.”

That's how it is with an inanimate object like a car. But when it comes to a live person, for instance, saying a hurtful word to a friend, the sin becomes doubled. First there is the actual misdeed done to the friend. Added to this is the fact that his friend is now angry with him. This anger could have many repercussions that go beyond the actual misdeed that was done.

⁵ *Tehillim* 91:1.

⁶ *Piyut* of R. Shlomo ibn Gevirol.

⁷ *Shir HaShirim* 6:3. See *Mishnah Berurah*, beginning of *siman* 581.

⁸ *Eichah Rabbasi* 1:57.

⁹ *Eichah* 1:8.

¹⁰ *Yeshayahu* 40:2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, v. 1.

This applies even more in relation to *Hashem*, the mighty King over all. *Hashem* says:

וְאִם אָב אֲנִי אֵינִי כְבוֹדִי – If I am a father,
where is My respect?¹²

So to speak, *Hashem* feels the insults and indignities; He feels who truly loves Him!

The Rambam writes that *Hashem* considers a sinner to be “detestable, rejected, and abominable.”¹³ In other words, besides the sin itself, there is also the offense to *Hashem*. There is the distance that results from the sin. Let’s take the sin of *bitul Torah*, for instance. Besides the five minutes that this person could and should have learned Torah, but didn’t, there is also the insult this constitutes to *Hashem’s* Torah. Therefore the Torah says:

If you leave me for a day, I will leave you
for two days.¹⁴

Yirmeyahu HaNavi cries out:

וְתַפְּשִׁי הַתּוֹרָה לֹא יָדְעוּנִי – Those who
hold the Torah did not know Me...¹⁵

Hashem is *Elokim Chaim*, and His Torah is *Toras Chaim*. *Hashem* and His Torah are alive and real. R. Yerucham of Mir would say that if a person sits in front of the *shetender* and suddenly leaves the *Gemara*, then even if he comes back, he should know that when he went away, his *Gemara* went away, too. And his *Gemara* won’t come back so fast.

This is why people don’t see success in their learning. The Torah is not a machine. Someone who learns a *daf Gemara* does not automatically know the *daf*. For that, *siyata di’Shemaya* is needed.

In the same vein, R. Yerucham quotes the *Yotzros* of the second day of *Shavu’os*, which recount those times that *Hashem* wanted to bring the Torah down to the earth, but the Torah refused. This happened

in the time of *Adam HaRishon*, and then again in the period of the *Avos*, until came the time of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, when the Torah had no remaining objection. Even the Torah itself desired to be given to the Jewish people. It wished to descend to the earth.

Here we see that the Torah is in charge of itself, so to speak. It’s not enough just to pick up a *Gemara* and start learning. There is a relationship to build — a person needs to live the Torah always and at all times!

(Digressing from the subject for a moment, it is worthy of mention that this is actually the first *chinuch* to Judaism that a child receives. Before he even learns to talk, well before he can say “Torah tzivah lanu Moshe,” he is taught to kiss *sifrei kodesh*. When a *sefer* falls down, he is told, “Pick it up and give the book a kiss!” Now, people don’t kiss stones, only something alive — *Toras Chaim*, the living Torah!)

This is the meaning of “they sinned doubly.” Besides the actual sin, there was also the insult to *Hashem*.

So it is with “they were smitten doubly.” When a person is punished by *Hashem*, it contains a double punishment. First of all, he loses all the good things that *Hashem* would have otherwise granted him. But besides that, he also loses the wondrous goodness that is inherent in closeness to *Hashem*, since he disconnected himself from *Elokim Chaim*.

And this is also what the consolation will be: “double.” When *Hashem* will console us and redeem us, we will once again receive all the good things we had in the past. In addition, we will be embraced by *Hashem* in closeness and love. This is a great “double” influx of goodness.

Connecting to Elokim Chaim and Toras Chaim

This encapsulates the month of Elul: *Ani l’Dodi v’Dodi li*. It is acquiring a connection to *Elokim Chaim* and to *Toras Chaim*. In the golden words of

12 Malachi 1:6.

13 Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:6.

14 Yalkut Shimoni Eikev 873.

15 Yirmeyahu 2:8.

the Chazon Ish, in a letter he wrote to *lomdei Torah*:

The main thing is to know before Whom you are toiling.

This is because when it comes to Torah learning, we are not dealing with a machine. We are handling *Toras Chaim*!

This is actually what the *avodah* of Elul is all about: to believe and acquire *yiras Shamayim* — to recognize that there is not some kind of a machine here that is judging and working against you. We are talking about *Hashem*, may He be blessed. You can make up with Him, so to speak. If a person will show his Creator that he cares about Him, there his salvation lies.

The words of *Rabbeinu Yonah* at the beginning of *Sha'arei Teshuvah* are well known:¹⁶

Know that when one who has sinned delays his repentance, his punishment becomes increasingly harsher day by day, for he realizes that *Hashem's* wrath is upon him and that he has a refuge to retreat to, his refuge being *teshuvah*. Nonetheless he persists in his rebelliousness, along his evil path; he is capable of freeing himself from this upheaval, but does not fear the pending fury and anger. Consequently, the ills that await him are great.

Chazal commented on this: This can be compared to a gang of thieves who were incarcerated by the king. They started digging an underground tunnel, broke through, and escaped to the other side, all with the exception of one, who remained behind. The prison warden came, noticed the underground tunnel, and saw one person still imprisoned within.

He struck him with his truncheon and said to him, "You wretched man! The tunnel has been dug out. How is it that you did not hurry to save yourself?"¹⁷

Taking this allegory at face value, everyone asks the question: What did the remaining prisoner do wrong? It was commendable of him not to escape. The answer is simple: The allegory doesn't mean to say that this man didn't want to escape. Rather, it is saying that he felt, "It is not so terrible to be here in jail." To harbor such a feeling is to make light of the king's punishment. This prisoner took the attitude that there is no difference between a prisoner and a free man.

But a person who cares and is afraid will rely on the relationship with *Hashem* that is to be found in these days. A person who is in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* embrace has nothing to fear:

יִפֹּל מִצְדָּד אֶלֶף וּרְבֵבָה מִיְמִינֶךָ אֵלֶיךָ לֹא יָגֵשׁ

– A thousand will fall at your side, and ten thousand on your right side, but it will not reach you.¹⁸

This is a *ben Torah's* main point: the connection to *Toras Chaim*, the relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. In our childhood we were taught that when we finish learning, we close the *Gemara* and give it a kiss. We show a conciliating gesture when we shut the *Gemara*! And when we finish a *masechta* to go on to a new one, we say "*Hadran alach v'hadrach alan*." We are expressing: I am not getting rid of you, *chas v'shalom*. With *Hashem's* help, I will come back to you.

This is the character of a *ben Torah*, and this is also the character of *chodesh Elul: Ani l'Dodi v'Dodi li*. ●

¹⁶ *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 1:2.

¹⁷ *Koheles Rabbah* 7:15.

¹⁸ *Tehillim* 91:7.