

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Yisro



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Yisro

Hearing vs. Understanding

The parashah begins with Yisro having heard about the miracles that Hashem performed for the Jewish nation. He decided to uproot himself, travel to the desert, and become part of the Jewish nation. We wonder why only Yisro came. On the pasuk (Shemos 14:21) ויבקעו המים, Rashi writes, "All waters of the world split." Everyone knew that Hashem split the sea for His nation, and they probably knew about all the other miracles, just as Yisro knew. So what inspired Yisro to convert while the rest of the world remained on the sidelines?

Rebbe Dovid Lelover zt'l answered, "The entire world *hatt gehert* [heard about the miracles], but Yisro *hatt derhert* [understood]." Of course, the entire world

heard about the miracles, but Yisro took it a step further. He contemplated and studied them until he concluded that his only path forward was to convert and become part of the Jewish nation.

To explain this idea, we will take a look at the miracles that are embedded in nature. Millions of miracles and wonders can be found in the nature of the world, and scientists are aware of all these miracles more than anyone else. However, many of them remain apikorsim. This is because they "hear" the miracles but don't take it a step further to "understand" what they mean.

Another example is the hashgachah pratis that is evident in the world. People see wondrous examples of Hashem's hand in their

lives, but many don't draw the proper conclusions – to recognize Hashem. Similarly, at the time of kriyas Yam Suf, the entire world heard about the miracles, but only Yisro thought about it and understood what it meant, and that compelled him to take action.

There was another factor that brought Yisro to recognize Hashem in a world where most people failed. It states (18:1) וישמע יתרו... את כל אשר עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל עמו, "Yisro heard... everything that Hashem did to Moshe and to Yisrael, His nation." The key words are "everything

that Hashem did." When looking at an isolated miraculous detail, one might rationalize and think it occurred by chance. But when one looks at the whole picture – the many miracles that happened- he realizes without doubt that Hashem performed them. This applies to the miracles we find in nature, the wonders of hashgachah pratit, and the miracles that occurred by yetzias Mitzrayim. Hashem took the Yidden out of Mitzrayim with many miracles. וישמע יתרו... את כל אשר עשה אלקים, Yisro paid attention to the *many* miracles, which brought him to recognize Hashem and join the Jewish nation.¹

1. We say in Ashrei (Tehillim 145:20) שומר ה' את כל אהביו ואת כל הרשעים ישמיד, "Hashem protects all who love Him, and all the wicked He will destroy."

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l says that someone once heard a person say the second part of this pasuk but didn't hear the first words. He heard the person say, "...all who love Him, and all the wicked He will destroy."

The listener didn't understand. "Why would Hashem destroy those who love Him?"

Another person in the same beis medresh heard the beginning of the pasuk, but he missed the last word. He heard, שומר ה' את כל אהביו, "Hashem protects all who love Him; and all the wicked."

He asked, "Why should Hashem protect the wicked resha'im?"

But the people who heard the entire pasuk had no questions.

The Chofetz Chaim explained that people question Hashem's ways because they only see half of the story. For example, they ask, "Why do resha'im prosper, and why do tzaddikim suffer?" But if you looked at the full picture, including what will be in the end, they wouldn't have any questions.

The Chofetz Chaim told the following mashal:

Someone complained to the gabbai of a shul, "I came to your shul for the first time today, and I am unimpressed by how it is run. You distributed the aliyos in an unfair manner. You chose randomly, without an order, from all sides of the beis medresh! And a young child received maftir! Why don't you make an order? Are you helping your friends while ignoring others?"

The gabbai explained to him that there was, in fact, an order. "The first aliyah goes to a kohen, and there is only one kohen in the beis medresh. The second aliyah goes to a levi, and maftir was given to the young boy because he is bar mitzvah this week. Every aliyah has a reason why it was given to that specific individual. You only came one week, so you think there is no order, but those who come every week know that everything is distributed in an organized manner." Similarly, when we look at half the picture, we think that things aren't right, but when we take into account ה' אשר עשה ה', that Hashem does everything, we understand that there is an order, and everything is correct and just.

The community of Slonim hired the best chazanim to lead the tefillos on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The problem was that people in other towns knew that Slonim had the best chazanim, and they would find out who had davened in Slonim that year and offer those chazanim more money, and the chazan would go to those communities. Thus, every year, the community of Slonim

would have to find a new chazan.

One year, all good chazanim were taken. The community of Slonim settled on an old chazan who knew the tunes correctly but had a weak voice. That was the best they could do that year.

They decided that this time they would be smart – they would make a condition with the chazan that he couldn't leave them for ten years.

Reb Isaac Charif zt'l, the rav of Slonim, laughed when he heard the community leaders make this condition. He told them the following story:

A city designated a new plot of land for a cemetery, but very few people agreed to go there; everyone wanted to be buried in the more populated cemetery. Therefore, the chevra kadisha offered a thousand rubles to the first ten families who agreed to bury their loved ones in the new cemetery.

A poor person told his wife, "I found a solution to obtain all our Pesach needs, but you must help me. I will pretend that I died, and you will cry before my bed like a young widow. The chevra kadisha will arrive and offer you the thousand rubles to agree to have me buried in the new cemetery. Tell them you agree, but only if they give you the money upfront, before the levayah begins. We will receive a thousand rubles, and I will find a way to escape from the chevra kadisha."

"Are you crazy?" his wife asked. "I refuse to participate in this plot." But some days passed; it was the thirteenth of Nissan, and they still didn't have money for Pesach. Without a choice, she agreed to her husband's idea. The husband lay in bed, the wife cried near him, and the community was speaking about the great tragedy. A young man was niftar.

The chevra kadisha arrived and made their offer. As per their plan, she agreed but demanded she get paid upfront.

The chevra kadisha raised the money, gave it to the wife, and carried her husband towards the new cemetery. The cemetery was quite far away, and the chevra kadisha members stopped at a

Kriyas Yam Suf and Milchemes Amalek

In particular, two miracles brought Yisro to convert. Rashi (18:1) writes that Yisro heard about kriyas Yam Suf and the war against Amalek, which inspired him to come. Several explanations are given for how milchemes Amalek was the catalyst for

Yisro to join the Jewish nation. The holy sefarim explain that after kriyas Yam Suf, Yisro recognized Hashem, but thought he could serve Hashem from the distance in Midyan. He was convinced that the inspiration and awareness of Hashem that he attained would last forever. But soon after the wonders of kriyas

tavern to buy some food and drink, and they left the body outside. This was his opportunity. He jumped out of the coffin and ran away.

Soon afterwards, another person was niftar. This time, it was real. This family also agreed that their niftar be buried in the new cemetery if they received the money upfront. Once again, the chevra kadisha worked hard, raised the money, and gave it to the widow. But they were afraid they would be tricked again, so when they came to a tavern, they tied the niftar down so he wouldn't escape. A wise person commented, "You should have tied down the last guy, but this person is dead; he isn't going anywhere."

Reb Isaac Charif told the community leaders, "When you had good chazanim, you should have tied them down with a contract. But this chazan isn't going anywhere. There is no reason to tie him down."

When it comes to parnassah, people make all kinds of hishtadlus and try to "tie down" their parnassah to guarantee that their parnassah won't leave them. We tell them, instead, they should tie down their connection with Hashem. Your parnassah can't run away and doesn't need to be tied down. Hashem gives us parnassah, not our hishtadlus.

Yam Suf, Amalek came and attacked the Jewish nation. When this happened, Yisro realized that seeing miracles isn't sufficient to remain firm in one's belief. One can quickly forget, just as the Amaleikim forgot. He realized that if he wanted to live with emunah in Hashem, he needed to join the Jewish nation. He needed to live among people who believed in Hashem, as each person strengthens his fellow man in their belief. Otherwise, it is so easy to forget.

Reb Shlomo Brevda zt'l once slipped on a stairway in Yerushalayim and miraculously managed to grab onto the railing, which saved him. Some days afterward, Reb Shlomo told the Chazon Ish zt'l that he thought that he would never be the same after his miracle, but he has returned to his old self. The Chazon Ish replied that people tend to forget.

The Or HaChaim (Devarim 8:18) writes, "The yetzer hara's main ploy is to cause people

to forget, which destroys them. This can be the translation of the next pasuk, וְהָיָה אִם שָׁכַח, 'If you will forget that Hashem does kindness to you, תִּשְׁכַּח ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, you will forget Hashem...'"

Reb Shmuel Tchuliner zt'l (a student of Reb Moshe of Kobrin zt'l) once experienced a certain *chesed* from Hashem and didn't stop talking about it. His family asked him why he kept on repeating the same story. Reb Shmuel replied, "The Or HaChaim says 'The yetzer hara's first ploy is to cause a person to forget Hashem's kindness,' therefore I'm repeating it many times so I won't forget."

That the Amaleikim tried to harm the Yidden so soon after the miracles of kriyas Yam Suf taught Yisro that he too can forget, so he came and joined the Jewish nation, a nation that remembers.

In general, it is important to be among other Yidden because unity is our strength

and ammunition against the yetzer hara.

When the Jewish nation came to Har Sinai, they encamped in unity at the foot of Har Sinai, as it states (19:2) ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר, "Yisrael encamped there opposite the mountain." Rashi teaches that ויחן is in singular tense to indicate that the nation was united.

They encamped in unity before the mountain. Reb Akiva Eigar zt'l brings the Gemara (Succah 52.), which calls the yetzer hara הר, mountain. So, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר, means that when the Jewish nation is united, נגד ההר, that is their strength against the yetzer hara.

Yisro recognized this and joined the Jewish nation. That was his hope to remain strong with emunah in Hashem and overcome the yetzer hara.

Zerizus

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l explains that when a

person moves to a new country, he generally doesn't move in a moment. He would wrap up his business activities, sell his property, say goodbye to friends, and make other arrangements. It takes time. But Yisro came immediately. He heard about kriyas Yam Suf, milchemes Amalek, and before matan Torah, which was only days or weeks afterward, he was already in the desert. Why did Yisro leave so abruptly?

The answer can be found in Rashi: "What did Yisro hear that caused him to come? He heard about kriyas Yam Suf and milchemes Amalek."

Yisro understood that the nature of Amalek is to act quickly, without thinking. Had Amalek taken some time to think things over, he would have realized that it was suicidal to battle the Jewish nation, for whom Hashem performed miracles, ten makos, and kriyas Yam Suf. Yisro understood from Amalek's spontaneous

reaction that he must act immediately on his inspiration. He would never make the move if he would stall to think things over. He was inspired, so he had to act immediately.

The Yesod HaAvodah says that the attribute of zerizus is alluded to in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 111), שכל טוב, if you have a good thought, לכל עשיהם, bring it to action.

When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish nation, they replied, נעשה ונשמע. They didn't ask, "What is written in the Torah?" Instead, they jumped in and accepted the Torah. This is often the only way to succeed in avodas Hashem.

It states (*Koheles* 9:10) כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך עשה, "Whatever you can do with your might, do it." The Baal Shem Tov zt'l says that בכחך means a good thought (because thoughts are called חכמה, which spells כ"ח מה). The pasuk is telling us כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך, if you have a good thought, an idea that can

bring forth a kiddush Hashem or kindness to others, עשה, do it right away. Don't procrastinate.

It states (20:23) ולא תעלה במעלת על מזבחי, "You shall not ascend with steps upon My mizbeach." Instead of stairs, there was a ramp.

When walking up a ramp, one takes smaller steps compared to when one climbs stairs. The pasuk hints that spirituality is attained with small steps, always going higher and higher.

So, it could be that a person should begin with smaller steps, but he should start immediately. The good thought and inspiration that came to him is a gift from Hashem. If he fails to act upon it immediately, he can lose it.

Battle, Not Perfection, is the Purpose

Ramasayim Tzofim teaches another reason Yisro decided to join the Jewish

nation only after he heard about milchemes Amalek. He was inspired to convert right after he heard about kriyas Yam Suf. However, he was afraid he wouldn't be able to keep all the mitzvos. He feared he would sin occasionally, so how could he join? The war against Amalek represents our battle against the yetzer hara. From this war, Yisro understood that Hashem desires our battles even more than our perfection. When Yisro understood this, he came and joined the Jewish nation.

This is an essential lesson that we must remember. Sometimes we err,

sometimes we sin, and we feel broken. We must not forget that if Hashem wanted perfection, He would have created us with the ability to be perfect. But the reality of human beings is that they will make mistakes, so it must be that Hashem wants our attempts, yearnings, and battles and that perfection isn't the goal.²

Chazal (Sotah 49:) say, בעקבות משיחא חוצפא יסגא, that before Moshiach comes, there will be a lot of chutzpah in the world. The Saraf of Strelisk zt'l teaches that the Gemara refers to a holy chutzpah. A person can be on a very low spiritual level,

2. It states (20:18) ומושה נגש אל הערפל אשר שם האלקים, "Moshe drew near to the thick cloud, where Hashem was." ערפל spells the words אראפ פאל, which means to fall down, to go down levels. The Torah tells us that אשר שם האלקים, that Hashem is there. Hashem doesn't leave us even when we fall from our levels.

Before kiddush on Friday night, we say, מלך שומע תפילה מלך תמים דרכו. Rebbe Boruch'l explains that תמים means twice temimus. This is because Hashem uses temimus twice. He doesn't think about what was, and Hashem doesn't think about what will be. He looks at the person as he is now and listens to his tefillos.

but that doesn't prevent him from turning to Hashem with Torah, mitzvos, and tefillah. This is the chutzpah of the later generations, and that is the chutzpah that Hashem wants from us.

Someone said to the Beis Yisrael zt'l, "I have doubts in emunah, so what value can my tefillos have?"

The Beis Yisrael opened a Gemara Shabbos to where it says that when one says Amen yehei shemei rabba with all his strength, even if he has thoughts of avodah zarah, he is forgiven. "Do you see what is written here? The Gemara discusses a person who has thoughts of avodah zarah, yet even he can say amen yehei shmei rabba. So, no matter what level we fall to, we can daven and turn to Hashem."

It states (19:5) ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי... והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים, "And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth."

Chazal (Bereishis Rabba 21:6) say that whenever the Torah states עתה, "now," it refers to teshuvah. What is the connection between "now" and teshuvah? The Avodas Yisrael writes, "We can explain that Hakadosh Baruch Hu hints to those who come close to Him that they shouldn't lose hope and be afraid to come close to Him due to their aveiros that they did in the past because the main thing is to come close to Hashem from today onwards and to not to sin anymore. This is Hashem's great chesed because He wants to bring close those who do teshuvah, and he doesn't want to think or remind them of their sinful pasts."

This lesson also applies to Torah study. One shouldn't feel that he has sinned too much and can no longer study Torah properly. Torah is for everyone, no matter which level one is on.

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos, Shavuous* 5562) zt'l writes, "The

Torah wasn't given to individuals; it was given to all of klal Yisrael, the sinners [the *chelbenah*'] and the tzaddikim [the *besamim*']. We received the Torah after falling to the forty-ninth level of *tumah* [which proves that Torah is for everyone, from the tzaddikim down to the lowliest Yidden]."

Meforshim ask why the *Aseres HaDibros* begin with אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim," instead of "I am Hashem...Who created heaven and earth." We can answer that we mention yetzias Mitzrayim to remember that just a short time before, we were at the 49th level of *tumah*. And with that awareness, no one will say he isn't worthy of studying or practicing the Torah.

Rebbe Leibeile Eiger zy"l explains that this is why matan Torah is written in parashas Yisro. Yisro worshiped every *avodah zarah* that existed in his time

and was a high-ranking priest. Yet he came to the desert and received the Torah. This teaches us that the Torah is for everyone; no one should think it isn't for him.

Hashem promised the Jewish nation that if they receive the Torah (19:5), והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים, "You shall be for the most beloved treasure of all nations."

A *segulah* reminds us of the *nekudah* "*segal*," which is the formation of three dots (two on top and one beneath). The uniqueness of a *segal* is that even when it lies on its side, it remains a *segal*. Any way you turn it, it remains a *segal*. None of the other *nekudos* have this trait. Therefore, Hashem says, והייתם לי סגולה, you will be like a *segal*. This means that even if you fall, you will always remain the *am segulah*, the precious nation of Hashem.

Tefillah

At Matan Torah it states (20:15) וכל העם ראים את הקולות,

"And the entire nation saw the voices." The Birkas Avraham zt'l says that the קולות can be referring to the voices of tefillah of Bnei Yisroel. It was at matan Torah that the Yidden thought back and realized how much they accomplished with their tefillos. They davened in Mitzrayim and shouted to Hashem. There were times when it seemed their tefillos weren't heard in heaven because their suffering continued. But now they were free men, they received the holy Torah from Hashem, וכל העם ראים את הקולת, now they saw what their tefillos accomplished!

About kriyas Yam Suf, it states (Shemos 15:21) ותען להם מרים ושירו לה כי גאה... Miriam called to the Jewish women, telling them to sing to Hashem for the miracles. ותען can also mean "to answer." ותען להם מרים can be translated as Miriam answered the women's question. They were asking, "What is the purpose of tefillah? We

daven a lot, and we don't see results." ותען להם מרים, Miriam replied, "Now you see the miracles of kriyas Yam Suf. Now you see what we accomplished with our tefillos!" This is what the Jewish nation recognized by matan Torah. וכל העם ראים את הקולת, they saw what they accomplished with their many tefillos.

The Meor Einayim zt'l teaches that a quota of tefillos is needed before one receives his *yeshuah*. Sometimes we daven and think our tefillos aren't accomplishing, but each tefillah brings salvation nearer. Perhaps just one more tefillah is needed, and the salvation will come.

It also depends on the intensity of the tefillah. A tefillah said with kavanah will bring the *yeshuah* quicker. A *mashal* is a person who bangs a table. The table doesn't break. He can hit the table a thousand times, but the table remains firm and complete. However, one strong blow with a

hammer and the table collapses. So, too, a strong tefillah with kavanah can accomplish a lot.

The second of the Aseres HaDibros is (20:3) *לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני*. This is not an easy phrase to translate. Many think that it means, "You shall not have other gods..." but that would imply that there are other gods, *chalilah*. As Rashi writes, "It is a disgrace for Heaven to call them gods along with Him." Rather, *אלהים אחרים* means that others call them gods. Rashi's second interpretation is that *אלהים אחרים* means gods who are strangers. Rashi explains, "For they are strangers to their worshippers. They cry out to them, but they do not answer them, and it appears as if the god were a stranger who never knew [the worshipper]."

The Imrei Emes zt'l said that if a person davens and thinks that Hashem won't answer him, he has *chalilah* made Hashem into a stranger, *אלהים אחרים*.

This is a very sharp vort. If one doesn't believe that tefillah helps, if he thinks Hashem isn't interested, he has made Hashem on the level of the *אלהים אחרים*, gods who are stranger to those who serve them.

In Tehillim (81:10) it states, *לא יהיה בך קלזר*, and the Kotzker zt'l explains that Hashem shouldn't be a stranger to us. We should recognize that Hashem listens to us, is interested in us, and answers our tefillos. Hashem isn't *אלהים אחרים*, a stranger to us, disinterested in our requests.

Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l once davened for the refuah of a certain woman, but the tefillah wasn't answered. Reb Akiva Eigar was shocked by that, and he asked in a letter (printed in *Igeres Sofrim*) whether he had the correct name.

Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l understood the potential of tefillos. If his tefillos weren't answered, this was a question. How could he have davened to Hashem,

and the tefillos weren't answered? He writes that his tefillah was שגורה בפיו, that he davened a lot for this woman, and he was wondering why there were no results. We should also approach tefillah with emunah that tefillah helps.

In Kobetz Igros (2), the Chazon Ish writes, העיקר להתרגל שלא צריך שליח "The main thing is to get used to the idea that we don't need a messenger [to daven for us] because everyone can daven and attain everything he needs." He calls tefillah מטה ביד כל אדם, a staff of might in everyone's hands. Tefillah is our strength and power. With tefillah, we can attain so much.

Growth in Torah in a Minute

The Chazon Ish zt'l said that it takes just a moment, and a bachur can turn from being a weak bachur to the best bachur in yeshiva. He expressed it, "A bachur crosses the street. When he

was on one side of the street, he couldn't understand Torah, and by the time he reached the other side of the street, he had a sharp mind and could succeed in Torah study. And this is because his mother and grandmothers davened for him when they lit Shabbos lecht; they prayed that he should grow in Torah, and that was the moment that the tefillos were finally answered.

I heard the following story from Reb Yochanan Wosner shlita, an elderly Rav of the Skver community in Montreal. He told me that he met a youngster, only twenty-six years old, who was already a great scholar, far beyond what would be expected for such a young man. He asked about how he achieved his vast expertise in Torah in so few years, and this is what he told him:

"As a bachur, I was in a very good yeshiva but wasn't learning. I was wasting my time. Once, a

new bachur came to the yeshiva. This bachur had a speech impediment so severe that he was embarrassed to speak. This new bachur planned to tell the gabbai that he shouldn't give him an aliyah because he feared everyone would laugh when they heard him stumble over the brachos. However, before he had the opportunity to speak to the gabbai, the gabbai called him up for an aliyah, to honor the new student of the yeshiva. The *borchu* and the *brachos* brought many snickers among the young bachurim. I understood that this bachur's brachos would be the conversation at breakfast. I immediately went over to the gabbai and told him that I want *hagbah*.

"It was uncommon for a bachur to request an aliyah or *hagbah*, but the gabbai agreed and called me up for *hagbah*. I made a *הגבה הפוכה*, a "backwards *hagbah*," as it is done on Simchas Torah, with the words of the Torah facing the community, and

the back of the sefer Torah facing me. Everyone was shocked. One of the Roshei yeshiva even banished me from the yeshiva, but another Rosh yeshiva knew that I was not crazy, and he asked me why I did it. I told him I wanted the bachurim to speak about my *hagbah* during breakfast rather than the humiliating experience of the poor bachur.

"I was accepted back into the yeshiva, and from then on, I became a *masmid*. Everything turned around, and I attribute it to my *mesirus nefesh* to help this bachur."

This story is an example of a phenomenon that occurs at times. Growth in Torah can happen in a moment. Sometimes, it is a reward for a kind deed; sometimes, it is because of *tefillos*, and one suddenly grows immensely in Torah.

Reb Elazer Tzadok Turchin *zt'l* was always a *masmid*, but the following incident raised his

knowledge and *hasmadah* in Torah to a very high level.

One *erev* Yom Kippur, he was rushing to beis medresh to arrive early so he could say tefillas zakah and learn some Torah to prepare for the approaching holy day. When he passed the Tepliker Rav's *zt'l* home, the Rav called out to him, "*Bachur'!! Bachur'!!* I need some help organizing up my home."

Reb Elazar Tzadok realized that he couldn't say no to the request of this elderly Rav, so he came to his home and helped him organize the house. When he completed the deed, the Tepliker Rav told him, "I know you have many things to do; it is *erev* Yom Kippur, and you helped me with *mesirus nefesh*. Therefore, Hashem will certainly help you beyond the rules of nature this year."

After this incident, Reb Elazar Tzadok Turchin became like a new person. He would learn thirty pages of Gemara a day, and it was

in-depth, and he didn't forget anything.

Rav Meir Chodosh *zt'l*, the *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Chevron, saw how his student, Reb Elazar Tzaddok, was finishing one *masechta* after the other, and he suspected that he was learning on a very superficial level. He tested him and saw that Reb Elazar Tzaddok knew everything perfectly. Reb Meir Chadash told him, "You know wonderfully! Nevertheless, I still maintain that this isn't the way to study Torah. To learn a *masechta b'iyun*, one needs more than just a few days.

Despite Reb Meir Chodosh's premonitions, Reb Elazar Tzaddok continued studying in this manner and became a great Torah scholar. He wrote the *sefarim Shoneh Halachos* together with Reb Chaim Kanievsky *zt'l*. The entire Torah was on his fingertips. To inspire bachurim to study Torah, he would tell them, "Recite any line of Gemara." They would tell

him a few words, and he would say the rest without looking inside. And he did more than that. They would read a few words of Rashi, and he would tell them, by heart, the words of the Gemara that is printed next to Rashi's words, and then he would tell them Tosfos's words and the Rabbeinu Chananel's words, as they are printed on that line in the Gemara.

Anyone seeking a certain Gemara would go to him, and he would tell them exactly which page and line they sought.

This is an example of growth in a moment, and it shouldn't surprise us because it is a phenomenon that occurs.³

There is a child who suddenly began learning well. He loved Torah, and he understood Torah. This child wasn't learning at all, and he received very low marks on his tests. The change was so sudden that the principal of the cheder asked the father for an explanation of how it happened. At first, the father didn't want to speak about it, but the principal convinced him that he could tell others what he did, which would help others raise their children to Torah.

The father said the change occurred when he made a kabbalah to say birkas haTorah with kavanah. In birkas haTorah, we daven that our children should study Torah and that the Torah should be sweet

3. The Chazon Ish said there are geniuses in our generation as there were in the past, yet they don't reach the levels of the *geonim* of yore. No one in our times is becoming a Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l, for example. This is because possessing a great mind isn't enough. One needs kedushah and taharah, and in this aspect, we don't compare to the scholars of the past (*Maaseh Ish* vol.2:10).

in our mouths. That is when everything turned around.

Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel zt'l was one of the leading rabbanim in Spain. His expertise in Torah was undoubtedly known in Spain as well, but he humbly writes about his lack of Torah there and the change and growth that happened after he was expelled from Spain in the expulsion of 1492. We bring Abarbanel's own words (as quoted in Seder HaDoros): "I wrote all these sefarim after I left my birthplace. Before then, I was busy with the king and didn't have time to study Torah. *לא ידעתי ספר*, I didn't know Torah. My days passed with emptiness to earn wealth and honor. Therefore, the wealth was lost in a bad way. I traveled around the world, I lost all my money, and then I took myself to studying Torah, and I said *חסורי מחסרי והכי קתני*, I lost all my money, and now I can learn."

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover zt'l excelled in the mitzvah

of *pidyon shvuyim*. Once, Reb Moshe Leib gathered money to save a prisoner, but when the person was freed, Reb Moshe Leib discovered that the person was a thief and deserved to be in jail. Reb Moshe Leib feared that he might not perform a mitzvah this time. He decided that he would test it: The rule is that one mitzvah brings another (*מצוה גוררת מצוה*), and one aveirah brings another aveirah (*עבירה גוררת עבירה*). He would wait to see what comes from this deed of saving the person from jail. If he performs another mitzvah after this one, that will be the sign that he actually did perform a mitzvah because *מצוה גוררת מצוה*, one mitzvah draws another mitzvah. But if he will end up performing an aveirah, chalilah, that will indicate that saving this person from jail was an aveirah, and *עבירה גוררת עבירה*, one aveirah drew the next one.

Soon after saving the thief from jail, another case

of *pidyon shovuyim* arose! Reb Moshe Leib collected money and saved this person from jail. However, he soon heard that the second person he rescued was also a thief!

Rebbe Moshe Leib spoke to this second thief. "You see what happens to you. You were on the verge of being killed in prison. Perhaps it is time to stop stealing?"

The man replied, "Why should I stop? If I fail this time, I will try again. Maybe next time, I will succeed."

Reb Moshe Leib said that it was worthwhile to save these men from jail just to hear this idea. You failed before but try again. Maybe this time you will succeed?

About Torah study, regardless of what was in the past, it is worth trying

again. Perhaps this time you will succeed!

The Importance of Torah

Reb Elyah Lopian told the following story⁴:

During the years of the first war, there was a great hunger in Eretz Yisrael, and one bachur became ill, a side effect of the hunger. Friends came to visit him during his hospitalization. "Who are they?" the son asked his father.

The father was upset when he heard that. It meant that his son's illness had affected his brain, as well. "They are your friends," the father said with a smile. "They came to visit you."

Sometime later, the son's situation worsened, and when his brother came to

4. Reb Elyah Lopian zt'l once came to the Sfas Emes with a kvittel. The Sfas Emes zt'l said, "A person who has giluy Eliyahu should come to me with a kvittel?"

Reb Elyah Lopian replied, "To a person who knows I had giluy Eliyahu, I want to give a kvittel."

visit, the son asked his father, "Who is he?"

"He is your brother," the father replied.

One day, the son asked the father, "Who are you?"

The father cried. The illness became so great that his child didn't recognize him anymore.

Reb Elyah Lopian explained that just as our bodies need food, our neshamos also need food. Torah and mitzvos are food for the neshamah. If we don't feed the neshamah with Torah, tefillah and mitzvos, we become very ill until we aren't even able to recognize our Father in heaven.

On the words of Rashi (19:6) לֹא פחות ולא יותר, "nothing less and nothing more," the Sar Shalom of Belz zy"a explains that Rashi's words hint that no one is less than someone who doesn't study Torah, and no one is greater than a person who does study Torah.

The Beis Aharon zt'l would say that he can't look in the face of someone who didn't study a *daf* Gemara that day.

Rebbe Shlomke Zhviler never spoke negatively about Yidden, but he once spoke very degradingly against those who don't study Torah.

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy"a would say, "Someone who doesn't study Gemara is *"Nisht kein Yid un nisht kein mensch,"* not a Yid, and not even a human being.

It states (*Bereishis* 10:10), וְתָרֵי, ראשית ממלכתו בבל, "His first kingdom was Bavel." Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l would say that this pasuk implies, "One should begin with Talmud Bavli." That is the basis of being a Yid.

As we said above, everyone can succeed in Torah. Fortunate are those who set aside time for Torah study.

Chesed

The Rebbe Reb Zusha of Anipoli zt'l wanted to rebuke a certain talmid chacham who didn't feel it was important for him to occupy himself with tzedakah and chesed. This scholar would say, "Let others do those mitzvos. I devote myself only to Torah." Rebbe Zusha told him a story of a wealthy person who bought a beautiful, expensive jacket. Everyone in the town complimented him on his purchase. He appeared so regal in his new clothing.

A poor person in town was jealous of all the attention the wealthy person received, and he decided also to buy the same jacket.

He saved up for it, sold some items from his home, and proudly came to town wearing an exquisite jacket. He waited for all the praise and admiration, but nothing came forth. Instead, he noticed people snickering

and laughing behind his back.

He had to find out what he did wrong. He told his friend, "Tell me the truth, is something wrong with my jacket?"

The friend replied, "Your jacket is beautiful but doesn't match your other clothes. Your lopsided hat is seven years old, your pants have patches, and your shoes are falling apart. Your jacket is incompatible with your style of dress."

Rebbe Zusha explained, "Torah is beautiful but needs the right setting. It doesn't look nice when there aren't good middos or gemilus chasadim."

Rebbe Zusha told him that this is the meaning of the Mishnah (that we say each morning after birkas haTorah), אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהם בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא, ואלו הן, כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים... ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם, "These are the things that a person eats their fruit in this world, and the

primary reward remains in Olam HaBa: honoring parents, doing kind deeds..." The Mishnah lists many examples of kind deeds, and then the Mishnah states ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם. These words can also be translated as "Torah goes together with all of them." כנגד כולם, they have to go together, Torah with chesed and chesed with Torah. One without the other isn't sufficient.

Someone once shamed Reb Chaim Goldfinger, the gabbai of the Bobover Rav Shlita, and he remained silent, not answering back. There was a person who didn't have children. He asked Reb Chaim to grant him the merit of his silence by the humiliation as a merit for him to bear children. Reb Chaim agreed and blessed him with children. Nine months later, he had a child, and there was a large *shalom zachor* celebration because it was a miracle. We live at a time of *hester panim*, we don't always see miracles, but there are times that

Hashem shows us what He loves. Hashem loves it when we are quiet to avoid machlokes, Hashem loves it when one saves his fellow man from shame and humiliation, Hashem loves chesed, and these gestures are rewarded immensely, also in this world.

Interpreting the News

It states (18:8) ויספר משה לחתנו את כל אשר עשה ה' לפרעה ולמצרים על אודות ישראל את כל התלאה אשר Moshe told his father-in-law about all that Hashem had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians on account of Yisrael, and about all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and that Hashem had saved them."

What did Moshe tell Yisro that he didn't already know? Behold the parashah begins (18:1) וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל עמו כי הוציא ה' את ישראל ממצרים, Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, the chieftain of Midian, heard all that

Hashem had done for Moshe and for Yisrael, His people, that Hashem had taken Yisrael out of Mitzrayim." So, what did Moshe tell Yisro that Yisro didn't already know?

One answer is that there are different ways to interpret the news. We can use the present war in Eretz Yisrael as an example. If you listen to an Arab radio station, you will hear an entirely different story than when listening to an Israeli radio station. And if you merit to hear the news from a Yid who has yiras Shamayim, and especially if he is a talmid chacham, you will hear an entirely different report. The story is the same, but it must be deciphered correctly. Yisro heard the miracles that occurred, but now he heard the report from Moshe Rabbeinu. He heard the same story but in an entirely different light. The Torah tells us (18:11) עתה ידעתי כי גדול ה' "Now I know that Hashem is great."

Rashi writes, "I knew Hashem before, but now I know Hashem more..." This is because he now heard the story he knew from Moshe Rabbeinu. The impact is very different.

One of the aspects that Moshe Rabbeinu explained to Yisro, which Yisro didn't perceive before, is that the miracles were done with Hashem's attribute of chesed. Initially, Yisro thought Hashem saved them with His attribute of strict judgment because the Mitzrim perished in the sea. Therefore, the parashah begins (18:1) וישמע יתרו... את כל אשר עשה אלקים "Yisro heard... all that Elokim had done..." He attributed the miracles to Hashem's name Elokim, the name for strict justice. Moshe told him that the miracles were from Hashem's attribute of kindness, as it states ויספר משה לחתנו את כל אשר עשה ה' לפרעה ולמצרים, "Moshe told his father-in-law about all that Hashem, Havayah, had done to Pharaoh and the

Egyptians..." He told him that the miracles, and even the punishment to Mitzrayim, were with Hashem's name of Havayah, Hashem's name of compassion. Everything that occurred, including the destruction of Mitzrayim, was because of Hashem's love for the Jewish nation.

The Noam Elimelech (Bishalach) writes, "It states (at the beginning of the ten commandments, Shemos 20:2) אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים, 'I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim, out of the house of bondage.' The *miforshim* ask, why doesn't the pasuk state, 'I am Hashem, your G-d, Who created heaven and earth'? This seems to be a greater wonder! But I think it is a

greater miracle that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. Creation isn't such a great chidush because it is Hashem's nature to bestow kindness. But yetzias Mitzrayim, that Hashem smote the Mitzrim with wondrous makos, this is against Hashem's natural way. Hashem doesn't perform bad. But, because these makos benefited the Yidden, Hashem acted against His nature and smote them. This is a greater wonder."⁵

Yisro, at first, thought that Hashem would only smite the Mitzrim with His attribute of justice, and Moshe explained to him that when it is a benefit for Bnei Yisrael, Hashem smites the goyim with His attribute of kindness, represented by Hashem's name Havayah.

5. The *Orchos Chaim* on the *Rosh* (1:26) teaches that yetzias Mitzrayim is a greater revelation than creation because yetzias Mitzrayim teaches us to believe in hashgachah pratis. From creation alone, one may have thought that Hashem created the world and forgot about it ch"v. But yetzias Mitzrayim reveals that Hashem actively leads the world.

The Hardships are for the Good

During wartime, keeping lights on in one's home is dangerous because it attracts enemy fire. Those who want light in their homes must place a dark curtain over their windows. When one goes to a store to buy a curtain, the storeowner would ask two questions. He would ask the wattage of the lightbulb in the room and the distance between the light and the window. With this information, the store owner knew the degree of thickness needed to conceal the light in the room.

Rebbe Sholom Shatzer zt'l used the above to teach an important lesson to his son-in-law, the Voidislover Rav zt'l, "When it is dark, that means there is light behind the darkness. The thicker the darkness, the greater the light." We must remember that even when things appear dark and bad, it is always for the good of the Jewish nation. The greater the darkness, the

greater the light that will eventually be revealed.

When you see a caterer preparing five kilos of chrein, you know he is preparing for a bar mitzvah. When you see him preparing twenty kilos of chrein, you know he is preparing for a chasunah. And when you see a caterer preparing a hundred kilos of chrein, you know he is preparing for a rebbishe chasunah - a large, happy chasunah. The nimshal is that when there is a lot of chrein, which represents hardship, that is a sign that a great chasunah is approaching. Very good times are coming. Something good is cooking.

This is implied in the pasuk (18:8) ויספר משה לחתנו... את כל התלאה אשר מצאתם בדרך ויצלם ה' "Moshe related to his father-in-law...all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and that Hashem [Havayah] had saved them."

Moshe explained to Yisro that all the tzaros that befell

them were actually Hashem's compassion.

Yisro knew the truth that good comes from hardships from his own experiences. The Midrash tells that Yisro was the leading priest in Midyan. When he recognized Hashem, he told the people of Midyan, "I am old. I can no longer be a priest. Find someone else." The people in Midyan suspected that he didn't believe in their avodah zarah anymore, and they placed him in cherem. This is why Yisro's daughters struggled daily to get water for their sheep. They had to come early, and the other shepherds would chase them away.

It seemed to be a sad situation for Yisro, but he gained from it. Moshe saved his daughters from the other shepherds and gave water to their sheep. When they returned to Yisro, Yisro asked, "Why did you leave that man? Call him; perhaps he will marry one of you."

And he married Yisro's daughter Tziporah. So, Yisro's problem resulted in a great favor for him. It was how he met Moshe Rabbeinu. He discovered from his own experiences that when we think something is terrible, it is all for the good.

Bikur Cholim

According to some *rishonim*, the source of the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* is in *parashas Korach* (*Bamidbar* 16:29). Moshe said, ופקודת כל אדם יפקד עליהם, "If the destiny of all men has visited upon them." The Gemara (*Nedarim* 39:) explains, "If they die like all sick people, who lie on their beds and people come visit them..." (רי"א הלכות נדרים).

Another source is in this week's parashah (18:20), והודעת, להם את הדרך ילכו בה, "You shall make known to them the path on which they should go..." The Gemara (*Bava Metziah* 30:) says that this refers to visiting the ill.⁶

6. Every year, Baron Rothschild z'l would visit the Ksav Sofer zt'l,

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 40.) relates that one of Reb Akiva's students was ill, and the yeshiva students neglected to visit him, so Reb Akiva himself visited him. Reb Akiva tidied up the room and washed the floors, and the sick student said, "Rebbe, you granted me life."

"Reb Akiva went out and taught, 'Whoever doesn't visit the sick, it is like murder, and whoever visits the sick gives him life.'"

The Seder HaYom writes, "*Bikur cholim* is the from highest forms of *gemilus chasadim*, as Chazal (*Nedarim*

39:) write, '*Bikur cholim* has not no limit (אין להם שיעור).' Sometimes, with clever, encouraging, and kind words, one can revive a sick person and grant him life. We have seen this happen many times. Sometimes a person visits an unwell person for an hour or two, and the sick person says, 'I feel like a new person. My *neshamah* came back to me,' and we see how his illness became lighter."

Happiness is a cure; this is one of the services we do for the ill when we visit them. We make them happy, making their condition easier to bear, and sometimes

at a vacation/health resort they both frequented. The Ksav Sofer wasn't feeling well one year, and the Baron cut his visit short. The Ksav Sofer asked him why he wasn't staying longer.

The Baron replied, "Chazal call visiting the sick (18:20) ילני, 'to go.' This is because when you visit the sick, you have to know when to leave. This is because your visit might burden the ill person, and sometimes, the ill person is embarrassed to be seen in this state. Therefore, the Torah says ילני, that you have to know when to leave."

The Ksav Sofer often repeated this *vort* that he heard from Baron Rothschild.

it can cure them. It states (*Mishlei* 18:14), רוח איש יכלכל מחלהו, ורוח נכאה מו ישאנה, "A man's spirit will sustain his sickness, but who can support a broken spirit." The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains that *ruach* means happiness. "When a person is happy, he can handle his illness... His joy will dissolve it. But when one is sad, who can tolerate it?"

The Rambam writes, "Tell an ill person happy stories that will gladden his heart. Tell him interesting news that will take his mind off his illness, make him laugh, and make the people caring for him laugh. When you choose someone to be with a sick person, choose someone who can make him happy because this is what he needs."

Sodi Razyah (attributed to the Rokeach) writes, "When one visits the sick, he should speak to his heart comforting and encouraging words." These encouraging words will bring joy and, at times, *refuah*, too.

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 40.) writes the many rewards of visiting and caring for the ill. Among them are that he will be saved from Gehinom, he will be granted a long life, he will be protected from the yetzer hara, he will be saved from afflictions, everyone will honor him, and he will have good friends who give him good counsel, and be saved from bad friends who give lousy counsel.

The *meforshim* explain that these rewards are מדה כנגד מדה. For example, the Gemara says that visiting the sick saves one from afflictions. This reward is מודה כנגד מודה, measure per measure. He saved the ill person from afflictions; therefore, he is rewarded that he won't be afflicted.

We add that he will be saved from the illnesses. Just as he helped the ill person overcome his illness, Hashem will help that he won't be afflicted with illness.

Staying Young

It states (Tehillim 71:9) אל תשליכנו לעת זקנה, "Do not cast me away at the time of old age." The Baal Shem Tov zt'l explained that this means we shouldn't become old in our avodas Hashem. We should always stay young and fresh.

In Kotzk, people would call a ninety-year-old person a "thirty-year-old three times". They didn't want to become old and inactive. They wanted to stay young and prepared for change and growth.

It states (19:4) ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי, "I bore you on eagles' wings, and I brought you to Me." Rashi (Tehillim 103:5) writes that the bird is called נשר because נשר also means to shed, and the eagle sheds its feathers every year.

It states (Tehillim 103:5) תתחדש כנשר נעורכי. Rashi writes that this means we should be young like the eagle. Just as the eagle receives a new set of feathers yearly, so should we become rejuvenated every year. We should have a youthful spirit, always prepared to grow higher, to know more, and to reach new horizons.