

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Tzav

There is Always Hope

The first avodah performed each day in the Beis HaMikdash was *trumas hadeshen*, and it is discussed in this week's parashah, as it states (6:3) והרים את הדשן אשר תאכל האש את העולה על המזבח ושמו אצל המזבח, "He shall lift out the ashes...from the *mizbeach* and put them down next to the *mizbeach*."

A kohen, wearing *bigdei kehunah*, and using a silver shovel, would scoop up the equivalent of a handful (*kometz*) of ashes from the *mizbeach*, and he would place the ashes at the east side of the *kevesh* (the ramp of the *mizbeach*). The ashes miraculously were dissolved or swallowed up into the earth.

The Beis Yaakov (Ishbitz, 15) zt'l says that the ashes removed from the *mizbeach* represent the people who

have sinned so much until they were banished from the *kedushah*. They have sinned and are therefore removed. Nevertheless, we shouldn't think that there is no hope for them. The ashes were placed alongside the *mizbeach*. This indicates that even those who have become distanced remain with their specialness and potential. We keep them near the *mizbeach* because there is still hope for them to return.

In fact, all the *korbanos* tell us that there is hope for the Jewish nation. Hashem's presence in the *Mishkan* showed the nation that they were forgiven for making the *egel* (see Rashi, *Vayikra* 9:23), and similarly, the *korbanos* were to atone for the Jewish nation so it would be clean from *aveiros*.

This week's parashah discusses the process of bringing a korban *chatas*. It states (6:18) זאת תורת החטאת במקום אשר תשחט העולה תשחט החטאת, "This is the law of the chatas; in the place where the olah is slaughtered shall the chatas be slaughtered..." This mitzvah tells us that the chatas should be shechted on the north side of the mizbeach, in the same place where an olah is shechted. Some explain that this is to protect the *baalei aveirah* from shame. A chatas is brought for an aveirah. If they would bring their chatas to an area that is solely designated for the chatas, everyone would know that they had committed an aveirah. Therefore, the Torah obligates us to bring the chatas and slaughter it in the same location as the olah. All who see him there will think he is bringing an olah, and they won't know that he performed an aveirah.

This is an excellent example of Hashem's compassion. Even when a person sins, Hashem seeks ways to protect him from shame.

The Kli Yakar explains that the mitzvah to shecht the chatas at the place of the olah is to teach us the potential of teshuvah. An olah is the most precious korban (as Chazal tell us). When one does teshuvah and sacrifices a korban chatas, he shechts it at the place of the olah to show that his korban chatas is precious to Hashem as if he brought a korban olah.

Similarly, the Ishbitze (Mei HaShiloach) zt'l explains that a chatas is brought by people who have aveiros, whereas an olah is a korban for tzaddikim because it isn't brought to atone for aveiros. The Torah tells the person who committed an aveirah that he should shecht his chatas with the tzaddikim who bring olahs. This teaches us that when one wants to improve his

ways, he reaches the level of the tzaddikim.¹

For a korban olah, the blood is placed on the lower half of the mizbeach. The blood of a chatas is placed on the four upper corners of the mizbeach. This tells us that those who do teshuvah reach higher levels than the perfect tzaddikim. As the Zohar (vol.1 129:) states, "In the place where baalei teshuvah stand in gan eden, the greatest tzaddikim can't stand there. They become closer to the King than all the others. [And this is

because] they have a very strong desire to connect and to be close to the King."

A Continuous Fire

It states (6:6) *אש תמיד תוקד על*, "A continuous fire shall burn upon the mizbeach; it shall not go out." The Rambam (Tmidim u'Musafin 2) explains, "There is a mitzvas aseil for a fire always to be burning on the mizbeach... Three arrangements of bonfires were prepared on the top of the mizbeach. The first was the *מערכה גדולה*, the large

1. There is an opinion that an olah is brought for an aveirah; it atones for bad thoughts. According to this view, the Kli Yakar explains that the olah and the chatas were on the north side of the Beis HaMikdash, which is the left side. The left side alludes to the heart because the heart is located in the left side of the body. They are slaughtered there because it is the heart that draws people to sin.

The Noam Elimelech (Tzav) writes that the pasuk *במקום אשר תשחט* hints to us that we should consider the aveirah of a bad thought, or any other seemingly minor aveirah, as though it were a severe aveirah. *במקום אשר תשחט העולה*, when you bring a korban olah for a bad thought, *תשחט החטאת*, consider it like you are bringing a chatas. Think that you committed a severe aveirah that requires the great atonement of the korban chatas.

arrangement upon which the korbanos were brought. Next to it was a smaller fire called the מערכה שנייה. They would take a shovelful of coals from this fire for the daily ketores. The third arrangement wasn't used at all. It was solely to perform the mitzvah of אש תמיד תוקד, that there always be a fire on the mizbeach."

What was the purpose of this fire that burned constantly and wasn't used at all?

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l says that this continuous fire hints that we should always have a fire burning in our hearts, a fire of a desire to do Hashem's will.

The Divrei Chaim translates the pasuk as follows: "אש, a fire, תמיד, continuously, תוקד, should blaze, על המזבח, in one's heart, לא תכבה, and it should never be extinguished." His passion to serve Hashem should always be in his heart.

The Divrei Chaim adds the following important words, "And this is even after he performed a severe aveirah." Even then, he shouldn't lose hope. He shouldn't feel that all is lost. Even then, he should keep his heart aflame with a desire to do Hashem's will.

So, this relates to our first discussion, that there is always hope. No matter how far a person falls, he should keep a fire that yearns for Hashem burning within him because Hashem will accept him back. But it also connects with our present topic, that a person should have a fire burning in his heart.

Avodas Yisrael (Mishpatim, ו"י ז"ה) writes, "The Ramak received from Eliyahu z'l that to annul bad thoughts, say the pasuk אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח, 'A continuous fire shall burn on the mizbeach.'" The Avodas Yisrael says that this is alluded to in the pasuk (Shemos 21:14) ו"י ז"ה א"ש על רעהו להרגו בערמה מעם מזבחי תקחנו למות. Literally, the pasuk

means, "If a man plots deliberately against his friend to slay him with cunning, from My mizbeach you shall take him to die."

The Avodas Yisrael explains that איש in this pasuk represents the yetzer hara. He wants to kill רעהו, his partner, the yetzer tov. (The yetzer tov and the yetzer hara are called partners, רעהו because they are together in a person's heart.) The yetzer hara is יייד, trying to kill רעהו, the yetzer tov. He tries to kill him בערמה, by bringing into a person's mind false and crooked thoughts. The solution is מעם מזבחי תקחנו למות. This means you will succeed to kill the yetzer hara מעם מזבחי, by saying the pasuk איש תמיד תוקד על המזבח. This pasuk is mesugal for annulling bad thoughts. תקחנו למות, by saying this pasuk, you will destroy the yetzer hara.

Rebbe Yankele of Pshevorsk zt'l explained that in addition to saying the words of the pasuk, one should practice the pasuk (as the Divrei Chaim, quoted above,

explained). He should have a fire of hislahavus in his heart, and then all the bad will fall away.

We can compare it to a king who wanted to build a large palace in a forest, so he hired workers to cut down the many trees. A wise person told the king that there was an easier way. "Instead of cutting down each tree, which will take a long time, just light a fire, and the entire area will be cleared quickly." The nimshal is that there are many bad middos in a person that need improvement. It will take him a very long time to rectify them all. But if he ignites a fire of hislahavus, everything will be corrected quickly and easily.

Let us define the continuous fire that should be in one's heart.

A fire means a strong desire. For example, when it comes to knowing Torah, a person shouldn't approach Torah study with boredom

and disinterest. To grow in Torah, he must ignite a passion in his heart. He has to feel passionately, "I have to know Torah. I have to know the lesson that is being taught. If I don't, I will be lacking so much."

When it comes to loving his fellow man, he must feel in his heart, "How can I transgress the obligation of the Torah! It is terrible to think negatively about others!" With these thoughts and a fiery passion, he will find a way to love everyone, including those he finds difficult to love.

In short, a fire means that he truly cares and wants.

After defining "fire" let us explain what becomes rectified with this fire. The Avodas Yisrael writes in the

name of the Ramak that saying the pasuk *אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה* will annul bad thoughts, and the Avodas Yisrael explains that it will annul *מחשבת ערמומית* "crooked and false thoughts."

There are many kinds of "crooked and false thoughts" that the yetzer hara places within us to confuse us and to destroy our hopes to serve Hashem. Among them are forbidden thoughts, wrong perspectives, unnecessary fears, etc. But when we say the pasuk *אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה*, and in particular when we practice its message, by having a fire burning in our heart, a passion to serve Hashem properly, we are saved from this yetzer hara.²

2. Alcohol doesn't freeze; it isn't affected by the cold. But when one drinks alcohol, it creates a burning sensation in the heart. This hints that when a fire is burning in one's heart, he won't be affected by the cold of the world. We live in a world gone crazy, surrounded by many queer ideas and thoughts that can distance us from Hashem, but when there is a fire burning in our hearts, we are protected.

Praise Hashem

This week, we study about the *korban todah*, a korban of thanksgiving, to praise Hashem for His salvations. A *todah* is essentially a *korban shelamim* with two differences: A *shelamim* can be eaten for two days and one night, while a *korban todah* is eaten for only one day and one night, until midnight. Secondly, a *korban todah* was brought together with forty loaves of bread, while there was no bread with the *korban shelamim*.

The Siforno and the Abarbanel zt'l explain that these differences were to publicize the miracle that occurred. When there are forty breads to eat in a short time, one will invite others to his meal. He won't be able to eat everything alone. As they eat the *korban* and the breads, he will tell the others about the miracle and the salvation Hashem performed for him, and this will sanctify Hashem's name.

The Abarbanel (this week's parashah) writes, "When the owner of the *todah* realizes that he has to finish it in one day and by midnight, he will invite his brothers, friends, and fellow men to eat with him. They will ask one another, 'Why did he bring a *korban todah*?' and he will tell them about the miracles and wonders that Hashem performed for him, and he will praise Hashem amongst many and this will publicize the miracle. If the *korban todah* would be eaten for two days and a night like all other *shelamim*, the owner of the *todah* wouldn't invite anyone to his meal because, over this amount of time, he could eat it in his home."

The Siforno writes, "There were many breads to publicize the miracle among the many eaters."

So, the Siforno discusses the breads, and the Abarbanel discusses why it was eaten in a short time, and their answers are the same. Due to the short span

of time and the many breads, he will certainly invite guests to his meal and tell them about the miracles Hashem performed for him.

We don't bring a korban todah right now, but we learn from their words the importance of telling people about the miracles Hashem performs for you. Everyone experiences miracles, and we understand from the korban todah that Hashem wants us to talk about the miracles and publicize Hashem's wonders.³

Praising Hashem brings Salvations

The great-grandfather of the Chida, Reb Avraham Azulay zy'a, author of Chesed l'Avraham, lived in Chevron, Eretz Yisrael.

Once, as he was traveling to chutz l'aretz to collect money for the poor in Eretz Yisrael, there was a great storm, and it seemed that the ship would capsize. Reb Avraham made a kabbalah that if Hashem saves him and the storm calms down, he will tell people about the miracle that happened to him. He will speak about this miracle every day of his life. Immediately after he made this kabbalah, the storm subsided. In memory of the miracle, he signed his name as a picture of a ship to praise Hashem and to publicize the miracle.

Indeed, the Chesed l'Avraham taught that when one is in a tzarah, he should accept upon himself to say Nishmas in front of ten

3. Reb Elyah Roth zt'l said in the name of Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil zy'a, "When you experience hashgachah pratis, don't keep it a secret. You have a holy obligation to reveal Hashem's hashgachah to others." It isn't only major salvations that we should publicize, but also Hashem's hashgachah pratis that we experience in our everyday lives, so everyone should know that Hashem leads the world.

people when Hashem will save him. Many people have practiced this *segulah* and found it helpful and accurate (see Kaf HaChaim 281:8).⁴

The Midrash (Shochar Tov 70) writes, "The Yidden were redeemed solely because they talked about Hashem's kindness. Dovid said, 'If so, I will also discuss Hashem's kindness. Therefore, it states למנצח לדוד להזכיר אלוקים להצילני, 'For the conductor; of Dovid, to make mention. Hashem to save me...'"

When Does One Bring a Korban Todah?

It is known that there are four categories of people who must say *birkas hagomel*, ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם הגומל להיביים טובות שגמלני כל טוב. The siman to remember who benches gomel is חיי"ם from the words of Shemonah

Esrei סלה וכל החיי"ם יודך סלה 'All life will praise you forever.' חיי"ם is roshei teivos for חולה, יסורים, ים, מדבר, which stands for someone who was healed from an illness, saved from jail, traveled over a sea or through a desert (as this is written in Shulchan Aruch).

Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 219) adds, "It isn't only them. Anyone who had a miracle, like a wall falling on him, or was saved from an ox who sought to trample or gore him, or if there was a lion in the city which wanted to kill him, or if there were thieves, night robbers, and he was saved from them, and so on, they all must say the brachah הגומל..."

When the Beis HaMikdash stood, these people would also bring a

4. A couple living in Antwerp didn't have children after many years of marriage. The wife made a kabbalah that when they have a salvation and are blessed with a child, she will make a *seudas hod'ah* for ten people. Shortly after making this kabbalah, she had her *yeshuah*.

korban todah, a korban for thanksgiving.

What would be if one traveled over a sea or through a desert, and everything was peaceful and safe, posing no major risk to his life, must he also praise Hashem?

The Biur Halachah writes, "All agree that if he traveled over a sea or traversed a desert and there weren't any dangers (there weren't any storms at sea, and he never got lost or lacked food and drink in the desert), he must still say the brachah *הגומל*. Since, commonly, such problems arise, he must praise Hashem that he was saved." When the Beis HaMikdash stood, he would bring a korban todah.

The Alshich HaKadosh (7:11-16) says that he should praise Hashem even more than someone who was in danger because Hashem helped him doubly. He survived the trip and didn't suffer the fear and agony of the pending danger.

We quote, "The four people who must praise Hashem, you might think that they don't have to praise Hashem [when their lives weren't in danger], but they do. Even if there weren't stormy winds at sea... and when they went in the desert, they didn't get lost and weren't hungry and thirsty [they are nonetheless obligated to praise Hashem]. Also, someone who was ill and became well, [he must praise Hashem] even if he never reached the gateway of death. The same applies to a freed prisoner, even if he was never in chains. Since he was freed, he must praise Hashem. He has an even greater obligation to praise Hashem because Hashem gave him a life of tranquility, and Hashem didn't lead him through troubles. He didn't undergo the fright of impending death.

"So, if there was no rain at sea, and there weren't strong winds, his obligation to praise Hashem is greater.

In addition to Hashem saving him, Hashem had compassion on him, not giving him any tzaar at all. The same is true with an ill person. Not only did Hashem save him from death, Hashem stopped the illness from deteriorating. He is more obligated to praise Hashem. The same is true for someone who was in prison, and Hashem didn't allow them to put him in iron chains and poverty. It was just a prison, and then Hashem saved him. His obligation to praise Hashem doubles."

If Hashem helps a person and he doesn't experience worry, his obligation to praise Hashem is even greater, but this isn't how people think. Those in a dangerous situation praise Hashem much more than those who didn't endure such hard times. The Alshich tells a mashal to demonstrate this reality.

"Someone traveled through a desert, and people asked him whether it was

safe and whether there were robbers. He replied, 'It is safe. There is nothing to fear. You can travel through this desert carrying a box of gold, and no one will take it. Don't be afraid. This is the route to take.'

"Another person traveled the same route through the desert and arrived disheveled and out of breath. He couldn't stop praising Hashem for the wonders Hashem did for him. He said, 'How can I not praise Hashem? Armed thieves with swords surrounded me. They wanted to kill me and take all my money away. Hashem, in whom I trust, performed miracles for me and saved me from their hands, although I didn't have any weapons. Let it be known that weapons and swords won't save a person. Hashem saves us.'

"The person who faced danger saw that Hashem saved him, and he praises Hashem endlessly, but the person who had no trouble and traveled in peace and

tranquility doesn't praise Hashem. He doesn't have the intelligence to recognize that he should praise Hashem ten times more than the person who faced dangers and was on the verge of death. He didn't even see the bad!"

The four categories of people who are obligated to praise Hashem are discussed in Tehillim (107). The final pasuk of this chapter states, *מי חכם וישמר אלו ויתבוננו חסדי ה'*, "He who is wise will keep these in mind, and they will contemplate the kindness of Hashem."

Following Alshich's explanation, we can explain that the wise recognize Hashem's kindness even when he doesn't see any danger. The wise praise Hashem even more because they were spared the trauma and fear. Because they think about Hashem's kindness when everything is perfect, they won't need to endure hardships to recognize Hashem. They are wise

because they are saving themselves from trouble.

We say [in the Haggadah shel Pesach], *שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו והקב"ה מצילנו מידם*, in every generation [reshaim] stand up against us to destroy us and Hakadosh Baruch Hu saves us from their hands." The Panim Yafos (Bo 10:2) explains that Hashem saves us before the tzaros begin! We don't even know about the tzaros Hashem saves us from, as Chazal (Niddah 31.) say, *אין בעל, הנס מכיר בניסו*, when a miracle happens to a person, he doesn't even notice it!" This is exactly our subject. Hashem's kindness is so great that often we are saved with miracles, and not only don't we suffer in the hands of our adversaries, but we also don't suffer the fear and panic. We are saved before we know there is a tzarah.

The Panim Yafos teaches that we should always praise Hashem because it could be that we were just saved from a great tzarah,

and we don't even know about it. He writes that this is the meaning of (Tehillim 107) ה'ודו לה'... יאמרו גאולי ה' "Give thanks to Hashem... Those who were saved should say it..." We should imagine that resha'im stood up against us and we were saved, and therefore, we must praise Hashem because possibly that occurred, only we aren't aware of it. "Everyone should imagine that he was in great danger, and Hashem saved him."

This lesson is alluded to in the words (22:29) וְכִי תִזְבַּח זֶבַח

תודה לה' לרצונכם תזבחו, "When you slaughter a korban todah to Hashem, you shall slaughter it by your will." The Divrei Chaim zt'l explains that this refers to a voluntary korban todah. It is לרצונכם; you chose to bring it. This refers to when we don't know how or when we were saved, but we know that Hashem constantly saves us without us knowing about it, and for these times, we want to express gratitude to Hashem.⁵

5. Chazal (Yoma 22:) say, כִּמְהָ לֹא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרַגֵּשׁ גְּבֵרָא דְמֵרָא סִייעִיה, The literal translation is, as Rashi writes, "How confident, guaranteed, and worry-free is the person whom Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps." When a person sees that Hashem is helping him, he knows he doesn't have to worry about anything.

I heard from the Zvhiler Rebbe of America zt'l another explanation, hinted in these words. When Hashem helps a person (גְּבֵרָא דְמֵרָא סִייעִיה), he doesn't always recognize that it is from Hashem (לֹא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרַגֵּשׁ). He thinks it is natural.

In Shemonah Esrei, we say רַפְּאוּנוּ ה' וְנִרְפָּא, "Heal us Hashem, so we will be healed." Why do we daven for refuah? Why don't we daven not to become sick in the first place?

The Kav HaYashar (ch.18) writes, "There isn't a person who doesn't experience miracles, especially in these generations when the tzaros constantly increase. There are harsh decrees, wars, swords, hunger, captivity, and illnesses. If you are a person whom Hashem shines His countenance on and draws His kindness onto, and He saved you from these problems, you should always be thinking about Hashem's kindness. You mustn't be a kafuy tovah. Whoever can live in peace in his home and has parnassah must praise Hashem for that. They mustn't complain. Hashem gives them more food than they need; even so, they complain and cry their entire lives."

Praise Hashem for His Kindness Each Day

An elderly person of eighty-six years old was on a respirator in the hospital for a few days. When he was ready to leave, the hospital staff told him that he owed them \$10,000 for using the respirator. The old man began to cry. The hospital staff assumed he was crying because he couldn't afford to pay so much, so they told him he could get a deduction and pay half that amount.

He replied, "I wasn't crying about the cost. When you told me that the cost is \$10,000, I understood how much I owe Hashem Who gives me breath every day and every minute for the

The Yaavetz answers that everyone is ill, only they aren't aware of it. "There isn't a healthy person who doesn't have some sickness in him. He doesn't feel it because, according to the rules of nature, this type of illness isn't felt, or it is Hashem helping him not be affected by his illness [but he is certainly ill. As Chazal say], 'Those who experience miracles, but aren't aware of them.'" (The Shevet HaLevi zt'l would often repeat this lesson from the Yaavetz.)

past eighty-six years! How much I owe Him!"

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 86) relates that Reb Shimon ben Chalafta sat on a mountain and asked his daughter to wave a fan at him on a sweltering day. He promised to give her packages of נרד, a type of besamim, in reward. Soon afterward, a fresh breeze blew. Reb Shimon ben Chalafta said, "How many packages of נרד I owe Hakadosh Baruch Hu!" This is because Hashem bestows His kindness on us all the time, and we should recognize it and praise Him.

The Or HaChaim (Shemos 22:6) writes, "There isn't an hour or a moment when Hakadosh Baruch Hu isn't doing [kindness] for man, either for his body or for his needs." Hashem's kindness is constant; therefore, we should constantly praise Him. This is the lesson of the korban todah. We can't bring an actual korban in our times, but we can praise Hashem for all His kindness.

Reb Matisyahu Luria zt'l had a letter correspondence with a person who was going through a hard time. Reb Matisyahu wrote to him that if he focuses on the good in his life, the bad will be batel b'rov, annulled and be like nothing compared to all the good he enjoys. The good that he receives far outnumbers the troubles he has. If he would put all the kindness that Hashem gives to him on the right side of a scale and his troubles on the left side, the right side would far outweigh the left side. And with that awareness, he will realize that it is foolish to complain.

He should praise Hashem because the bad that he has is בטל ברוב, annulled in the multitudes of all the good. He writes that this can be alluded to in the words (Tehillim 150:2) הללוהו כרוב גדלו, "Praise Him as befits His superb greatness." רוב גדלו means that whatever seems negative in life, it is batel in the majority of kindness we receive.

Parashas Vayikra discusses the korban עולה ויורד. This is a korban that is brought according to one's wealth. If he can afford it, he brings a כשבה או שעירה, a sheep or a goat, for a chatas. If he is poor, he brings two birds, one for an olah and one for a chatas.

Why must he bring an olah? If he was wealthy, he would only bring cattle for a chatas!

The Ibn Ezra (Vayikra 5:7) replies, "It is because perhaps he had a thought." This means that since he is poor, perhaps he has a complaint against Hashem. To atone for this bad thought, he must bring a korban olah together with his chatas. A korban olah atones for negative thoughts (see Yerushalmi Yoma 8:7).

This tells us that we shouldn't have negative thoughts, and we shouldn't complain. We should recognize Hashem's kindness and praise Hashem for all the good we receive.

The Gemara (Bava Kama 16.) states, "After seven years [in the grave], a person's spine becomes a snake if he didn't bow down for modim." Toras Chaim explains, "This is because Hashem does kindness with His creation every day and at every moment; only a person doesn't recognize the miracles that Hashem performs for him. He thinks the world runs on its own. He doesn't recognize that every move and every breath is from Hashem yisbarach, as it states (Tehillim 37:23) מִדֶּם מִצְעָדֵי גֵבֶר כֹּוֹנֵנוּ, [which means that all of man's steps are from Hashem], and it states (Iyov 12:10) אֲשֶׁר בִּידוֹ נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חַי וְרוּחַ כָּל בֶּשֶׂר אִישׁ, 'In Whose hand is the soul of all living and the breath of all human flesh.'

"It would be proper for a person to praise Hashem all the time for each step, movement, and breath, as Chazal (Bereishis Rabba 14:9) state, כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל י"ה, that we should praise Hashem for each breath...And since it is

impossible for a person to praise Hashem constantly, from the morning until nighttime, and to praise Hashem for each step, breath, and movement... therefore, Chazal found a solution and established that every night, morning, and afternoon we should praise Hashem [with Modim]. With this one praise (of Modim), he praises Hashem for every breath and all the kindness and wonders that Hashem does with him every moment. With this one praise, he fulfills his obligation to praise Hashem. Therefore, we say in this prayer ... על חיינו ועל נשמותינו, this is to praise Hashem for each breath... This is why they established that we should bow down when we say this brachah, as it is the custom of people to bow to their friends and nod their heads when they express gratitude to their fellow man. Wherever there is gratitude, there is bowing down. For example, it states (Tehillim 138:2) אשתחוה אל היכל קדשך ואודה את שמך על הסודך 'I

shall bow myself toward Your holy Temple, and I shall give thanks to Your name for Your kindness and Your truth.'

"The Midrash says that when the snake came to entice Chavah, it stood erect because it came to deny Hashem yisborach. This is why whoever doesn't bow down by modim, his spine will become a snake. This is because if he stands erect and doesn't bow down to praise Hashem for all His kindness, he denies Hashem and claims that it isn't Hashem Who does all the kindness that he receives. It is like he agrees with the first snake of creation because all kefirah and foreign ideas come from it."

Shabbos Parah

Some *poskim* say that reading *parashas Parah* is a Torah obligation. Where does the Torah tell us that we must read *parashas Parah*?

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

The Avodas Yisrael writes, "The Torah is hinting (with לאמר) that even when we don't have a Beis HaMikdash and can't prepare a physical *parah adumah*, we must read the *parashah*, and ונשלמה פרים שפתינו, our saying the *parashah* will be considered as if we brought the *parah adumah*."

The Torah (*Bamidbar* 19:21) calls *parah adumah* חקת עולם, "an eternal law." How is *parah adumah* eternal? The ashes of the *parah adumah* were available in the times of the Amoraim, and they would use them to purify themselves. But what about our generation? How is it possible to keep *parah adumah* in our generation? The Aruch HaShulchan (685:7) answers that this is

where the Torah hints that when we can't make a *parah adumah*, we have a mitzvah to read *parashas Parah*. That is how *parah adumah* is eternal.

The Yerushalmi writes, "*Parashas Parah* is טהרתן של ישראל, the purity of the Jewish nation." The root of our *taharah* comes from this *parashah*. When we read about the *parashah* of *parah adumah*, we become pure.

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

The Sfas Emes (*Parashas Parah* end 5641) writes, "The purity discussed here is purity from sin."

Similarly, Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* teaches that we become pure from sin when we read this *parashah*. He proves this from the *haftorah*. The *haftorah* is

usually based on the weekly Torah reading. This Shabbos, the *haftarah* says (*Yechezkel* 36:25), וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים, וטהרתם מכל טמאתיכם ומכל גלוליכם וטהרתם מכל טמאתיכם ומכל גלוליכם, אטהר אתכם, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean; from all your impurities and all your abominations will I cleanse you." The haftarah discusses becoming clean and pure from aveiros, which indicates that the parashah of parah adumah in the Torah also refers to being tahor from aveiros.

Torah Purifies

Parashas Parah begins with (*Bamidbar* 19:2) זאת חקת התורה, "This is the statute of the Torah..." Why doesn't it state זאת חקת הפרה, since the topic is parah adumah? Why is Torah mentioned (זאת חקת התורה)? The Rokeiach answers that this is to tell us that Torah study purifies us like the *parah adumah*.

The Shlah HaKadosh writes, "Even when there isn't a *parah adumah*, by

studying Torah with *hasmadah*, one becomes pure."

A non-kosher cooking utensil is *kashered* by immersing it in boiling water (*הגעלה*). An even more powerful method of kashering is to scald the cooking utensil in fire (*ליבו*) until the utensil becomes red-hot. The Or HaChaim zt'l (*Rishon L'Tzion*) teaches that these two methods of *kashering* represent the paths people take to attain purity from their *aveiros*. One way is through afflictions, such as fasting and the like. This method is compared to boiling water, which cleanses and purifies the utensils from their impure, non-kosher status. Learning Torah, however, is a greater purifier because Torah is compared to fire. As it states (*Yirmiyahu* 23:19), הלא כה דברי כאש, "Behold My words are like fire." Just as fire is a more potent form of cleansing and kashering, so too is learning Torah a preferred

way to attain purity from aveiros.

It states (*Bamidbar* 21:28), להבה מן העיר סיחון "a flame from the city of Sichon." Targum Yonason translates סיחון as שיחון, speech, and it refers to speaking divrei Torah. The pasuk says that a blazing flame comes forth from Torah study to purify us.

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

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

The seventh day also represents Torah, as Chazal say, "All opinions agree that the Torah was given on Shabbos." The ashes of the parah adumah were sprinkled onto the tamei person on the third and seventh day, teaching us that Torah study purifies.

Studying Gemara, in particular, purifies.

Rebbe Shlomo Karliner zy" a said that Gemara comes from the word *gumri* [coals] because Gemara is like burning coals that burn away all impurities.

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

One of the students became inspired and quickly went into the next room to learn Gemara. He couldn't find a Gemara, but he found a mishnayos. So he studied

a chapter of mishnayos and then returned to hear more Torah from Reb Shmuel Kaminka. As he returned, Rebbe Shmuel commented, "He thinks he can cleanse himself with a chapter Mishnayos with the same purity that comes from a daf Gemara..."

Tzaddikim said that ovens can be warmed with coal or with straw. Straw creates a larger fire, but the straw is consumed quickly, and the stove will become cold again. Coals make a smaller fire, but the heat lasts longer. This describes the difference between mussar and Gemara. Mussar inspires the person like a raging fire, but the inspiration will soon dissipate. But when he studies Gemara, the fire can remain for a long time.

The word טמא, when the three letters are spelled out in full like this: טית מם אלף is gematriya 610. תורה is one more because תורה is gematriya 611. This is hinted in the yotzros of Shabbos

Parah, מוי יתן טהור מטמא הלא אחד, that purity comes from the one more, which is Torah.

The Gemara says (*Brachos* 16a), דברי תורה מעלין מטומאה לטהרה, "Studying Torah raises a person from *tumah* to *taharah*." Likewise, the *Zohar* states, "The words of Torah... purify those who are *tamei*" (Introduction to *Piskei Teshuvah*).

Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (18) proves that Torah purifies from the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 12:7), אמרותה: אמרות טהורות, "Hashem's words are pure."

The *pasuk* writes (*Bamidbar* 24:5-6), מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך, ישראל כנחלים נטוי "How good are your tents [of Torah] O Yaakov.... Like long rivers..." *Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba* (19, see also *Brachos* 16a) asks, "What is the association between rivers and tents of Torah? It is because when people are *tamei* they immerse in a river and become *tahor*. Similarly, when people are impure with *aveiros* they go to the

tents of Torah and they come out pure.”

The Rambam (*Mikvaos* 11:12) says that the waters of the *mikvah* represent מימי הדעת, the waters of *daas*, the wisdom of Torah. The mitzvah of *mikvah* hints that when you immerse yourself in Torah study you will be purified from all your sins. The Rambam concludes with a prayer, “May Hashem, with His immense compassion, purify us from all our sins, amen.”

Immersion in *Bnei Yisrael* Purifies

Mishmeres Isamar *zt”l* (*Vaykhel*) writes, “I heard from the Yid [Hakadosh of Pshischa *zt”l*] that ויקהל has the *gematria* of ויקהל.” מקוה means a gathering of Yidden, and it has the *gematriya* of מקוה because being among Yidden purifies like immersion in a *mikvah*.

The *Zohar* writes, אסיפתן זו, טהרתן, their gathering purifies them....”

Toras Chesed (*Vayakhel*) writes, “Chassidim were once dancing around Reb Mendel of Kosov *zt”l* while he danced in the middle. As he danced, he bowed his head and said, ‘I am *tovel* in Hashem’s *mikvah*, as the pasuk says, מקוה ישראל ה’, the Jewish nation is Hashem’s *mikvah*.”

Divrei Yisrael (תורת הסבא) קדישא מקוזמיר p. 379 quotes Rabbi Yechezkel of Kozmir *zt”l*, who taught: “מקוה ישראל ה’” means that *Bnei Yisrael* are like a *mikvah*. When you immerse in a *mikvah* you become pure. Similarly, when you immerse yourself in *Bnei Yisrael* – which means you feel *batel* (not better than others) – you become pure. The *halachah* is that when you are *tovel* in a *mikvah* not one hair may remain outside the water. Similarly, you must be totally *batel* to Klal Yisrael, without any feelings of *gaavah*. If you have such humble thoughts, you will become pure.

“Another *halachah* is that when the *mikvah* water is

clean, you should kick the earth [floor] to raise dirt because the *mikvah* water should be murky (so you can make a *brachah* even while undressed, see *Brachos* 25b). This reveals that you purify yourself in the *mikvah* of the souls of *Bnei Yisrael* not solely when you are among great *tzadikim*. Even when you are among regular Yidden who aren't so clean (because of their bad deeds), they create a *mikvah* for you to purify yourself."

Torah on Shabbos

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* traveled to Vienna for medical purposes. His son, Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zt'l*, accompanied him. They stayed in Vienna for a few weeks.

Reb Yissacher Dov was impressed by a certain bachur in Vienna who was studying Torah with *hasmadah* throughout Shabbos. Rebbe Yissachar Dov spoke with this bachur, and the bachur told him his story:

"I was drafted into the army and had to work on Shabbos. I asked my commander to let me take off on Shabbos, and in exchange, I would work extra during the weekdays. Miraculously, he agreed! I realized this was a miracle, so I made a *kabbalah* to dedicate Shabbos to studying Torah."

Reb Yissacher Dov quipped, "Who knows whether this bachur isn't holding up the coming of Moshiach. Hashem has so much *nachas ruach* from his *mesirus nefesh* for Torah, and this *nachas ruach* won't be there when Moshiach comes..."

In the *Aseres HaDibros*, keeping Shabbos is written next to the mitzvah of honoring parents. The Chida explains that the two mitzvos are juxtaposed because a primary time for *kibud av v'em* is Shabbos. The *Zohar* states that the *chidushei Torah* one creates on Shabbos become a crown for one's parents in Gan

Eden, so one can honor his parents through Shabbos.⁶

Ben Ish Chai writes, "One accomplishes a thousand times more with his studies on Shabbos than on a weekday."

Reb Elyah Roth *zt'l* said, "A *daf* Gemara on Shabbos is equivalent to five hundred pages of Gemara on a weekday. One chapter of *Tehillim* on Shabbos is equivalent to five hundred chapters on a weekday."

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said that if a non-Jew knew the pleasure Yidden have when they study a *daf* Gemara Shabbos morning before *Shacharis*, they would convert just for that pleasure.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (p.144) says, "Studying a page of Gemara before daybreak on a weekday is *גן עדן התחתון* (the lower Gan Eden) and to study a page of Gemara before daybreak on Shabbos is *גן עדן העליון* (the upper Gan Eden). The Beis Aharon concluded, "If you learn a *daf* Gemara with *iyun* (in-depth) before *Shacharis*, you will say *נשמת כל חי* differently."

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky *zt'l* would say *Tehillim* chapter קי"ט on Shabbos morning⁷ before *Shacharis* and translate many of the *pasukim* into Yiddish. For example, he would repeat many times, *חסדך ה' מלאה הארץ*, "The earth is full of Your kindness; teach me Your Torah." And in Yiddish, he would say,

6. The Yesod v'Shoresh h'Avodah writes that for those who can't create a *chiddush* in Torah, a *kabbalah tovah* is also sufficient.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* says that gaining a clearer understanding of Torah is also considered *chidushei Torah*.

7. The *roshei teivos* of *חמדת ימים אותו קראת* are *gematriya* 119. This hints at the ideal of saying chapter (קי"ט, 119) on Shabbos.

“Hashem, the world is filled with Your *chesed*. There are so many pleasures in the world. But I do not ask for any of them. All I ask is that You teach me Torah.”

It states (*Tehillim* (ק"ט ט מה, אהבתי תורתך כל היום היא שיחתי, “How I love Your Torah! All day it is my conversation.” The Chida says that היום means Shabbos. Dovid HaMelech is saying כל היום היא

שיחתי, that he would study Torah the entire Shabbos.⁸

Chinuch for Torah

Torah is beloved by Klal Yisrael, and when a *gadol* emerges, it is often due to the *mesirus nefesh* of the child's parents.

Pirkei Avos (2:8) says, ר' יהושע בן חנניה אשרי יולדתו, "Reb Yehoshua ben Chananyah, fortunate is his mother!"

8. The Ponovitcher Rav zt"l, HaRav Kahanaman, learned in the Kollel Kodshim that the Chofetz Chaim established and was chavrusa with Reb Elchanan Wasserman zt"l, hy"d. They would study every day for six hours straight, from eight to two. One day, the Ponovitcher Rav received a telegram requesting him to go home because his wife was in labor. He showed the telegram to the Chofetz Chaim, but the Chofetz Chaim advised him to continue learning.

Soon, he received another telegram informing him that his wife had given birth to a boy. He put on his *datchek* cap, said the *brachah* of '*HaTov VeHameitiv*,' and continued learning until two o'clock, as he did every day. Then he showed the Chofetz Chaim the second telegram and told him he wanted to go home to the bris. "Are you the mohel?" the Chofetz Chaim asked, and the Ponovitcher Rav remained in the yeshiva.

The Ponovitcher Rav told this story to the Beis Yisrael of Gur zy"a. He was very impressed and commented, "This story is fitting for chassidim."

Ra'v Bartenura explains, "Some explain that when his mother was pregnant, she went to the *batei midrashim* of her city and asked the Torah scholars to daven for the child in her womb to become a *talmid chacham*. And from the day her son was born, she didn't take his crib out of the *beis medresh*, so his ears will hear nothing other than *divrei Torah*."⁹

Reb Noson Gestetner *zt'l* writes (בן עמרם vol.1 310) that when his mother was in labor with him, his father, Reb Amram *zt'l*, requested from the midwife not to speak for the first few minutes after the child is born because he wanted the first sounds the child hears to be the sound of Torah study. When the child was born, Reb Amram was in the next room studying

Gemara out loud; these were the first sounds Reb Noson Gestetner heard as an infant.

Shulchan Aruch (Yorah Deiah 245:5) states, "When does one begin teaching Torah to his son? When the child begins to speak, teach him to say תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב and the first pasuk of *Shema*. Continue teaching him gradually until he reaches six or seven years old, and then bring him to a *melamed*."

Because we want the child's first words that he hears and speaks to be words of Torah.

Reb Yitzchak Hutner *zt'l* attributed his growth in Torah to his mother, who showed him her love for Torah. Once, her husband bought her a new dress. They were poor, so the dress meant a lot to her, but she

9. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 96: and *Yevamos* 79:) relates that Reb Yehoshua said, "I heard [the following halachah], but I don't know what it means." Reb Chaim Kanievsky *zt'l* (*Derech Sichah Vayeilach*) says that perhaps Reb Yehoshua heard this halachah as a young child when his mother brought him to the *beis medresh*.

saved it to put on for the first time when her son made a siyum. This showed her son how much she loves the Torah, encouraging him to put all his efforts into knowing the Torah.

Two Approaches for Teshuvah

In the *yotzros* of *parashas Parah* we say, *מי יתן טהור מטמא לא אחד*. This can also be translated as, "How does one become pure? How does one stop sinning? The answer is *לא אחד*, by saying "No!" once and for all.

To explain, we share the following:

An alcoholic recognized that his drinking was destroying his life, so he made a firm decision never to drink again. Around ten in the morning, he became thirsty for a drink, but he controlled himself and didn't take it. At noontime, he started walking to the bar. His old habits were controlling him. But midway, he reminded

himself of his resolve and stopped himself. He wouldn't drink, and that was final. He returned home.

He had several other tests that day, but he overcame each challenge. At ten o'clock at night, he thought to himself, "I had a perfect day today. I deserve a drink to celebrate." He went to the bar and became drunk.

Tomorrow, if he decides once again to become clean, he will need to say "no" again. His first resolve wasn't strong enough.

But the teshuvah, which the *yotzros* is alluding to, is *לא אחד*, when one can say "no," once and for all.

However, there is also a gradual approach.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma - Behaloscha* 10) says, "The Jewish people said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'Ribono shel Olam, You know the great power of the yetzer hara... [How can we

conquer him?]) Hashem replied, 'Send the yetzer hara away, step by step in this world, and I will totally remove the yetzer hara in the future. Today, improve in one thing; tomorrow improve a drop more; until you acquire a second nature.'

This Midrash refers to the gradual approach to teshuvah, which is often the ideal and recommended way.

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

The Beis Avraham of Slonim, zy"ra, compared this to someone who drinks one cup of wine. It seems like nothing happened. He isn't drunk. He isn't even dizzy. Later, he drinks a second cup, and then a third... and then he's intoxicated. Now,

he recognizes that the first cup also contributed to the final result. Similarly, when one overcomes the yetzer hara once, nothing seems to have changed. He seems to be the same person as before. But he isn't the same. Something has changed. If he keeps at it, he will see in the end that he has become a new person.

The Tanya (27) teaches:

"Whenever one is victorious over his yetzer hara, even for just a short moment...for example, he desires to eat, but he pushes it off for an hour or even for less than an hour, and during this time, he studies Torah... Or when one remains quiet and doesn't say what he strongly desires to say...even if it is merely for a brief moment...it sanctifies him... As Chazal say: 'When a person sanctifies himself a little bit below, Heaven sanctifies him a lot from above.'"

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

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

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