

# Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
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Mattos-Massei



בס"ד

# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings

*Mattos - Massei*

## "According to the Word of Hashem"

It states at the beginning of parashas Masei (33:2) ויכתב משה את מוצאיהם למסעיהם על פי ה' "Moshe recorded their starting points for their journeys according to the word of Hashem." In this parashah, the forty-two trips the Yidden took in the desert are recorded.

מוצאיהם can also be translated as "what happened to them" (see Yehoshua 2:23). Accordingly, we can explain the pasuk as follows: People think that what happened to them (מוצאיהם) is due to their travels (מסעיהם). If they go and earn a lot of money somewhere,

they think that they earned it because they traveled to that destination. They mistakenly believe that they wouldn't have made this money if they had traveled somewhere else or stayed at home.

Similarly, if they go someplace and suffer shame and humiliation, they attribute their problems to going there. They think, "Why did I have to go there? I could have saved myself from so much trouble."

The Torah corrects them, מוצאיהם... על פי ה' what happened to them was Hashem's decree. It wasn't because of their travels.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Degel Machaneh Efraim zt'l (Masei) writes, "I heard from my grandfather [the Baal Shem Tov zy'a] that the forty-two journeys [listed in this week's parashah] apply to each person from the day he's born until he returns to [heaven]..."

The words מוצאיהם and מסעיהם are later written in opposite orders in this pasuk. It states, ויכתב משה את מוצאיהם למסעיהם על פי ה'... ואלה מסעיהם למוצאיהם. This alludes to the confusion people have regarding hishtadlus. They think, מוצאיהם למסעיהם, that what happened to them is due to the place they traveled to. However, the truth is, מסעיהם למוצאיהם, they traveled to those places because these matters had to happen to them.

One of the forty-two stopovers the Yidden made was in Marah (see 33:8), which means bitter. It was called Marah, bitter, because there was no drinkable water there (as discussed in *Shemos* 15:23). They thought they didn't have potable water because they came to Marah. But the truth is, they didn't have drinkable water because it was bashert for them not to.

It wasn't the place that caused them the trouble; rather, it was planned from Above that they should be tested in this manner. Their next travels brought them to Eilam. The Torah says in this week's parashah (33:9) ובאלים שתים עשרה עינת מים ושבעים תמרים ויחנו שם, "In Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there." Here, they had plenty of water. Hashem could have brought them initially to Eilam, but it was all planned from above, where they had to go, and which challenges and tests they had to go through. It's not the place that causes the events, instead, everything is dependent on Hashem's plan.

When Reb Eliyahu Meir Bloch *zt'l* was living in Telz, Lithuania, he would go to the stores on erev Shabbos

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Everyone goes through stages in life, and these are the sojourns that Hashem sends a person. They are all על פי ה', according to Hashem's decree, and for a purpose.

to encourage the storeowners to close before Shabbos. Once, he smacked a non-religious Yid for keeping his store open on Shabbos. That person eventually was promoted and served in the government. Reb Bloch feared that now that he was a high-ranking official, he would take revenge on him, so Reb Eliyahu Meir and his family fled from Telz to Cleveland, Ohio, where he re-established the Telz Yeshiva. At the *chanukas habayis*, Reb Eliyahu Meir said, "I thought I was fleeing from the government official, but I discovered that Hashem sent me here to save my family from the Holocaust and so I can establish a yeshiva in America." He traveled to America for his reasons, but Hashem had His own plan.

Reb Bloch added the following *Dvar Torah*:

The *Navi* says that Yonason (the son of Shaul HaMelech) arranged a code with Dovid HaMelech so Dovid would know if Shaul was planning

to kill him. Yonason said he would shoot an arrow and send his aide to fetch it. If Yonason tells his aide that the arrow is *ממך והלאה*, "further away from you," that will be Dovid's sign that he should run away because Shaul wants to kill him. And if Yonason says, "Come towards me, the arrow isn't so far," this would be Dovid's sign that he can return home.

Let's focus on Yonason's words. He said (*I Shmuel* 20:22), *ואם כה אמר לעלם הנה החצים ממך והלאה לך כי שלחך ה'*, "If I tell the lad, 'The arrows are further away,' go because Hashem is sending you." Yonason didn't say, "Go because my father wants to kill you." Instead, "Go because Hashem is sending you."

In a similar vein, Reb Eliyahu Bloch explained that Hashem wanted him to flee from Telz so he and his family would survive, and so he could open a Telz yeshiva in America. He thought he was fleeing from the government official, but



that was just the tool Hashem used to get him to travel. Ultimately, he traveled because this was Hashem's will.<sup>2</sup>

The word והקריתם is found in this week's parashah (35:11). It is a unique word that can be translated in two opposite manners. It is often

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**2.** People think they make decisions, but they are all from Hashem. This also occurs with *shidduchim*. People think they choose a shidduch based on their preferences, what they heard, and how they perceived that information. Actually, the shidduch happened because it was Hashem's will. Hashem arranged what people should say and that you should understand precisely what was needed so the shidduch should happen.

Someone came to the Rebbe of Kotzk and told him, "I used to be wealthy, but I lost all my money, and my wife died. When I was wealthy, I used to buy a lottery ticket every week, and my maid would also buy one, and I would check the tickets to see if we won. I continued this habit even after I lost my money. One day, I checked the numbers of our tickets and saw that my maid had won the lottery. Now that she was wealthy, I wanted to marry her to share the wealth. But I realized that if she knew she had become wealthy, she wouldn't agree to marry me. She would want to marry someone wealthy like herself. So, I didn't tell her that she had won the lottery. I kept that a secret and hired a *shadchan* to ask her to marry me. She agreed, thinking that I, at least, had more money than her. Shortly after the wedding, I informed her that she had won the lottery and that we were rich. She replied, 'But what can I do? I sold the rights of that lottery ticket to my father.'

"That is why I came here now," this man explained to the Rebbe of Kotzk. "I only married her because I thought she was wealthy. Now that she is poor, I want to divorce her."

The Kotzker replied, "Haven't you grasped by now how Hashem leads the world? He made you poor, took your wife, made the maid win the lottery, all so you should marry her, and now you want to divorce her?!"

translated as "by chance" (קרה). But Rashi says that in this week's parashah, it means "prepared."<sup>3</sup> How can the same word mean "by chance" and "prepared"? Aren't they opposites? If something is by chance, it wasn't prepared; if it was

prepared, it didn't occur by chance! The answer is that even things we think happen by chance are also prepared by Hashem. Nothing happens by chance.<sup>4</sup>

The *Mishnas Chasidim* writes, בלתי טהור - כי אמר מקרה

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3. It states (35:11) והקרייתם לכם ערי מקלט, and Rashi writes, אין הקריה אלא, לשון הזמנה, "The translation of הקרייתם is to prepare." So the translation of the pasuk is "Prepare for yourself *arei miklat*."

4. On the idea that a word can have two opposite meanings, we add the following Dvar Torah:

At the end of every parashah, the Chumash states the number of pasukim in the parashah and a siman to help us remember that number. At the end of parashas Masei, it states that there are 132 pasukim, and it states that the siman is מחלה חולה (which is gematriya 132). The siman is very rare and unusual. Shouldn't the siman be something happy? Why use a siman which means illness?

Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt'l answers that they don't mean illness. מחלה is one of the names of Bnos Tzefachod, mentioned at the end of parashas Masei, as it states (36:11) ותהינה מחלה ותרצה וחלגה ומלכה ונעה, בנות צלפחד לבני דדיהן לנשים, which tells us that the daughters of Tzefachod (including Machlah) married their cousins.

Furthermore, מחלה doesn't mean illness; here, it means dancing, as Chazal tell us that on the fifteenth of Av, the girls would go out dancing במחול, in a circle. So, מחלה חולה, means Machlah got married and there was dancing.

Let us learn from this that when we think something is bad, an illness, or any other tzarah, r'l, be aware that if you look deeper, you will understand that it could be a reason for happiness.



הוּא (I Shmuel 20:26) if someone plans and arranges  
 says that something everything.  
 happened by chance, that  
 person is impure because he Tzaddikim said that מַקְרֶה,  
 lacks the fundamental happenings, stands for רק  
 awareness that Hashem מַה, only from Hashem.<sup>5</sup>

5. When we know that everything is from Hashem, we can be happy with our lot, including our spiritual portion. There are people who are upset that they can't serve Hashem in (what they perceive to be) a better way. But if they knew that their situation was planned by Hashem, they would be happy with their portion, the avodas Hashem that they can do. We will explain this with a parable:

Someone came to the king and said, "I admire the great king immensely, and I want to serve you. Send me on any mission, and I will fulfill it."

The king gave him an envelope and asked him to deliver it to the king of a foreign country. The loyal citizen is excited with the opportunity to do the king's bidding and is determined to deliver the letter as quickly and as proficiently as possible. He calculates that the quickest route is by sea, but when he arrives at the port, he sees that the ship has just pulled out of the harbor. He calls to the sailors to return, but they ignore him. The next ship to that country leaves in half a year.

Having no choice, he sets out to the distant country on horseback.

He feels devastated as he rides to the other country. He wanted to do the king's bidding in the best manner, and now he must travel by land, which takes much longer.

Throughout the trip he moans, "If only I came to the port a few minutes earlier. If only I'd been swifter, I would have been able to do the king's will in the best way."

Now, let's change the story a bit. The king gave the letter to his

## **Tefillah is Essential**

*Siddur Rokeach* writes, "From the time the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't give goodness to Bnei Yisrael without tefillah."

Similarly, the Hafla'ah (*Kesubos* 67:) writes, "It is known to all believers in Hashem's *hashgachah* that in *galus*,

*parnassah* comes solely through tefillah. The Gemara (*Kesubos* 10) tells us that מזבֵּחַ means מזִין, sustainer, for it gave sustenance to the Jewish people. Today, tefillah fills this function (tefillah is in place of the korbanos placed on the mizbeach). Tefillah brings *parnassah* and blessings to Klal Yisrael."<sup>6</sup>

loyal citizen and said, "I don't want you to travel by sea (although it's the shortest route) because thieves are on board, and they may steal the letter from you. I want you to travel by land and to deliver this letter..."

How would he feel during the long land journey? He would be happy with each part of the journey. Although it is far away, he knows he is carrying out the king's will with every leg of the journey.

The moral of the story is to believe that everything that happens to a person is *bashert*, planned from Above. One thinks, "If not for these circumstances, I could have served Hashem better," but Hashem wants you to serve Him amidst these hardships and struggles. The situation you are in is the one that Hashem planned and chose for you.

6. The Apter Rav zt'l had a kollel in his beis medresh, and would hand out stipends to the yungerleit every Rosh Chodesh. One of the kollel members thought, "I don't have to pray for *parnassah* since my *parnassah* is given to me by the Rebbe."

That Rosh Chodesh, after musaf, the yungerleit lined up in the Rebbe's room to receive their monthly stipend. When it was this

It states (32:42), ונבח הלך וילכד, את קנת ואת בנתיה ויקרא לה נבח בשמו, "Novach conquered Knas and its surrounding villages and named it Novach, after his name." Rashi tells us that this name didn't last. The hint is that לה is written without a *mapik heh*, which means the heh isn't pronounced. "It is read like נבח לא because this name didn't last."

The Pnei Menachem *zt'l* teaches that a dot in the ה hints at the heart, which is in the middle of the body. The *pasuk* teaches us that

whatever is done without heart doesn't last. This is why placing our heart and soul in tefillah is important. Indeed, tefillah is called עבודה שבלב, the service of the heart.

In *parashas Masei*, we study the laws of someone who accidentally killed his fellow man. He must flee to *arei miklat* and remain there until the *kohen gadol* dies. When the *kohen gadol* dies, he goes free (see 35:25).

Rashi explains (in his second explanation) that the murderer's freedom depends on the

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yungerman's turn, the Rebbe ran out of money. The Rebbe excused himself and left the room to get more money. The yungerman also had to leave his place in line for some reason, and when he returned, he went to the end of the line.

The Apter Rav returned and resumed handing out money, but when this yungerman's turn came, there was, again, no money left.

The Rebbe said, "Hashem gives me the money I need to support the yungerleit every month. There must be a reason you didn't receive your stipend this month. Check your deeds and see whether you can find the reason."

The man understood that it was because he didn't daven for *parnassah*. Even if the Rebbe supported him, he still needed tefillah because *parnassah* comes from Hashem.

*kohen gadol's* life because the *kohen gadol* is somewhat responsible for the murder that occurred inadvertently. Rashi writes, לפי שהיה לו לכהן גדול להתפלל שלא תארע תקלה זו לישראל בחייו, "The *kohen gadol* should have davened that such a calamity shouldn't occur in his lifetime."

The Mishnah (*Makos* 11) states, "The mothers of the *kohanim gedolim* would supply food and clothing [to the murderers who escaped to *arei miklat*] so they won't pray that their son die." She wanted the people living in *arei miklat* to feel content and satisfied so that they wouldn't pray for her son's death.

However, we wonder how food and clothing parcels would appease them. Being detained in *arei miklat* was like being in prison. Wouldn't they still daven for the *kohen gadol's* death regardless, so they could go free?

The answer is that, true, they would still daven for

the *kohen gadol's* passing, but due to the care packages they received, they wouldn't pray with all their heart and soul, and such a tefillah is less effective.

Rashbam (*Bava Basra* 121.) writes, "The Midrash Eichah states that every Tisha b'Av evening [in the desert], it was announced that everyone must dig a grave and lie in it. In the morning, it was announced that the living should separate from the dead. They discovered that fifteen thousand people died each year. This is what occurred for forty years. In the final year, they checked and saw that everyone remained alive. They said, 'Perhaps we counted the dates wrong [and it isn't yet Tisha b'Av]. They lay in their graves on the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth [of Av] until the moon was full. When the moon was full, they said, 'Hakadosh Baruch Hu annulled this harsh decree from us,' and they celebrated

with food and drink and made a yom tov."

Fifteen thousand people died each year.  $15,000 \times 40$  years in the desert equals 600,000. It was destined that 600,000 people die. This was their punishment for the sin of the *meraglim*. However, in the final year, they were granted forgiveness. No one died that year.

We can explain that when the men climbed into their graves each year, they didn't daven with all their might to be saved. They knew that 15,000 people

would die that night, but they thought that perhaps others would die and not them, so they didn't daven with all their heart and soul. But in that final year, the last fifteen thousand people of the previous generation (who sinned with the *meraglim*) climbed into their graves, knowing they were all destined to die. We can be certain that on that night, they davened for salvation with all their heart. And when one davens with all his heart, his *tefillos* are answered. This might be the reason that this time they all survived.<sup>7</sup>

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7. Rav Eliyashev zt'l's parents were childless for many years. Once, they traveled to the medical center in Vienna for treatment, but the doctors informed Rebbetzin Eliyashav that there was no cure. "There's nothing we can do."

She didn't want to cry on the train ride home, but when she arrived home, she went into a silo where she could be alone, and she wept copiously.

Her father, noticing her red eyes, asked her what happened. She gave some lame excuse, but the father asked her again for an explanation. Finally, she admitted that her tears resulted from the devastating news the doctor delivered. "I didn't cry throughout the two-week trip home, and now I am letting my tears flow freely. I am pouring out my heart before Hashem."

It states (31:4), אֶלֶף לַמִּטָּה אֶלֶף, למטה לכל מִטּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁלַח לְצִבָּא, "A thousand for each tribe, a thousand for each tribe, from all the tribes of Israel you shall send into the army" to fight and to take

revenge on Midyan. It states twice אֶלֶף לַמִּטָּה, "a thousand for each tribe," though it seems it would be sufficient to write אֶלֶף לַמִּטָּה, "a thousand for each tribe," one time. The Baal HaTurim writes

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Her father told her, "It states (*Tehillim* 145:18), קְרֹב ה' לְכָל קוֹרְאָיו לְכָל אֲשֶׁר, 'Hashem is near to all those who call Him, to all who call Him with sincerity.' When does one pray sincerely? When he knows he has nowhere to turn other than Hashem. And since you said such a tefillah, I'm confident you will soon bear a child."

A year later, she gave birth to Reb Yosef Shalom Eliyashev zt'l, who illuminated the world with his Torah.

There's another story on how this righteous woman merited bearing a holy son, Reb Yosef Shalom Eliyashev.

One day, in Yerushalayim, Rebbetzin Eliyashev hung out laundry to dry, and a neighbor purposely cut the ropes, toppling the clean laundry into the mud.

Rebbetzin Eliyashev didn't complain, although she would have to clean all the clothes again by hand. She didn't even tell her husband about it.

Late that night, there was frantic knocking at their door. At the door stood the neighbor in tears. Her child suddenly developed a high fever, and she came to ask forgiveness for the laundry incident. The husband, who had answered the door, was surprised to hear about the event. His wife immediately and wholeheartedly forgave the woman and wished her child a full and speedy recovery.

About a year later, this righteous woman gave birth to an extraordinary son — Reb Yosef Shalom Eliyashev, zt'l, one of the leading rabbanim of Yerushalayim.



(and it is based on a Midrash), "For each tribe, two thousand people were sent. That is twenty-four thousand people who went to war, corresponding to the twenty-four thousand who died [in the plague, see Bamidbar 25:9].<sup>8</sup>

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 22:2) teaches that one thousand people went to war, and the other thousand davened for the soldier's success. They came to the war in pairs, one person to daven and one person to fight the battle.

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* asks:

(1) One can daven from a distance. However, here it states תשלחו לצבא, that also those who were davening were sent out to the battlefield. Why was that necessary?

(2) Why was it necessary for a thousand people to daven? Why did each soldier need someone to pray exclusively for him?

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* answers that miracles were needed to win this war. It was twelve thousand people against an enormous army. And from the entire Jewish nation, not even one person was captured at battle, as it states (31:49) ויאמרו אל משה עבדיך נשאו את ראש אנשי המלחמה אשר בידנו ולא נפקד ממונו איש, "[The officers of the war] said to Moshe, "Your servants counted the soldiers who were in our charge, and not one man was missing." The nature of people is to think that they do things on their own. Therefore, for the warriors not to believe that they were succeeding in the war with their own might, Hashem commanded each soldier to

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8. The Baal HaTurim concludes, "The pasuk begins with an ו, and ends with an ו to tell us that they all had לב אחד, one heart for their Father in heaven."

have a partner, someone davening for him, standing near him on the frontlines. This would remind the warriors that Hashem was fighting for them and that their success comes from Him.

We can offer another reason why those appointed to daven were required to be at the site of the war. It was so they should daven with all their heart and soul. Yes, they could daven from afar, but if they didn't see the danger before their eyes, their tefillos wouldn't be said with the same passion and enthusiasm.

### **The Miraculous War against Midyan**

Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "This war was miraculous. The greatest miracles that happened to the Jewish nation took place during

their battle against Midyan. Midyan was a large nation, like the sand on the seashore. The Yidden killed them and took many captives. The Torah testifies that not one Yid was lost in this war. They merited this great miracle because they were righteous. As Chazal say, ולא נפקד ממנו איש, no one sinned." They merited the miracles because they passed difficult tests.<sup>9</sup>

The Targum Yonason (31:50) writes that the war generals reported to Moshe, "When Hashem gave the Midianites into our hands, and we conquered their lands and countries, we entered their houses and whoever found Midianite women wearing gold jewelry, they would take the jewelry, but *chalilah* we should raise our eyes! We didn't look at them so that we shouldn't sin and die the

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9. Sefer Chasidim says that miracles are called נס, and the word נס can also mean to flee. This is because when one flees from an aveirah, he merits miracles.

deaths of *resha'im* in Olam Haba. May this be remembered on the great day of judgment, to atone for us before Hashem."

How did they take the jewelry without seeing the women? The Midrash states, "This was their way in this war: When they would take off the jewelry, they would first cover [the women's] faces with טיט ורפש, tar and garbage, and they took off the jewelry without seeing them."

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* notes that after this war, we don't find the warriors bringing a *korban* to thank Hashem for saving them. Chasam Sofer writes, "They didn't need to bring a *korban* for the wonders Hashem did for them to save them

from the sword because there is no greater *korban* than when a person sacrifices himself for Hashem. As it states (*Vayikra* 1:2), אדם כי יקריב מכם, קרבן לה' "When a person sacrifices himself as a *korban* for Hashem." Their sacrifice of self was their caution from sin and their caution with their eyes. That was their *korban* to Hashem.<sup>10</sup>

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 64) teaches, "Although they didn't sin, they had sinful thoughts." That is why they donated gold and jewelry to the Mishkan, as it states (31:50) לכפר על נפשותינו לפני ה', "To atone for our souls before Hashem."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* notes that they didn't immediately donate gold and jewelry to the Mishkan

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10. After this war, the Torah (31:54) writes, לבני ישראל לפני ה'. The Or HaChaim writes that the warriors of this war were לפני ה', "before Hashem" because they passed a great test and were fitting to stand before Hashem and serve in the Beis HaMikdash. This is as Chazal say, 'Whoever refrains from doing an aveirah, even if he is a Yisrael, is fitting to bring sacrifices on the mizbeach like the kohen gadol.'"

when they returned from the war. Sometime later, they decided to do so. So why did they change their minds and donate the gold and jewelry to the Mishkan as atonement for their thoughts?

The answer is that, at first, they didn't appreciate the severity of an impure thought. "It is just a thought," they figured. However, among the spoils of war were pots and food utensils

that had belonged to the Midianites, and Elazar HaCohen taught the nation to *kasher* those utensils (see 31:21-24). This was done so the taste of the non-kosher Midianite foods would be removed entirely from the pots. The Yidden learned from this halacha that even the slightest hint of *aveirah* is too much. They then realized they should cleanse themselves from the subtle sin of impure thoughts.<sup>11</sup>

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**11.** Rebbe Mendel of Riminov *zt'l* said that studying this section (of *kashering* utensils, הַגְעֵלַת כֵּלִים) is *mesugal* for overcoming bad thoughts. We might now have a slight understanding of this statement. It was the parashah of *kashering* utensils that helped the nation appreciate the severity of an impure thought.

A *bachur* complained to Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* that he couldn't keep his thoughts pure. The Rebbe told him that learning two Maharshahs daily is *mesugal* against bad thoughts. The *bachur* later said that this counsel thoroughly cleansed his thoughts.

To understand Maharsha, one must know the Gemara and the Tosfos very well. Without clarity in Gemara, Rashi, and Tosfos, one can't understand the Maharsha. So, when one studies Maharsha, he will automatically need to be fully immersed in Torah study. For that reason alone, studying Maharsha is *mesugal* for clean thoughts. But it is more than that. The Maharsha is a very holy sefer and is *mesugal* for pure thoughts.

The Chida (Dvash I'Pi 5:4) writes that to study Masechta Makos is

The tribes of Gad and Reuven asked permission to inherit the other side of the Yarden River, and Moshe granted that land to them. But it wasn't solely to Reuven and Gad that he gave this land. The Torah states (32:33) ויתן להם משה לבני גד ולבני ראובן ולחצי שבט מנשה בן יוסף, "Moshe gave to the children of Gad, the children of Reuven, and half of the tribe of Menashe ben Yosef." Half of Menashe ben Yosef also received a portion of this land, on the other side of the Yarden. Why? Menashe's tribe never asked Moshe for permission to live there!

Tzror Hamor explains that Menashe was one of Yosef's sons, and some of Yosef's descendants had to live with Reuven and Gad. Reuven and Gad couldn't live on the other side of the

Yarden without the influence of Yosef's children. This is because Yosef excelled in the midas Yesod, which is the attribute of kedushah (being cautious with one's thoughts, what one sees, and the like). This is why Moshe positioned half of Menashe with Reuven and Gad on the other side of the Yarden.

### **Don't Deal with Problems; Avoid them Altogether**

There is a parable about a bridge that lacked a railing. Many people fell off, resulting in broken arms and legs. A solution was desperately needed. One 'wise' person suggested, "Let's build a hospital under the bridge so those hurt will receive immediate treatment."

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mesugal to be protected from bad thoughts. The hint is that מכות is gematriya הרהורים (466).

The Saraf of Strelisk zt'l said, "When one guards his eyes, he will raise his children without distress, and they will be protected from all troubles."

A wiser person said there is a better solution: erect a railing on the bridge. That way, people won't fall off and will not need medical assistance.

How much better it is when the problems are avoided from the onset.

On this note, we share another parable:

Residents of a small village decided that it was time to replace their elderly wagon driver. The driver had served the community for many years, but he couldn't keep up with the townspeople's needs. They told him it was time for him to retire, and they would hire a younger wagon driver to take his place.

The older wagon driver replied, "I will test your candidate. If I find him to be wise and clever and capable for the position, I will abandon my post to him. However, if I find him incompetent, I refuse to give up my post."

The people agreed to the condition and brought the young wagon driver to the veteran wagon driver to be tested.

The elderly wagon driver asked the young man, "What will you do if your wagon gets stuck in the mud and you can't get it out?"

"I will tell everyone to get off the wagon. That will make the wagon lighter, and the horses will be able to pull out of the mud."

"Good answer, but what will you do if that doesn't work?"

"I will have people push the wagon from behind. Together, they should be able to get the wagon out of the mud."

"But what will you do if that doesn't work either?"

The young wagon driver admitted that he didn't know the answer. The elderly wagon driver said, "If you don't know, then you aren't worthy to be the



town's wagon driver. I remain the town's official wagon driver."

"I accept your verdict," the young man said. "But please tell me so I will know in the future. What does a professional wagon driver do when the wagon is caught in the mud and there seems to be no way to get it out?"

The veteran driver replied, "A professional wagon driver doesn't run his horse into the mud in the first place."

The lesson is that when one finds himself in a quagmire, there are ways and solutions to fix the problem, but how much better it would be if this situation was completely avoided.

How and where can we use this counsel?

One place is related to *chinuch*. Reb Michoel Ber Weissmandl, zt'l told the following parable:

People wanted to transfer merchandise over a border without needing to pay taxes, and they came up with the following idea: It was permitted to bring a coffin over the border if people wanted to be buried in the other country. So, they began to make mock funerals. They placed contraband in the coffin, walked with the coffin as if it were a levayah, and, using this method, smuggled the merchandise into the neighboring country.

This worked very well for a while, but on one occasion, the border police told them to open the coffin. The guilty people cried and pleaded with the police to free them and forgive them.

The police replied, "If you had cried before, you wouldn't need to cry now." The police explained that when they saw that no one was crying at the funeral, they suspected that something was off. The police said, "Had you cried at the funeral, you wouldn't

need to cry now. But since you didn't cry before, you are forced to cry now."

Reb Michoel Ber Weissmandl explained that when it comes to chinuch habanim, it is advisable to daven with tears before problems occur. When there are tears first, this helps that tears shouldn't need to be shed afterwards.<sup>12</sup>

The lesson also applies to the care we should have to educate children, and to raise them with good chinuch. It takes time, effort, and money to be *mechanech* children, but it is better when these efforts are done before there are troubles, r'l.

Another example to consider is health. It is easier to maintain good health than to cure an illness. Being cautious initially is wiser

than fixing problems that can arise afterwards, *chalilah*.

This, too, applies to tefillah. The Gemara (Shabbos 32.) says, "A person should always daven that he doesn't become ill." The Gemara explains that one doesn't need special merits to remain healthy. But once he becomes ill, he needs greater merits to become well. So, one is advised to daven beforehand so that he shouldn't become sick.

Another area to consider is *machlokes*, disputes, r'l. It is better to be cautious in the beginning and avoid machlokes than fix the problem afterwards. Although a machlokes can be amended – you can make up and forget the past – but often the scars of the dispute remain. How much better it

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**12.** Tzaddikim encouraged saying Tehillim, even when everything is good and fine. The Tehillim you say now is deposited in your spiritual bank account, and when the need arises, the prayers are already there to help you.

is when people are cautious from the onset.<sup>13</sup>

מי שלא חטא, fortunate are those who never sinned!

Yet, another example of our conversation is teshuvah. Hashem accepts those who return to Him. It is possible to fix the past; however, אשרי

Our topic is also related to technology. There are people who have fallen into the pitfalls of technology. They cry, they mope, and they try to change. It is much

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**13.** One of the problems of machlokes is that you don't know when, or if, it will end. Many machlokes begin small, but if you don't end it immediately when it is small, it grows and becomes a monster, hard to contain.

The Shlah HaKadosh teaches that the first letter of מחלקת is מ. The מ has a small opening on the bottom, hinting at a minor peace breach. The problem is small and can be easily fixed. However, if the problem isn't quickly resolved, the fissure and division will become more expansive. This brings us to the next letter of מחלקת, ח, with a wide opening at its bottom. Afterwards comes the letters ל and ק. The *lamed* has a line going up, and the *kuf* has a line going down. This implies the fire of the dispute has become extreme, and the flames of their dissension blaze in all directions. Finally, we reach the letter ת, which stands securely upon its two feet, implying that the rift is firmly established and now very difficult to mend. This can all be avoided when the *machlokes* is worked out when still small.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 7) discusses that machlokos begin small but then grow and widen until they grow out of control. The source is the pasuk (Mishlei 17:14), פוטר מים ראשית מדרן, "Like water streaming through a breach, is the beginning of a dispute. When water pushes through an opening at the edge of a river, it begins as a small trickle. But then it widens. Disputes are similar because they begin small, but if one doesn't stop it in its tracks, it can become unbearable.

better to be cautious beforehand.<sup>141</sup>

### Keep the Yetzer Hara Away

Fortunate are those who install a filter on their computer! It accomplishes so much! But when possible, it is so much better not to have anything to do with the internet. When the yetzer hara gets his foot inside, even a tiny foot, you don't know where it will end, as the following mashal, told by the Toldos Yaakov Yosef zt'l, demonstrates:

A poor person knocked on a wealthy man's door and asked to buy one of the pegs hanging in his foyer.

The rich man replied that it was not for sale. But the poor person kept coming back, begging to buy the peg. Finally, the wealthy person agreed to sell it to him. (He thought he wouldn't be bothered after the sale anymore; he was mistaken.) The poor man paid a large sum, the wealthy man wrote out a contract, and the peg was now his. The next day, the poor man returned and hung some clothes on the peg. He claimed that the peg was now his and had the right to use it as he desired.

Every day, the pauper came back to the wealthy home to hang up another item or to take something

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**14.** A *mashgiach* of a yeshiva told me that he was speaking to a *bachur* about the importance of keeping away from the internet, but the *bachur* argued that he was careful not to go on forbidden sites. As they were speaking, they saw two people walking down the street. One was wearing a hat, the other only a yarmulka. A strong gust of wind lifted the hat off one of them and the yarmulka off the other, and they both went scrambling to pick them up. The *mashgiach* said, "Do you see? The one with two coverings remained with a covered head, while the other remained with nothing on his head. Because when one adds onto his *kedushah*, he moves further away from sin."

down. One day, he arrived with a carcass and hung it on the peg. The stench was terrible. The wealthy man and his family fled from their home. They couldn't live there. That's how the entire house became the property of the poor man.

The *nimshal* is that the *yetzer hara* comes to a person and tries to convince him to sin with something relatively minor. The person pushes the *yetzer hara* away, but after the *yetzer hara* bothers him so many times, he gives in to "one small thing." He figures that if he gives in, the *yetzer hara* will leave him alone. But now that the *yetzer hara* has a grip on him, he will keep coming back until he brings very stinking sins, and then he can rule over the person, *chalilah*.

The Rebbe of Vizhnitz zt'l told a *mashal* of a plot of land surrounded by a fence. The fence aimed to keep the animals out so they wouldn't destroy the crop. There was only one minor breach in the gate. He thought it was

small and insignificant, but this small breach in the fence became a significant problem. The animals circled the gate until they reached the opening and came inside.

The *nimshal* is that we must seek to keep as far away as possible from the *yetzer hara* and his enticements. Lowering our guard, even in one area, gives the *yetzer hara* a foothold from where he can cause much more damage.

### Don't Believe in Yourself

Chazal (*Shabbos* 105:) teach, המקרע בגדיו בחמתו והמשביר כליו בחמתו והמפזר מעותיו בחמתו יהא בעיניך כעובד ע"ז שכך אומנתו של יצה"ר היום אומר לו עשה כך ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך עד "If a person rips his clothes in his anger, or if he breaks utensils due to his anger, or if he scatters money due to his anger, you can consider him like he worships *avodah zarah*. For this is the craft of the *yetzer hara*: Today he tells you to do this, and

tomorrow he tells you to do that until he tells you to worship *avodah zarah*, and he goes and does so." We can learn from this Gemara that we shouldn't trust ourselves. We shouldn't feel secure that the yetzer hara has no power over our selves. About this, Chazal (Avos 2:4) say, "Don't believe in yourself until the day you die." We must always be wary of the yetzer hara.

The Kozhnitzer Magid zt'l didn't allow women to come into his room to talk and seek his counsel. He only spoke to men. Once, the gabbai wasn't near the Rebbe's door, and a woman, who didn't know the customs of this court, came inside. When the Rebbe saw her, he immediately ran to the window to jump out. Just then, the gabbai arrived, and he saved the Rebbe from jumping out.

When the opportunity arose, the gabbai asked the Rebbe why he was so afraid that he considered jumping out of the window! The

woman who came in was an old lady, and the Kozhnitzer Magid was an ill man. There was nothing to fear.

The Kozhnitzer Magid replied sharply, "Fool! When the yetzer hara takes control of a person, he can turn an old woman into a young woman, and I could become healthy."

The Rav of Nasad zt'l once rode on a train, and an old woman came onto the train. The Nasader Rav immediately jumped out of the window of the moving train. His students asked him, "Rebbe, were you afraid of that old lady?"

He replied, "I was not afraid of her. I am afraid of Hashem, so I run away from every slight possibility of an aveirah."

The Mishnah (Avos 2:5) states, *אל תאמין בעצמך עד יום מותך*, "Don't believe in yourself until the day you die." Yerushalmi (Shabbos 1:3) tells about a certain old chasid, who constantly repeated



this Mishnah. He wanted to engrave into his consciousness that even if he is old, it doesn't mean he is safe and doesn't have to worry about aveiros and tests that can arise.

The Yaavatz (Avos 2:5) writes on the Mishnah that you shouldn't believe in yourself, "Don't say, 'I fought with my yetzer hara many times, and I won. I broke the yetzer hara, and I was saved.' [It is a mistake to say this] because the yetzer hara becomes stronger every day. The yetzer hara you won in the past isn't the yetzer hara you have today." And it could be that the yetzer hara of today will be stronger than you. So, you are better off keeping a distance and protecting yourself from confronting tests.

### **Mourning or Joy?**

We are in the Nine Days, about which Chazal say we must minimize our joy. Too much joy is always a problem. Shulchan Aruch

(Orach Chaim 561:5) teaches, "One may not fill his mouth with laughter in this world." The Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah teaches that this is especially so during the Three Weeks.

Yet, this doesn't mean we should be sad. A Yid must always serve Hashem with happiness. The Avodas Yisrael (Masei) writes, "Although we should be sad during these days and mourn the churban Beis HaMikdash, nevertheless, we must be strong to serve Hashem with joy when we study Torah and when we daven, and particularly when we praise Hashem. We can explain this with a mashal: It is the way of a human king to possess many things that make him happy – singers, drums, dancers, flutes, and harps. When the king is happy, he doesn't need the singers and musicians. He is happy without them. However, when he is sad, he calls for his musicians to sing and play before him and make him happy. The nimshal is

that the malachim in heaven sing and praise Hashem. However, at the time of the churban, there is sadness in the outer chambers. Someone who cares about Hashem must strengthen himself, enter the inner chambers without sadness, and make the honored King happy."<sup>15</sup>

During the Holocaust, people were amazed to see Rebbe Pinchas of Ustila zy'a (the son-in-law of Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zy'a) learning Torah with immense *hasmadah*. How could he put aside all the pain and devastation and delve into Torah study now? He replied, "People asked my father-in-law this

same question during World War I. They couldn't understand how he had the peace of mind to study Torah then. He explained that studying Torah is even more important during hard times. The Mishnah says, 'When a person is in pain, the *Shechinah* says, 'My head hurts. My arms hurt,' which means Hashem suffers together with us. We live in a time when Klal Yisrael is in distress, and Hashem is certainly suffering together with us. It's our duty to make Hashem happy, and nothing brings more joy to Hashem than a Yid studying Torah."<sup>16</sup>

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**15.** These days are also mesugal for tefillah. The Avodas Yisrael (Masei ה' וכו' הקדים) writes, quoting the Magid of Mezritch zt'l, "When a king is out of his palace and passes through the marketplace and the streets, he is close to all those who call out to him and listens to the shouts of those who call his name. Similarly, we must know that at this time [during the Three Weeks], it is like a bird who left its nest [Hashem is in galus], and everyone has permission to come close to the King of the world, and He answers all."

**16.** Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l taught that when a Yid learns Torah, he isn't in *galus*. This is why one may eat meat and drink wine at a *siyum* during the Nine Days. Where there is Torah, there is no *galus*.

But as we said, these are also days of mourning, and we are obligated to minimize our joy. So, how does a Yid do both? How can he mourn and, at the same time, be happy?

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg zy'a answers with a *mashal*: A king was forced to run away from his palace. He arrived at a distant land and stayed at a good friend's home. The king noticed that his host sometimes appeared happy and sometimes seemed sad and asked him about that.

The host replied, "I am happy, and I am sad. I am

sad because the king had to leave his palace and come here, but I am also happy because I have the privilege of hosting the king in my home."

Reb Shmelke of Nickelsburg explains that this describes our emotions during the Nine Days and the Three Weeks. We cry bitterly and mourn because the Shechinah is in galus, but we are also happy because the *Shechinah* is with us.

Rebbe Dovid'l of Tolna zt'l once came late to his *tish* and explained that he was delayed because he had the

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The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l said: Halachah states that at a *bris* in the Nine Days, only ten people may partake in the meat and wine at the meal. But there is no limit to the participants at a *siyum* in the nine days. The Chozeh explains that the *churban* came about because they weren't studying Torah as they should, as it states (*Yirmiyahu* 9:11-12) על מה אבדה ארץ נצתה כמדבר מבלי עבר, ויאמר ה' על עוונם את תורתִי "Why is the land ruined (and) withered like a wilderness, without anyone passing through? Hashem said, '[It is] because they have forsaken My Torah.'" When one finishes a *masechta* and makes a *siyum*, he amends the root cause of the *churban*. The scent of the *ge'ulah* is in the air, and therefore, all participants can partake in the meal.

privilege of meeting with Moshiach. Moshiach asked Rebbe Dovid'l whether he should come immediately to redeem the Jewish nation or wait until all Yidden were ready. Moshiach explained the question: "If I redeem the Yidden now, some neshamos will never be rectified." Rebbe Dovid of Tolna advised Moshiach to wait until all neshamos were ready.

One of the chassidim at Rebbe Dovid's *tish* asked, "Rebbe, isn't it better that Moshiach comes now? Why should we wait for those few *shleppers* and unfortunate souls?"

The Tolna Rebbe replied, "You are one of those souls. If Moshiach comes now, you will never be rectified."

Reb Shalom Keshenmacher wanted to divorce his bickering wife, but his Rebbe, Rebbe Asher of Stolin *zy'a*, opposed the divorce, so he held out as

long as he could. But it came to a point that he couldn't cope any longer, and he divorced her. He understood that having done so, he couldn't return to his Rebbe.

Reb Shalom Keshenmacher, however, couldn't bear to watch his children suffer, so he remarried his first wife. He returned to his Rebbe.

Rebbe Asher Stoliner said, "Reb Shalom? What brings you back here?"

"I remarried my wife."

"You did? Why?"

"I couldn't bear to see my children suffer."

Rebbe Asher turned his eyes heavenward and said, "Ribono Shel Olam, Shalom Keshenmacher took back his wife, whom he doesn't love because he couldn't bear to watch his children suffer. Woe to the children [the Jewish people] who were banished from their Father's table."