

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Ki Seitzei



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Ki Seitzei

Destroy Amalek, Remove All Doubts

עמלק (which is discussed at the end of the parashah) is the same gematria as the word ספק, doubt. This is because Amalek seeks to place doubt into the hearts of the Jewish nation, as it states (Shemos 17:7-8) "ה'יש ה' בקרבנו אם אין ויבא עמלק Hashem among us or not? And Amalek came..." Amalek places doubt in emunah into the hearts of the Yidden, r'l.

Another indication that Amalek instills doubt is as it states in this week's parashah (25:18) "אשר קרך בדרך", "That he chanced upon you on the way." These words imply that Amalek tries to persuade us that things happen by chance, by happenstance. He doesn't want us to believe in hashgachah pratit.

Therefore, the Torah commands (25:19) זכר את זכר

עמלק מתחת השמים, "Wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens!" Divrei Shmuel says that we must erase the notion that matters occur מתחת השמים, under heaven, and become aware that everything occurs from Heaven.

Similarly, it states (Eichah 3:66) תרדפם באף ותשמידם מתחת שמי ה', "Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of Hashem." Destroy the *resha'im* who claim that things happen מתחת שמי ה', from under the heavens! We must attain the emunah that everything happens from Heaven's decree, not by chance.

It states (Tehillim 118:23) מאת ה' היתה זאת היא נפלאות בעינינו, "This emanated from Hashem; it is wondrous in our eyes." The Beis Aharon teaches that when a person

constantly says מאת ה' היתה זאת, that what occurred is from Hashem, הוא נפלאות בעיניו, he will merit to see with his eyes Hashem's salvations.

He will also see Hashem's hashgachah pratis in his life. When one thinks things happen by chance, he doesn't recognize the miracles that occur to him. But when one has the emunah of מאת ה' היתה זאת, that everything that occurs is from Hashem, including who he meets, where he goes, and the many other factors, הוא נפלאות בעיניו, he will discover Hashem's hashgachah pratis all the time. He will discover the wonders that Hashem performs for him.

In reference to the war against Amalek, it states והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו (Shemos 17:11) וגבר ישראל, "When Moshe raised his hand, Yisroel was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger."

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 3:8) asks how the position of

Moshe's hands affected the outcome of the war. The Mishnah answers, "This tells us that when the Yidden looked up to heaven, and they attached their hearts to their father in heaven, they won [the war], and if they didn't [raise their eyes to heaven], they fell."

Winning the war against Amalek was directly linked to looking up to heaven. As discussed, Amalek wants us to be plagued by doubt, to think that things happen by chance. We win over Amalek when we look to heaven and remember that everything comes from Heaven.

The pasuk states (25:19) לא תשכח, we shouldn't ever forget that everything comes from Hashem.

Many mitzvos are written in this week's parashah, and one of the mitzvos is to build a gate around a roof, as it states (22:8) כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך "If you build a new house, you shall make

a fence for your roof so that you will not place blood in your house if a fallen one falls from it."

The words *כי יפל הנפל ממנו*, "if a fallen one falls from it," is a very unusual phrase. It seems that it should have stated *כי יפל אדם ממנו*, "if a person falls from it." Why is he called "a fallen one"?

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei' writes in his second interpretation of this pasuk,¹ "According to the Midrash, since the six days of creation, this person was destined to fall. But don't allow him to fall and die because of you." This means that what occurred was bashert, it was destined for him to fall, but why should it happen in your home, from your roof? You should protect your home so that dangers don't occur because of you.

This explanation is also written in Rashi on this pasuk. On the words *כי יפל הנפל ממנו*, "if a fallen one falls from it," Rashi writes, "He deserved to fall. Nevertheless, don't be the cause of his death. Because from good people comes forth good things, and from bad people comes bad things." You shouldn't be the source of his death.

The Gemara (Chulin 60.) teaches, *כל מעשה בראשית בקומתו, נבראו בדעתו נבראו בצביונם נבראו*, "All creations that were made in the beginning of creation, they were created fully grown, with their consent, and with their beauty." We focus on *נבראו בדעתו*, that they were created with their consent. Rabbeinu b'Chayei explains, "Every one of Hashem's creations was created with their desire, consent, and will. Hashem

1. Rabbeinu b'Chaya, in his first explanation, writes, "According to the pshat, the pasuk obligates us to protect ourselves and others from danger... Therefore He commanded that when one builds his home, he should erect a gate on the roof..."

told them at the beginning of their creation everything about them, and everything that will occur to them. He told them how long they will live and how they will die. They were told whether they would have abundant parnassah or limited, whether they would be self-supportive or whether others would support them... They all wanted and agreed to [Hashem's plan]. This person was meant to fall, but nevertheless, the one who caused it to occur will be punished severely for causing it to happen."

We quoted this Rabbeinu b'Chaya because it teaches us the extent to which everything is bashert. As it states in sefarim, even what people do to you with their free will, is also bashert. Rabbeinu b'Chaya clarifies that this doesn't excuse the owner of the roof for his carelessness, for not making a gate, but nevertheless, what occurred was planned and destined since the beginning of creation.

Wipe Out Amalek - Don't Despair

Another primary tactic of Amalek is to cause people to feel like sinners and to lose hope.

It states (25:17-18) זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק... ויזנב בך כל הנחשלים אחריו ואתה עיף ויגע ולא ירא אלקים "Remember what Amalek did to you... He cut off all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary and didn't fear Hashem."

Rashi writes that this means Amalek attached "those who lacked strength on account of their aveiros, and the cloud [of glory] expelled them." Amalek came to the not-so-successful people who had failed in their lives, failed in their spiritual lives, and wanted them to lose hope. The Torah teaches that we must entirely wipe out Amalek and this notion. Every Yid is precious and wanted by Hashem, and everyone must believe this.

The parashah begins, כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך... ושבת שבי,

"When you go out to war against your enemies... and you take his captives." The Belzer Rav zt'l explains that the pasuk is discussing when we go out to war against the yetzer hara. The Torah tells us ושבית שבי, which means to stop considering ourselves as captives, captured in the hands of the yetzer hara. We must believe in our potential and that we can live a life of spirituality with Hashem.

A *ben sorer u'moreh* is discussed in this week's parashah (see 21:18). He is a rebellious child who eats large quantities of meat, drinks exaggerated amounts of wine, and doesn't heed his parents' rebuke. Rashi (21:18) writes, "The ben sorer u'moreh (the wayward, rebellious child) is executed on account of what he will become in the end. The Torah penetrates to his ultimate intentions. Eventually, he will squander his father's money, seek what he has become accustomed to, not find it, and stand at the crossroads and rob people [killing them, thereby incurring the death penalty]. Says the Torah, 'Let

him die innocent [of such crimes] rather than have him die guilty [of such crimes]." The *ben sorer u'moreh* is executed because he will certainly commit severe sins in the future.

Reb Shimon bar Yochai (Sanhedrin 71.) says, בן סורר ומורה לא היה, ולא עתיד להיות, there never was one, and there will never be a *ben sorer u'moreh*. We can explain that it never occurred because, for Bnei Yisrael, there is always hope. Even if a child is acting up, we never sign him off. We don't know the future. The potential is still before him. There is no guarantee that he will commit severe sins in the future.

And the path to improvement is through *kabalos tovos*. When you take on yourself to improve with small steps, you will change.

The Alter of Kelm zt'l said that just as the *ben sorer u'moreh* is נדון על שם סופו, judged and punished because of what will become of him, so, too, we can be certain that when one is on the path of improvement,

even if he hasn't yet improved, he is judged as if he has already improved his ways.

This shows the benefit of *kabalos tovos*, which brings one on a journey of gradual growth. Since he began the process, he is judged as having already improved his ways.

Changing Your Nature

We must believe that we have the ability to change our ways. The Gemara (152.) states, *ודמנעלי בריגלוהי בר איניש*, when a person wears shoes, he is a human being. Without shoes, he isn't a human.

The Malbim explains. What is the difference between people and animals? If you say it is the power of speech, animals also have some form of speech. If you say that it is intelligence, animals also have intelligence (see Iyov 35:11). So, in what way is a person better than an animal? It is because a

person can go against his nature, and an animal can't.

The Malbim further clarifies that shoes separate us from the earth. Shoes demonstrate that we are not bound to act according to the rules of nature. We can elevate ourselves above the earth, above the pull of nature and the yetzer hara. Therefore, someone who doesn't wear shoes isn't considered human. He lacks the defining quality that humans have over animals.

When *chalitzah* is performed, the widow removes the yavam's shoe, as stated in this week's parashah (25:9) *והלצה נעלו מעל רגלו*. This is done when a yavam refuses to do the mitzvah of *yibum* (the preferred mitzvah). He isn't able to go against his nature, so he is similar to an animal. He couldn't elevate himself above the earth, so he should go without shoes.²

2. We blow the shofar, which is taken from an animal. This hints

Hints to Elul from this week's Parashah

At the beginning of the Parasha, the pasuk says, (21:10) **בִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אוֹיְבֶיךָ**, "When you will go out to war against your foes." Which war is the pasuk referring to? The Imrei Elimelech of Grodzisk zt'l says this refers to the war of Rosh Hashanah. The Satan prosecutes us on Rosh Hashanah, and we battle him with our tefillos, shofar, and teshuvah. But notice that the pasuk states **בִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה**, "When you will go out to war." This means the war hasn't begun yet. We are still going out to the battlefield but aren't there yet. The battle didn't start yet. Imrei Elimelech explains that the pasuk refers to Elul. That is when we go out to the war before the war

begins. That is the month that we prepare for the great war that will begin on Rosh Hashanah.

He writes, "This pasuk refers to Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment when people stand before Hashem in judgment. But certainly, on Rosh Hashanah, the day of war, one can't say **בִּי תֵצֵא**, that he goes out to the war because he is already in the midst of the battle. Rather, the pasuk refers to going out to war *before* the day of judgment, when we prepare for the war with teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. If we prepare, we will win and be found worthy in the judgment. As the Torah promises **וְנָתַנּוּ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְיָדְךָ**, Hashem will give us success on the day of judgment [if we prepare for Rosh Hashanah during Elul]."³

that we have the ability to elevate ourselves above the level of an animal and overcome our yetzer hara.

3. The Dubno Magid tells a mashal to illustrate the importance of preparing ourselves for Rosh Hashanah during the month of Elul:

The final words of the Imrei Elimelech are very

A poor person desperately needed a loan. He came to a wealthy person's home and knocked at the door, nervously thinking about what he would say. He hoped he could convince the wealthy person to lend him money. The secretary answered the door and said that the wealthy person was busy and couldn't see him then.

The wealthy person had a beautiful garden surrounding his home, so as he waited, the poor man paced around the grounds. An hour later, he returned to the wealthy man's door. Once again, the secretary told him that the wealthy man wasn't available.

The poor fellow nervously paced the grounds some more, waiting for the wealthy man to call him in. When he saw that he wasn't being called in, he tried the door again, but the response was the same. He didn't have time to meet with him.

Finally, the wealthy opened the door and came out of his house. He was going to daven minchah. The poor man rushed over to him and asked for a loan. The wealthy man responded, "Certainly," and he gave him a check for the full amount he needed.

After minchah, another person approached the wealthy person in the beis medresh and asked for a loan.

"I am not able to give a loan now," the wealthy man responded.

"But you just gave a large loan to a poor person. Why can you help him and not me?"

The wealthy man replied, "I saw that the poor man really needed the money. He was so worried that he didn't leave my estate all morning. But you happened to meet me at Minchah, so you figured that you might as well ask for a loan. I don't lend money so easily..."

The Dubno Magid explained that this is the concept of Elul. When we daven and prepare ourselves during Elul for the judgment, we show that we are truly worried about it, which will help us receive a favorable judgment.

important to remember. The days of Judgment are frightening times. Our future is decreed on these days. The Magan Avraham writes that sometimes the decree of what will be for the upcoming several years is determined on Rosh Hashanah. Who isn't afraid of the great judgment? But if we prepare for these awesome days in Elul (with tefillah, teshuvah, and tzedakah), we can be confident that we will certainly be granted a favorable judgment.

Let's see other hints to Elul from this week's parashah.

In reference to the אשת יפת תואר, the non-Jewish woman who was captured at war, it states (21:13) וּבְכָתָהּ אֶת אָבִיהָ וְאֶת אִמָּהּ יָרַח יָמֶיהָ, "[She shall] weep for her father and mother for a full month." The Zohar (Zohar Chadash 72.) states that this pasuk alludes to the Jewish nation in the month of Elul. Elul is the month we cry and plead to Hashem for a good year and for the forgiveness of our aveiros.

Reb Chaim vital (Eitz HaDaas, או ירמוז) writes, "The primary teshuvah is in Elul, called ירח ימים because that is when your tefillos are answered."

The Chasam Sofer (Sefer Zikaron, Drashos Chasam Sofer Erev Yom Kippur) teaches, "Elul is called ירח ימים, and the gematriya of ירח ימים is ש"ח, which means prayer. This hints that Elul is a month for tefillah, to pour forth one's heart in prayers before Hashem, and Hashem will accept his tefillos. There are forty days from rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur (and forty is the letter מ'). If you add the letter מ' to ש"ח, it becomes משי"ח, because tefillos during Elul bring the redemption near." These are wonderful words. We can bring the geulah with our tefillos in Elul. This also refers to each person's individual redemption, from his personal problems. One can attain redemption and freedom from his tzaros with his tefillos in Elul.⁴

The Ups and Downs of Life and of Avodas Hashem

The shofar is narrow on one side and wide on the other. It is represented in the pasuk (Tehillim 118:5) מִן הַמִּצָּר "קראתי י"ה עננים במרחב י"ה", "From the [narrow] straits did I call upon Hashem; Hashem answered me with expansiveness." We say this pasuk before we blow the

shofar on Rosh Hashanah. It is expressing that we call out to Hashem from amidst our tzaros, represented by the narrow side of the shofar, and Hashem answers us with expansiveness, represented by the wide end of the shofar. Hashem hears our prayers and grants us all our hearts' desires.

Ben Ish Chai zt'l says that the shofar teaches us

4. The mitzvah of pidyan haben is performed when a child turns thirty days old. Shaar HaMelech teaches that we begin doing teshuvah in Elul, and thirty days later, on Rosh Hashanah, we are redeemed (pidyon). As we explained, we await the final redemption, with the coming of Moshiach, may it be soon. And each person's personal redemption can also arrive in the upcoming year.

There are forty days from rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. Chazal (Brachos 60.) say that forty days before the child is formed in the womb, the parents can daven that the child be a male (זכר). After the child is formed, only a miracle can change the child. Shaar HaMelech (1:5) teaches that during the first forty days of the year, from rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur, you can daven that the upcoming year be zachar, a male (which represents a good year, a year of rachamim, when Hashem's kindness and compassion are revealed). One can daven that if the year was destined to be נקבה, female, representing *din*, it should become דוֹכֵר, male, representing chesed."

The Zohar writes, "This is the month that Moshe went up to ask for rachamim," thus establishing אלול as a good time for tefillah. Reb Chaim Vital (Eitz HaDaas) writes, "Teshuvah is primarily accepted in Elul... That is when tefillos are heard."

life lessons. It tells us never to be too worried and anxious and never too proud and certain of ourselves. He explains that life is filled with ups and downs, good times and tough times, challenges and salvations. When going through difficult times, one should remember that good times are coming. And when times are good, he shouldn't be a baal gaavah, because things can turn around and become hard again. This is the lesson of the narrow and wide side of the shofar. These opposite sides remind us that times and situations can change, so don't be too anxious or relaxed with your current situation.

Ben Ish Chai (in another location) tells the following story:

A person came to a city and introduced himself as "the Mochiach of Prague". The people of the city understood that if he was called "the Mochiach of Prague", it must be that he was appointed to give

mussar drashos to the community of Prague. They all wanted to hear his drashah, to be inspired by his pearls of wisdom, so they put up signs announcing that they have the privilege and opportunity to listen to the drashah of the Mochiach of Prague, and the sign told the date and time of the drashah.

A large crowd gathered at the designated time. They expected to hear divrei Torah and gems of wisdom, but that didn't happen. Instead, "the Mochiach of Prague" said a few short words. "I used to be the wealthiest person in Prague, but I lost all my money and became poor. So, I am the Mochiach of Prague. I am an example of how things can turn around. When people go through good times, they shouldn't become proud, because hard times might follow. And when they go through hard times, they should know that good times can come."

We don't need the Mochiach of Prague to teach us this lesson, because everyone knows it from his own life. There are good times, and there are harder times. Even in the same year, there can be changes. We can think back to the beginning of the year, until today, and we will see many ups and downs and see that things change, for the good or for the better. This contemplation will help those suffering to remember that suffering isn't forever. And it allows those going through good times that they should know that they shouldn't be haughty. No one knows what the future will bring.

This lesson also applies to spirituality. There are ups and downs, better times and harder times, and that is what makes our avodas Hashem precious to Hashem.

The Rebbe of Kobrin zt'l said, the beauty of a king's crown is from the holes. If it were a piece of solid gold or

silver without any spaces, or if it were totally covered with diamonds and gems, it wouldn't be so beautiful. It is because of the areas where there is no gold and silver, and there aren't any gems and diamonds that make the crown so beautiful. The lesson is that it is the hardships that we endure that make our avodas Hashem beautiful for Hashem.

The rav and tzaddik of Neipest zt'l told the following story. He told the same story every Friday night amidst many tears. (When he would tell the story, he would say that he has already said it before, but the story should be repeated every day so that it will enter our hearts.)

After the petirah of the Yetev Lev of Sighet, zt'l, on the 6th of Elul 5643, his son, Reb Moshe Yosef of Uhel zt'l was very broken from losing his holy father. He thought that soon would be Rosh Hashanah and the holy days, and perhaps then he would pull himself together and return to his

previous self. But the holy days passed, Succos and Simchas Torah passed, and he still couldn't find chizuk. He decided that for Shabbos Bereishis he would go to the Shinover Rav zt'l. He was sure he would find a cure for his broken heart there.

Friday night, the Shinover Rav explained the zemiros (אומר בשבחין), the words נעביר להון כתרין במילין יקירין. He explained that נעביר means heavy (see Onkelos, Shemos 7:14). So, we can explain, נעביר להון כתרין "We will make a crown for Hashem, the King of the world, במילין יקירין from those things that are difficult for man." When he overcomes those trials, they become a crown for Hashem.

He told a mashal of a great king who was immensely beloved by all the people. They decided they would give him a gift, a precious crown made from the most beautiful gems and diamonds, to show him how much they loved him. Everyone donated as much as they could, and together,

they amassed a large sum. But for some reason, the crown lacked *chen*. When people saw it, they didn't like it, and they couldn't figure out what could possibly be the problem. They called an expert jeweler to explain where they went wrong and why the crown wasn't beautiful. The jeweler examined the crown from various angles, and he immediately understood the problem. He explained that, generally, a crown is made so that you can see all of the gems and diamonds from whichever angle you look at it. But with this crown, you don't see the other gems when you look at a gem on one side. The only solution is to put in a simple mirror. Then you will see all the gems and diamonds together, and it will shine brightly, and the crown will have *chen* and beauty.

The nimshal is that the malachim give a crown to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as we say, כתר יתנו לך ה' אלוהינו מלאכים, ה'מוני מעלה, we have no inkling

of their great avodah. However, keviyachol, something is lacking. Keviyachol, the crown lacks the chen and beauty. This is completed by human beings with מילין יקרין, their hardships and struggles; each person, in their own way, creates a crown for Hashem. ער רייסט זיך, איבער זיי, he tears himself above the troubles to do Hashem's will.

When the Shinover Rav told this mashal, he repeated, around fifty times, ער רייסט זיך, איבער זיי, and he said it with a fiery hislahavus. He tears himself above his troubles to do Hashem's will. When Reb Moshe Yosef heard this lesson, this consoled him. Although it was very hard for him that his father had

left the world, but this is the service that will find favor in Hashem's eyes. And when he passes the test, it will become a crown.

Rashi (this week's parsha 21:11) writes, לא דברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע, "The Torah is speaking solely to counter the yetzer hara." The Beis Yisrael zt'l said that this doesn't only refer to the parashah of אשת יפת תואר, the non-Jewish captive, captured at war (as is the simple meaning of Rashi). Instead, Rashi refers to the entire Torah, from Bereishis until Zos HaBrachah. The whole purpose of the Torah is to counter the yetzer hara. It gives us strength to stand up in battle against the yetzer hara's enticements.⁵

5. Someone cried before the Rebbe of Ropshitz zt'l that his talis and tefillin were stolen. The Ropshitzer replied in his renowned humorous manner: "Why are you upset? The tefillin weren't yours, anyway. One of them was Rashi's, and the other was Rabbeinu Tam's. The talis wasn't yours either, because it was a Turkish talis. (A talis made from Turkish wool is called a 'Turkish talis'. With a play on words, the Ropshitzer said, "The talis doesn't belong to you. It belongs to a Turk.") The siddur wasn't yours, because it was a Bardichover siddur. So, what did they steal from you? Only the bag, which was anyway

Tefillah in Elul

It states in parashas

torn and had many holes. So why are you complaining?"

There are undoubtedly profound ideas concealed in these simple words. This great tzaddik didn't speak in vain. Although we don't know his intention, we will bring out one lesson: A person has many good deeds: Torah, tefillah, and mitzvos, but they aren't his. They are his teachers, who taught and trained him to act in this manner. Besides, Chazal (Vayikra Rabba 27:2) say, "Whoever made a bris milah on his son before I gave him a son? Who built a *me'eka*, a fence around his roof, before I gave him a roof? Who put up a *mezuzah* before I gave him a house? Who made a *succah* before I gave him a location on which to do so?"

So, in a way, a person doesn't do anything. Hashem gives him the ability to do the mitzvah and the knowledge on how to do the mitzvah he received from his teachers and parents. So what does the person do? He is nothing more than a *כלי קיבול*, a vessel, a utensil, to do Hashem's will!

So, what is man's? In the story, the talis bag was ripped and torn and had many holes. This represents the many tests placed before man. That part is his. He has tests and hardships performing the mitzvos but successfully overcame the challenges and served Hashem. That is the person's portion in the mitzvos!

The *parashah* begins, *כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך*, "When you go out to a war against your enemy..." The simple meaning of the *pasuk* is about wars, but the *remez*, the implied explanation, refers to the battle against the *yetzer hara*.

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* taught that in our generation, the hinted explanation of the *pasuk* is its literal *pshat*. The Torah applies to all generations, and since we don't wage wars nowadays, the simple meaning of the *pasuk* is about the battle against the *yetzer hara*. The Torah promises that if we set out to fight this war, we will succeed. As it states *ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידך*, you will ultimately win the war.

Eikev (9:25) וַתִּתְנַחֵם לִפְנֵי ה' אַרְבַּעִים יוֹם, "I fell before Hashem for forty days." Those were the days between rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur (see Rashi Devarim 33:18). The Gr'a (Aderes Eliyahu, Ki Sisa 33:7) explains that during those forty days, Moshe didn't do anything other than tefillah. He fell before Hashem [and prayed for Bnei Yisrael]. Therefore, these forty days were established as days of prayer, and on Yom Kippur, נִתְרַצָּה הַשֵּׁ"ת לָהֶם, Hashem accepts their tefillos and teshuvah.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur it will be determined what type of year it will be, and the tefillos in Elul sweeten the *din* and turns things to the better.

When Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt'l was sick with cancer, r'l, he said that had he known in Elul that he would become sick that year, he would have ripped open the heavens in Elul and annulled the decree.

The Chazon Ish zt'l would say that yiras Shamayim in our generation means emunah that everything that occurs, was destined on Rosh Hashanah. Therefore, let us invest in tefillah in Elul so that the upcoming year will be better than this one. That the upcoming year should be a year of wealth, health, peace, and prosperity. It should be the year of the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

The mazal of Elul is besulah, which represents a bride before her chasunah. At the beginning of a chasunah, everyone is happy, but the chasan and kallah cry. They are happier than everyone else, but they understand the importance of davening at this special time because they know that their future lives depend on these tefillos. The same is true with Elul, mazal besulah. We trust that a good year is coming, and we are happy with Hashem's salvation, but we daven and

cry because we know that tefillos will make it be so.

Reb Pinchas of Koritz zt'l discussed our apparent contradictory emotions on Rosh Hashanah. We are happy, as it states (Nehemiah 8:10, regarding Rosh Hashanah) אכלו משמנים ושתו ממתקים... כי קדוש היום לאדנינו, ואתה אל תעצבו כי חדות ה' היא מעוזכם, 'Go, eat fat foods and drink sweet drinks...for the day is holy to Hashem. Do not be sad, for the joy...is your strength." On the other hand, there is the great fear of the judgment. Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer explains that it can be compared to a chasunah. Everyone is dancing and happy, but the people closest to the simcha may be crying. The same is true with Rosh Hashanah. It is a very happy day; we coronate Hashem as king; there is a lot to be happy about, but mixed in the joy is an element of fear because everything that will occur in the upcoming year depends on this day.

Reb Eliyahu Dessler zt'l said, "I am not a 'himmel

mentch' (a person who has ruach hakodesh). I don't know what was decreed on Rosh Hashanah. But when the year passes by, I know exactly what was decreed on the last Rosh Hashanah. And the key to being found worthy in the judgment is to prepare for the judgment in Elul. As the Tur writes, "The more a person invests in tefillah in this month, it will be for his benefit."

The Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitz zt'l said, "Elul is the season for saying Tehillim." (He said this when he sent his gabbai to buy him a Tehillim in Elul.)

Shaar HaMelech (1:2) encourages saying Tehillim every day in Elul after Shacharis. He writes, "I saw a good custom in many communities, and my parents also told me about this good custom. From rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur, immediately after Shacharis, these communities say Tehillim with a crying and sweet voice. I decided to bring this

good custom to our city. Tehillim is needed because our primary goal this month is to remove the *mastinim* (prosecuting malachim)... and nothing stops them as effectively as Tehillim. Tehillim is called *mizmorim*, which also means to shear because the Tehillim shears away all thorns [the prosecutors] ..."⁶

The Nesivos Shalom zt'l (Slonim) was very ill at the end of Av, and the doctors decided he needed emergency surgery. The Nesivos Shalom requested to postpone the operation until after the yomim noraim. He explained that he wanted the tefillos of the

holy days to overturn his fate.

A doctor gave him exact instructions on how to take care of himself throughout this time, until the operation, including what he could eat, how much he needed to sleep, etc., and he followed the recommendations.

The day after Yom Kippur, he arrived at the hospital for surgery. The doctors checked him once again and saw that he no longer needed an operation. His doctor said, "Time was good for you." The Nesivos Shalom replied that "Time" indeed helped him. The days of Elul and the yomim noraim were good for him

6. The Shaar HaMelech concludes:

"So, say Tehillim with kavanah and tears, and say the tefillah after each sefer of Tehillim. There should be ten people saying Tehillim, and they should also say the thirteen attributes of mercy at the end of the prayer. If you know of a place or city that doesn't know of this good custom, you should tell them about it so that every day of Elul we will be with the Tehillim. The Tehillim will be precious to Hashem as if we had studied the laws of negaim and ohalos, and the merit of Dovid HaMelech a'h will protect us, to receive a good judgment, for life and peace."

because his destiny changed through his tefillos during this time.⁷

In the year ת"ש, at the outbreak of the War, many cities in Romania came under Hungarian rule. The city of Satmar is an example of this. It used to be a Romanian city, and during the war, it became part of Hungary. Moshe Friedman, a bachur from Earmanshtat, Romania, studied in Satmar. He was orphaned from his father. His mother rushed to

the yeshiva to take her son home. She explained she was afraid that the borders might close, and then her son wouldn't be able to return to Romania. However, her son didn't want to leave Satmar. He said, "It is better for Yidden in Hungary than in Romania, and besides, my Rebbe is here."

They went to the Satmar Rebbe zt'l and asked his opinion. He agreed with the mother that the bachur should return home to

7. (Amos 3:6-8) אריה שאג מי לא יראה, "A lion has roared; who will not fear?" This pasuk alludes to Elul and the days of awe because אריה is roshei teivos for הושענא רבה, יום כיפור, הושענא רבה, days of teshuvah, hinting at the fear we have in those days.

Someone asked Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt'l that if the pasuk alludes to Elul and the days of judgment, it should be in the present tense because the immense fear comes each year anew. Why does it state אריה שאג, "A lion roared," in the past tense?

Reb Chaim zt'l replied that the pasuk is saying, "Think about what happened this year. You saw the tragedies, the problems. The lion has roared, r'l. This should inspire us to invest in tefillah."

Imagine the Elul before the Holocaust began. If people knew what to expect, they would have invested in Elul with all their hearts and souls. We never know what is approaching, but there are years of אריה שאג, great devastation, and we can save ourselves and avoid them with sincere tefillos in Elul.

Romania and added, "If I could, I would also return to Romania."

During Shalosh seudos, the Rebbe mentioned in his divrei Torah the pasuk (Devarim 32:8) "יצב גבולות עמים" He sets the boundaries of nations." He explained that Hashem changes the borders of countries, למספר בני ישראל, and it is all for the Jewish nation so they can have a place to escape to.

The Satmar Rebbe advised the bachur to escape while it was still possible. Had he waited, by year תש"ד, he wouldn't be able to escape.

This is a mashal for the month of Elul. Hakodosh Baruch Hu tells us that the days of judgment are coming, but now you can escape your enemy, the yetzer hara. You can run and improve your ways with teshuvah. It states (Shemos 21:13) והאלקים אנה לידו ושמתי "...I will make a place for you to which he shall flee." Seforim

Hakedoshim write that the roshei teivos of אנה לידו ושמתי לך spell out the word אלול. These are the days that we can escape from the yetzer hara and our deficient ways and set out on a new path.

It states (Devarim 3:23) ואתחנן "אל ד' בעת ההוא לאמר Hashem at that time, saying..." When was that special time, that Moshe davened? When was the בעת ההוא?

It was in the month of Elul. The proof is that Rashi writes that Moshe davened, "לאחר שכבשתי ארץ סיחון ועוג I conquered the lands of Sichon and Og..." The Midrash (Bamidbar Raba 19:32) teaches that the wars of Sichon and Og were in Elul. So בעת ההוא is in Elul. That is when Moshe davened. It is an *eis ratzon* for tefillah.

Bnei Yissaschar (Elul 1:9) explains that the months of Tamuz and Av are difficult months for the Jewish nation, they are months that fell into the portion of Eisav HaRasha. They are called דל

רש, which both words mean poor. But Elul is בעת ההיא. Add the letters ע"ת to דל and רש, and they become דל"ת, שע"ר, doorways and entrances. This hints that in Elul, the doors of heaven are open to accept our teshuvah and tefillos. As it states הפותח שער לדופקי בתשובה, "Hashem opens the gates for those who knock on it to do teshuvah." Heaven is also open during this month to accept our tefillos. It states (Eichah 3:44) סכתה בענן לך מעבור, תפלה, "You have enveloped Yourself in a cloud so that no prayer can pass through." But in Elul, the gates of heaven are open and our tefillos can ascend. The Bnei Yissaschar writes, "In Elul, the gates of heaven are opened to accept our tefillah and teshuvah. Moshe Rabbeinu accomplished this for all generations. Moshe davened a lot בעת ההוא, in this month. לאמר, this means we should tell all future generations that this is the time the heavens are open to receive with compassion the tefillos of Yisrael."

The Protection of Kedushah

Reb Shmuel Katz z'l worked on the 85th level of the Twin Towers, the level that suffered a direct hit when the planes crashed into the towers in Manhattan. Everyone on that level perished, but Reb Shmuel wasn't in the office that morning, and his life was saved. He lived a full life, raising children and grandchildren. He was niftar about a year ago. This is what occurred:

He would travel to his office in the Twin Towers by train. For the sake of shemiras einayim, he had an agreement with his boss that every day, he would come an hour later than most workers. To make up for that hour, he would remain an hour later every day. This arrangement enabled him to avoid the trains during rush hour. He preferred traveling later, when the trains were less full, and there were fewer tests with shemiras einayim.

This arrangement for the sake of kedushah saved his life. He wasn't there when the plane crashed into the tower. He was saved because of his kedushah.

Kedushah saves the entire Jewish people. It states (23:15) *כי ה' אלקיך מתהלך בקרב מחניך להצילך ולתת איבך לפניך והיה מחניך קדוש ולא יראה בך ערות דבר*, "For Hashem, your G-d goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you. Therefore, your camp shall be holy so that he should not see anything unseemly among you and turn away from you."

The Sifri writes *מלמד שעריוות מכלות את השכינה*, this pasuk teaches us that arayos causes the Shechinah to abandon us. We are protected by Hashem when there is purity in our midst.

At the Kenisiya HaGedolah, תרפ"ג, Elul, Vienna, the gabbaim of the Gerer Rebbe (the Imrei Emes zt'l) inspected the hall before the

rebbe entered because they knew how cautious the rebbe was with kedushah. They noticed there was no curtain over the balcony, which seated the women at the event. The gabbaim said the rebbe would insist on a curtain over the balcony, and that he wouldn't participate in the meeting if there is no curtain over the balcony.

There were rabbanim present who were saying that according to halachah, the mechitzah was kosher, and they were saying there was no reason to fix it. They decided to ask the Chofetz Chaim, zt'l, who was already present, and do as he would say. The Chofetz Chaim ruled, "According to halachah, the other rabbanim present are correct. The mechitzah is kosher. Nevertheless, since someone wants to be machmir, we should heed his request."

The Chofetz Chaim explained, "The greatest tragedy for the Jewish nation is when Hashem isn't

present, when Hashem doesn't watch over the Jewish nation. The Torah tells us that a lack of tznius causes the Shechinah to leave us, so every hidur in tznius and kedushah is worthwhile. How could a Jewish heart not tremble from the fear of *ושב מאחריו*, causing Hashem to leave us."

This story was told by the Chofetz Chaim's student, Reb Avraham Kalmanovitz, Rosh Yeshivas Mir zt'l. His son, Reb Shraga Moshe, pointed out a chiddush in the Chofetz Chaim's lesson. One might think there aren't levels or gray areas; everything about kedushah is black and white. Either there is kedushah, and Hashem is present, or there isn't kedushah, and Hashem leaves. But the Chofetz Chaim taught us that there are different levels of drawing in Hashem's presence among us. There is halachah, and there are hidurim, beyond the letter of the law. Whatever a

person can do to increase tznius and kedushah brings more hashgachah pratis and siyata dishmaya. It brings Hashem to be among us, and guard over us.

Reb Elchanan Wasserman zt'l hy'd said in the name of the Chofetz Chaim zt'l that Hashem is called *שומר עמו* *ישראל לעד*, the guardian of the Jewish people. There are different types of guardians, as discussed in Chazal. There is a shomer chinam, a shomer sachar (a shomer who watches an object voluntarily, a paid shomer, and so on). A shomer chinam, a voluntary shomer, has permission to back out and say he doesn't want to be a shomer anymore. Hashem is our shomer, as we say *שומר עמו ישראל לעד*, and no one pays Hashem for His service, so Hashem is a *שומר חנם*. Hashem, therefore, has permission to say that He doesn't want to be the shomer anymore, *chalilah*. Therefore, we must be cautious with *ערוך דבר*, arrays, tznius, and the like because that causes Hashem to be

ושב מאחרך, to leave us and to stop being our shomer, chalilah.

On the words מזהיך מהניך, קדוש, "Your camp shall be holy," we add that the Jewish home should be holy. The items and gadgets of the house should bring Hashem's presence there and not chalilah the opposite. We specifically refer to technological devices that are so opposite Judaism and polarly against the ideals of tznius and kedushah.

This week's parashah discusses weights used for measuring and selling. The Torah (25:15-16) commands, אבן שלמה וצדק יהיה לך איפה שלמה וצדק יהיה לך למען יאריכו ימיך על האדמה אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך, כי תועבת ה' אלקיך, כל עושה אלה, "You shall have a full and honest weight and a full and honest ephah measure, so that your days be prolonged on the land which Hashem your G-d gives you. For whoever does these things, whoever perpetrates such injustice, is an abomination to Hashem, your G-d."

Siforno writes, "After the Torah discusses how the Shechinah will reside among Yisrael, the Torah warns that [we mustn't use false weights for measuring merchandise]. Not only does Hashem hate corruption in judgment, He warns us not to have in one's home such utensils that are used for corruption. One must keep these utensils away from the home, lest Hashem hate us. As it states, כי תועבת ה' אלקיך כל עושה אלה, "it is an abomination to Hashem, your G-d."

Building on the idea of the Siforno, one should check the modern-day utensils he uses to make sure that these utensils will bring the Shechinah into the home. Even owning a utensil used for abomination causes the Shechinah to leave the home.

Battling the Yetzer Hara

We are now in Chodesh Elul, blowing the shofar and waging war against the yetzer hara. Like every war,

strategies are required to help us win this great battle.

Let's begin by understanding that the nature of this war is unlike any other war.

The goal of a war fought between countries is to conquer the enemy. When the opposing army is defeated, the war is over. But it isn't so with the war against the yetzer hara. When we win one battle, we are confronted with yet another war. It is a never-ending fight. Chazal (*Brachos* 61.) call the yetzer hara "a fly" because, like a fly, after you chase it away, it returns.

The beginning of this week's *parashah* (21:10) states, *כי תצא למלחמה*, "If you go out to war against your enemies..." and the *pasuk* alludes to the war we wage against the yetzer hara. Take note that the *pasuk* doesn't state, *כי תצא לנצחון*, "When you go out to win," rather, the *pasuk* says when "you go out to war." The Tiferes Shlomo explains that this is because

even when we win a round, the war goes on. There is always another battle.

We quote the Tiferes Shlomo (beginning of this week's *parashah*):

"There are righteous people who battle against their yetzer hara and win, and a few days later, the yetzer hara returns, and they must wage war with the yetzer hara once again! This confuses them, and they ask, 'What is this all about? I already had this war with the yetzer hara and won!' They think they were finished with the yetzer hara, but the yetzer hara returns. They wonder what will be with them. The Torah discusses this situation and explains, *כי תצא*, the reason you came down to this world, *למלחמה* is for war. This is your life's mission. For this, you were created." You cannot win the war once and for all and be at peace with the yetzer hara because then life wouldn't have a purpose. There are

always new battles to be fought.

Although we try our best to win all wars, the nature of the world is to lose sometimes. You win some, and you lose some. It is unrealistic to expect to be victorious every time.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe *zt'l* said, "A *potch* for a *potch*, the main thing is that *you* give the final *potch*." Sometimes, the yetzer hara wins a battle, and sometimes, you win. The main thing is that *you* should win in the end.⁸

Reb Yitzchok Hutner *zt'l* writes in a letter, "When we discuss the greatness of *tzaddikim*, we have a bad habit to begin at the end [of their lives], focusing on the great levels the *tzaddikim* achieved. We skip the many years they struggled with their yetzer hara, and we think they were born

tzaddikim. [For example], everyone praises the Chofetz Chaim's *shemiras halashon*, but who speaks about his struggles and ups and downs he encountered until he reached this level? Leaving out the early chapters of their lives creates a problem because when a *bachur* has a strong desire to grow in *avodas Hashem* and is confronted with a challenge or a downfall, he thinks he will never reach the level of the *tzaddikim* he wishes to emulate. He thinks that if he faces challenges, he has no hope. But that is ridiculous. Know, my friend, you will fall time and again, and there will be battles that you will lose. But in the end, you will emerge victorious and wear the crown of success on your head. The wisest of all men said, שבע וקם 'פול צדיק וקם', 'A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises.' The wise understand that the

8. In *Shacharis* we say, הָמָּה כָּרָעוּ וּנְפְלוּ וְאָחֲזוּ קִמּוֹ וְנִתְעוֹדָד, "They kneel and fall, but we rise and gain strength" (*Tehillim* 20). The *pasuk* implies that we also fall, but then get up again.

tzaddik rises *because* he fell seven times [and he kept lifting himself again]. I beg you, don't think of tzaddikim as people who are at peace with their *yetzer tov*. Rather, when the *yetzer hara* is

burning inside you, and you're struggling to overcome it, those moments are when you are most similar to the *gedolim*, even more than when you are at peace with the *yetzer hara*."