TORAH TREATS

An Anthology of Short Divrei Torah & Stories

Compiled by Yitzchok Henry







לעילוי נשמת



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Tehilim

Siddur Avodas Yisrael cites a custom to recite Psalm 71 on the Shabbat on which Parashat Ha'azinu is read. Accordingly, we present here verses from, and commentaries on, that Psalm.

• **אַל־תַּשְׁלִיכֵנִי לְעֵת זִקְנָה כִּכְלוֹת כֹּחִי אַל־תַּעַזְבֵנִי - *"Do not cast me off in time of old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me."*** (71:9)

R' Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov z"l (1748-1800; Ukraine) writes in the name of his grandfather, **R' Yisrael z"l** (1698-1760; **the Ba'al Shem Tov**, founder of the Chassidic movement): This is a prayer that our spiritual growth never become "old," that it never weaken, as the physical body does with old age. Rather, we pray, it should remain "alive" with newness. (Quoted in Asifat Amarim)

• **וְגַם עַד־זִקְנָה וְשֵׂיבָה אֱלֹקים אַל־תַּעַזְבֵנִי עַד־אַגִּיד זְרוֹעֲךָ לְדוֹר לְכָל־יָבוֹא גְּבוּרָתֶךָ** ***"And even until old age and hoariness, Elokim, do not forsake me; until I proclaim Your strength to the generation, Your might to all who will yet come."*** (71:18)

R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l (1847-1905; second Gerrer Rebbe) writes, based on a Midrash: This verse is teaching that when a Torah scholar becomes old and no longer can

perform Mitzvot with strength and Zerizut / alacrity as he did in his youth, he should devote himself to teaching others how to serve Hashem. (Sfat Emet Al Tehilim)

קְחוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה - "Take words with you and return to Hashem." (Hoshea 14:3 – from the Haftarah)

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) writes: When a student hears a Torah teaching or Mussar lesson from his teacher, he cannot understand it immediately. He must delve into it to grasp its depth. - "Take the words with you!" says the prophet. Take them home and reflect on them rather than thinking you understand them immediately. (Ruach Chaim 3:1)



כְּנֶשֶׁר יָעִיר קִנּוֹ עַל־גּוֹזָלָיו יְרַחֵף יִפְרֹשׂ כְּנָפָיו יִקָּחֵהוּ יִשָּׂאֵהוּ עַל־אֶבְרָתוֹ – 'He was like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, carrying them on its pinions.' (32:11)

In describing Hashem's relationship with Klal Yisrael, the Torah uses the simile of an eagle. The eagle demonstrates incredible compassion for its young. It does not suddenly enter its nest, but rather, stirs the nest up, then spreads its wings – not under, but – above its nestlings, so that, with keen courageous eyes, they fly up to rest on the mother's outspread wings awaiting them above.

The eaglets, however, must make the first move, explains **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**. Their mother waits for them, but they must bravely and consciously make the decision to leave the safety and security

of their nest and fly up by themselves to set themselves upon their mother's outstretched wings.



So, too, does Hashem first awake His People and get them used to having the courage to trust themselves with the free-willed decision and full consciousness to place themselves under His guidance.

This free-willed, conscious decision is the preliminary condition that grants them access to the whole future guidance and makes them worthy of it. Only the young eagle has the courage to leave the stability of its nest and trust himself to the upward flight, into the isolating heights where its parent hovers.

It requires great courage to make this move, to take the "plunge" and trust in a Higher Power. We are so used to relying on the secure and comfortable life built upon human power and art that it is difficult to sacrifice a life of materialism and imagined security for a life of spirituality, relying solely on the word of G-d. How many have refused to do so out of fear of the "unknown"? How many have "tip toed" out, only to return quickly, having failed the courage test?

To be an observant Jew takes courage and resolution. Klal Yisrael was trained during the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. This courage to trust has been transmitted to their descendants.

We have to believe in ourselves, believe that we can do it. Unless we make the move by leaving the imagined safety of the nest, however, we will never soar. We will continue living in the nest until it falls apart and we, who thought that we have been protected, will sadly discover that we are not. - Hashem beckons to us to come to Him, but we must be prepared to leave the nest.

הֲלַה' תִּגְמְלוּ זֹאת עַם נָבָל וְלֹא חָכָם – ***'Is it to Hashem that you do this, o vile and unwise people?'*** (32:6)

How could Klal Yisrael have been so vile and unwise as to sin against Hashem?

Rashi explains that they were vile in their lack of gratitude and unwise in not taking into consideration the dire consequences of their misbehaviour and rebellion against Hashem.

One would think that being considered vile is much worse than being called unwise. Why then does vile precede unwise?

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains this with a mashal: A man worked one month a year, during which he earned enough to sustain himself for the other eleven months. This arrangement worked out well until he suddenly became ill during that month. He was quite ill, and he had to take every penny that he had hidden away for a rainy day.

Well, it was now raining. He used up all of his savings, but, Baruch Hashem, he emerged from the treatment a healthy, cured person. The problem was that he was now broke. His friends saw that he was depressed. His usual smile and friendly demeanour were gone. He was essentially miserable.

His friends asked him about his unbecoming attitude. He explained that he was not upset about the medical expenses which had depleted his savings. What concerned him was the fact that he had no money to support himself during the coming year, since he had spent his "working" month in bed. "When I sit out that month, I do not eat the following year," he complained.

This, explains the Chafetz Chaim, is the distinction between vile and unwise with regard to mitzvah observance. Prior to its descent to this world and following its return to the Olam Ha'Neshamos, Heavenly Abode of Souls, regardless of the duration in time (even if it is thousands of years), the neshamah, soul, of a Jew, can do nothing to accumulate reward. It has no opportunity for mitzvah

performance in Olam Habba; hence, there is no chance of reward. It is only in this world that mitzvah performance, good deeds, are available. What one fails to do here lives with him forever.

A naval, vile person, is one who has transgressed, who has rebelled against Hashem. Lo chacham, an unwise person, is a reference to one who wastes his time and allows the opportunity for spiritual advancement via mitzvah performance to slip through his hands. Once it is lost, it is lost for eternity.

The naval has sinned, but, if he repents, his slate is cleansed and his "vileness" expunged. The unwise person who does not perform mitzvos, who does not learn when he can, whose davening is, at best, deficient, loses out forever. Therefore, the Torah first wrote vile, because that appellation is salvageable. The unwise person is sadly relegated to "live" with his impudence.

לוּ חָכְמוּ יַשְׂכִּילוּ זֹאת יָבִינוּ לְאַחֲרִיתָם – '*Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end*.' (32:29)

There are some things that we only seem to comprehend at the end, after we have had the bad experience, and everything good that we believed would occur does not materialize. Only then do we realize our foolishness for not listening to the voice of reason, to those who discourage us from making a bad choice. The worst part is that, even after we have supposedly learned our lesson, it does not serve as a deterrent from performing the same foolish acts over again.

The Kaf HaChaim, zl, offers a powerful analogy to explain the pasuk: A man was married to an exceptional woman. She possessed superior intelligence because of her sharp acumen. She was exemplary in her middos tovos, positive character traits. Indeed, she personified the eishes chayil, true woman of valour, as characterized by Shlomo Hamelech in Sefer Mishlei. Her husband was acutely aware of this most wonderful gift with which he had

been blessed, and he made every effort to show her his appreciation. Once, he was on a business trip which took him to a small town where he enjoyed the hospitality of the local Jewish innkeeper. It had been a long – but successful – trip and he saw no harm in relaxing from his tensions with a good hearty shot of whiskey. One shot led to two, and, before long, the man was in a state of total inebriation.

The innkeeper saw an opportunity to benefit from his guest's present "relaxed" state. It seems that the innkeeper had a daughter who was neither blessed with exceptional physical looks, nor was she unusually bright. These deficiencies (in the eyes of the beholder), coupled with her living in a small out-of-the-way village which precluded her contact with society, created a situation in which she was challenged with regard to shidduchim, marriage. Being not overly intelligent, not overly appealing in appearance, her father was climbing the walls in search of a young man to marry his daughter.

The innkeeper saw before him a solution to his problem. He approached the inebriated guest and proposed his daughter to him as a wife. "But I am already married", the guest countered. "Nu, so what is wrong with a second wife?" the innkeeper asked. Back and forth, they talked, until in a moment of total imbecility, the guest agreed to marry the innkeeper's daughter. Quickly, the father called two witnesses and made a makeshift tenaim, binding engagement. Voila! His daughter was practically married!

The guest stepped out into the cool night air, and, after a short time, his head began to clear. He suddenly realized what he had done. Now what? His wife would probably be furious with him. On the other hand, if he were to renege on the marriage, he will have lost a good friend and hurt the feelings of an innocent girl. He had only one course of action. During all the years of his marriage, whenever a difficult decision came before him, he would discuss the issue with his wife. Her clear, common- attitude to the various problems was a

breath of fresh air. She would surely advise him regarding to his present predicament.

The man came home and, meekly, he began to present the entire debacle: how he became drunk and betrothed to this other woman. She was aware of the other woman and her reputation. She looked at her husband and said, "I think you should keep her as a wife." He looked at his wife incredulously, "Do you know what you are suggesting? Her father expects me to marry her within the month!" "Why wait a month? I think you should get married this week", his wife answered. The husband thought that he would lose his mind. "How can I get everything ready within a week?" he asked. "I do not have an apartment, furniture and the various accoutrements that go with setting up a house." "Do not worry," his wife replied. "You can use our house. We will all live together as one happy family. I will leave the day of the wedding and live with my father for a month. I will return home after the month. This will give you the opportunity to get to know your bride. There is, however, one condition: during the month that I will be gone, you may not contact me. Under no circumstances may you reach out to me during this time – regardless of the situation!"

Reluctantly, the husband agreed to his wife's advice. He did not understand her reasoning, but who was he to argue with her? He was the one who had created his own problem. He would have to live with it. He notified his kallah's parents that he wanted to get married the following week. His wife helped prepare the dinner and even decorated their home to welcome the new bride. The wedding took place, and he brought his bride home with him.

Now that he was stone sober, he looked at her and saw a different woman than the one he had seen in his inebriated state. Well, looks are not everything. Perhaps her seichal, common sense was her strong point. He asked her, "What is today?" She replied, "Wedding." "I know that. What day of the week is it, Monday, Tuesday or

Wednesday?" "Wednesday," she repeated. "What was yesterday?" "Wednesday" she repeated – again. "What is tomorrow?" he asked. "How should I know?" she replied. "We will wait and see and when tomorrow arrives, we will know what it is."

Seeing that he had really fallen in, he figured that maybe she might at least be proficient in the kitchen. He asked her, "Can you please bring me a glass of water?" "From where?" she asked. "From the kitchen," he replied. "Where is the kitchen?" she asked. This went on for a while until the husband realized that this woman was clueless concerning anything. She obviously was physically and mentally challenged, which was far from appealing. He immediately returned with his new wife to her father's home and petitioned for a divorce. He had been duped into marrying a woman who was not for him.

The man sat at home for an entire month – lonely, depressed, and miserable. Oh, did he miss his wife! She was so special. Now he realized even more how fortunate he was to have such a special wife. He now understood why she had readily agreed to the marriage. She knew it would not work. She was acutely aware that he had to discover for himself that such an arrangement was doomed. Had she told this to him, however, he would not have believed her. He would always wonder: Perhaps she would have been good for me. Maybe the marriage would have worked. He had to find out for himself the hard way that such a relationship was not for him.

The Kaf HaChaim sums up the mashal, analogy. The Torah is compared to a faithful wife without peer. It guards over us and protects us from harm. Along comes the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, and attempts to push "her," the Torah, aside. It tempts us with another spouse. We defer to our desires, falling into the trap of blandishments set for us by the king of guile, the yetzer hora. We follow our heart, falling prey to its passions, until we realize too late that this is a poor imitation of Torah. Lu chochmu yaskilu zos, "Were

they wise, they would comprehend this." They would realize that absolutely nothing can replace the Torah. There is no wisdom like the Torah's wisdom, no lifestyle like the one prescribed by the Torah.

Too many have wandered off to chase their dreams, only to wake up to a bitter nightmare. They thought that another spouse, a life detached from Torah observance or one in which they could inject a little modernity, some progressive thinking, would add to their geshmak, enjoyment of life. Yavinu l'acharisam; 'They would discern it from their end.'

In the end, they have lost everything. Their past is gone; their present is filled with frivolous foolishness, nothing of enduring value; their future is likewise gone, because the decisions they made earlier in life took their toll on their children, who are now completely divorced from Judaism. Thus, the sooner they realize the folly of their ways and come to their senses, the better are their chances of salvaging their present and future.



לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת – 'To be careful to perform all the words of the Torah.' (32:46)

The Jew is obliged to observe the Torah, adhere to its mitzvos and carry out our acts of human kindness, regardless of the circumstances in his life which might impede him. Commitment is not always easy. Observance is not a walk in the park. This does not change one's responsibility to Hashem.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, relates that he once had a conversation with an unobservant Jew concerning the significance of mitzvah observance in contemporary times. "So much has changed," the man insisted. "We have moved on from the dark ages. I am not against observing the Torah, but change must be made to adjust the Torah to coincide with today's modern world."



Rav Galinsky replied, "Imagine, a young boy comes to his parents with a valid complaint, 'My shoes are too small.' The boy has grown; his feet are no longer the size they were six months earlier. The parents have a few options available before them: either purchase a new pair of shoes; or cut the front of the shoes to allow for the foot's growth; or have the child walk barefoot. There is one other option which is so ludicrous that it does not even momentarily enter the picture: trim the child's foot to fit the shoe! - No one in his right mind, the cruellest parent, would never dream of such an option. One does not cut the foot to fit the shoe!"

"The same idea applies to the Torah. Our Torah is the 'foot' – you are the shoe. You view the Torah as something that must fit into your comfort zone. It must conform to your desires and pleasures – rather than the other way around. Whenever the Torah is not in tune with your desires, you feel it should be trimmed to size. One does not cut the foot to fit the shoe."

הַצּוּר תָּמִים פָּעֳלוֹ כִּי כָל־דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט – '*The Rock! His works are flawless, for all His ways are just*.' (32:4)

People go through life living a dream – a dream that allows them to believe that they can get away with what they wish. They are granted free will, so that they may choose whatever lifestyle suits their fancy. They even begin to think that Hashem does not frown upon what they do. Proof positive is that nothing happens to them. No bolt of lightning strikes them when they bite into a succulent

portion of non-kosher food. They blatantly desecrate the holy Shabbos – seemingly with impunity. If Hashem really cares, why does He not do something about it?

Apparently, the days of shemiras ha'mitzvos, mitzvah observance, are bygone and the Torah's commandments are archaic. They have convinced themselves of this foolishness, because it eases their conscience.

But, if we would know the pain that Hashem experiences when His children sin, we would think and act differently. Imagine an earthly father who has given his child everything, asking very little in return. When the child rebels and does everything that displeases the father, is there any doubt that the father is in pain, that he suffers greatly as a result of this child's insolence? - Why do we not take this into account when we act out our fantasies, when we allow our bechirah chafshis, free-will, to run roughshod over everything that Hashem has commanded us not to do?

The answer is that the yetzer hora, evil inclination, has convinced us that we can get away with it. Reward and punishment are fairy tales. One need not worry. We have no accountability.

This is what the yetzer hora would have us think. The Torah teaches otherwise. Hashem is just. His ways are wholesome. We will be rewarded for our good deeds and positive actions, and we will pay for our sins.

Horav Lazer Brody, Shlita, offers an inspirational analogy which is profound in its simplicity. A man enters a fancy restaurant. This is no simple food establishment. It caters only to the effete rich. The valets who are parking the cars are quite comfortable behind the wheel of a Bentley, because this is what they are accustomed to parking.

After being seated at a table in the most exclusive section of the restaurant, the man begins to order. Duck liver roasted in wine. This

is only the appetizer. The entrée is a two-inch Kobe steak sautéed in exotic vegetables. He orders a thirty-year-old chateau wine. For dessert, he enjoys a healthy serving of a decadent chocolate mousse cake. This is accompanied by a glass of the finest French cognac. He then lights up a Cuban cigar, and his evening is complete.

After resting for a while and checking his emails, he asks the waiter for his bill. The waiter complies and returns with his bill, ensconced in a hand-stitched leather holder. The man opens the holder, removes the bill, and gasps. He almost passes out when he sees that his little foray into the restaurant has cost him seven hundred dollars – and this does not even include the tip for the waiter!

He begins to scream, "How dare you charge me so much money for dinner?" The waiter stands there calmly and replies, "Sir, it was you who ate. The prices for each course are clearly marked on the menu. You will either pay, or I will be compelled to refer you to the authorities."

The analogy is quite clear and simple to understand. The restaurant is this wonderful world which Hashem created just for us to enjoy. All of the entrees and courses on the menu are the earthly pleasures which are available for us to enjoy. There is, however, a price to pay for each bit of enjoyment. Nothing is free. We eat – we pay. It is as simple as that. There are no free rides. Those of us who choose to live a life of physical pleasure and materialism can do so. We must remember that, of course, we will have to pay a heavy price. If we are going to have an expensive meal, then the price on the bill will be equally high.

Everything which we do on this world is recorded in Heaven. At the end of our mortal journey, when we finish enjoying our worldly pleasure, we will be called to pay up. It is then that we will realize that all of His ways are just. We are not being punished – absolutely not! We are just being given the bill for our stay on this world.

א-ל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עָוֶל צַדִּיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא – *'A G-d of faithfulness without injustices; He is righteous and upright.'* (32:4)


צוואה

משתובת יר קדוש הרב המפורסם בוצינא קדישא
חסידא ופרישא נ"י ע"ה פ"ה אור ישראל וקדושו
איש אלקים קדוש מוהר"ר אהרן זצוק"ל
מקאריליז זכותו יגן עלינו

גם ומר נחה מהרב הקדוש המפורסם מוהר"ר אהרן הלוי
לחבר היה משורר טרוח קדש בשבח קדוש

ועשינו וחשוב לפשיטת בפתיחת הקדוש החודשות
והתהנות ישרות מבנו של
הרב הקדוש תנ"י הוא חתן
המפורסם בוצינא קדישא חסידא ופרישא נ"י ע"ה פ"ה אור
ישראל וקדושו קדישת מוהר"ר אשר הצוק"ל
מקאריליז זכותו יגן עלינו

הבא נכית הלפום ע"י המוחפים היה מוסקנ הנבזה
מוהר"ר משה יהודה ליב הלוי איש
החרוזין נ"י. ונימו המוסקנ הנבזה מוהר"ר
ישעי' אשר נ"י כהרב הגאון המפרסם מוהר"ר
יצחק שמשון החרוזין
מיוחלש נ"י מחבר הספר

טשערנאוויץ

נפיק תרטו פסח

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Our inability to see beyond the parameters of our eyesight is the reason that people have questions concerning the manner in which Hashem guides the world. As human beings we have limited eyesight, and our ability to understand His ways is, likewise, stunted. We understand neither why bad things happen to good people, nor who really is good and who is not. For that matter, can we really define good things?

The following story regarding the birth of **Rav Aharon Karliner, zl**, founder of the Karlin-Stolin dynasty, should engender a good feeling within us, especially on this, the first Shabbos of the year, when our fate for the coming year is before the Heavenly Tribunal.

Rav Yaakov and his wife, Perel, of Pinsk, Poland, had not yet been blessed with children. Hearing of the great **Baal Shem Tov**, and his ability to be the catalyst for miracles, motivated Perel to travel to the holy man and entreat his blessing. She poured out her heart to him, and she received his blessing.

The next year, she was holding her own son in her arms. Words cannot describe the joy that permeated their home. Sadly, it was cut short when, two years later, shortly after taking their son for his first visit to the Baal Shem Tov, the child died.

After the mourning period was complete, they returned broken-hearted to the Baal Shem Tov in search of an explanation. When

they entered his room, he was engrossed in deep thought. He looked up at them and said, "Let me tell you a story: A powerful king had everything a person could want, but one thing: he had no children. After visiting the greatest doctor of his time, with all the same results- no luck- he decided to turn to the nation that understands that everything in life is actually a miracle from G-d: the Jewish People. He called in the leaders of the Jewish community and put it to them very bluntly: They would either pray for him to have a child, or they would all be expelled from the country. "The Jews were used to impossible demands. This was, however, an ultimatum they could not negotiate. They turned to Hashem and did what they did best: daven.

The prayers had their desired effect. Hashem now needed a "volunteer" from the world of the neshamos to be willing to descend to this world and allow his soul to live within the body of a gentile. One holy soul came forward. "If it means saving an entire Jewish community – I will do it!" the neshamah declared.

"The joy throughout the king's palace extended throughout the country. The Jews enjoyed tremendous respect and favour. The young prince was a brilliant child, soon there was no one who could teach him. The king brought his son to the pope and asked him to see to his son's education personally.

One does not argue with the king. The Pope now had a new student. The boy absorbed whatever he was taught – on both secular and religious bases. He was allowed full reign over the papal palace. There was one restriction, however: one room was sealed every day for two hours; no one was allowed entrance. - This piqued the prince's curiosity. One day, he figured out how to enter the room – which he did.

"How shocked he was to discover the Pope wearing tallis and tefillin! At first, he lost his breath and could find no words to express himself. The prince then expressed his inner joy, explaining to the

Pope that, although he did not know why, he had a serious gravitational pull towards Judaism. He wanted to convert, so that he could live and die as a Jew.

When the Pope realized that there stood before him no simple soul, he facilitated his escape. The boy found a community whose rav studied with him, and he converted to Judaism."

The Baal Shem Tov continued: "Years went by, and the child, now a man, went the way of the world. Upon passing, his soul came before Hashem and asked for entrance into Gan Eden. He had successfully completed his mission.

As Hashem was about to grant his request, the prosecuting angel came forward and accused, 'What about those years he lived as a pagan, as a prince in the king's palace?'

It was a strong indictment which could not be placated. Hashem responded with a decree that this pure, holy soul descend to this world and live a pure life for two years. - That neshamah was the neshamah of your baby. It was not decreed for you to have children. Through your prayers you were granted this special gift."

The parents were assuaged but questioned if they had done enough to raise their child.

The Baal Shem Tov instructed them to recite amein with children in shul and hand out sweets to the children. Shortly thereafter, they were blessed with a special child whom they named Aharon. He was the holy founder of the Karlin/Stolin dynasty.

"People use the excuse when they do something wrong, that they are human and humans are not angels. – Indeed they are not; They are much greater." ~ R'Nosson Tzvi Finkel [Alter of Slabodka].

הַאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וַאֲדַבֵּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־פִי - "*Give ear O Heavens and I shall speak, and may the earth hear the words of my mouth*." (32:1)



These words, which begin Shiras Ha'azinu, present the essence of the song of Ha'azinu -- as well as the entire Torah, which is compared to a song.

What is a song? **Horav Gedaliah Shorr z.l**. explains that a song suggests something which is completely synchronized, as a song must be the essence of harmony. He notes that in a song, all the notes of the score of the song, all the instruments of the orchestra, and all of the voices in the choir join together to create a perfect harmonious blend. - Likewise, so do all of the elements of the universe work cooperatively to carry out Hashem's dictate.

In Shiras Ha'azinu, the Torah demonstrates to Klal Yisrael how all parts of Hashem's creations respond harmoniously to the iniquities and virtues of Klal Yisrael.

Let us expand on this concept. The Torah is a song. It must be perfect; if one letter is changed or removed, it is no longer the Torah. In a song, if one note is misplaced, the entire song is transformed. The Torah is a song which must penetrate every aspect of our lives. The Torah is all embracing and must be incorporated into all our activities. Man can listen to the word of Hashem on earth and thereby reach out and interact with eternity. The Heaven and the earth meld together when Torah is the guiding force for our mundane endeavour.

Horav Moshe Swift z.l. asserts that to the human who perceives eternity and spirituality in his earthly mundane activity, death is but

a transition through which the human is transported from one stage to another. Indeed, in such unity the bitter cup of life is no longer bitter if it comes from Hashem. Torah gives one a sense of perspective, just as a melody stimulates one's mood. One sin can change the whole "song."

In an orchestra there are various musical instruments, each making its own distinct sound. In a choir there are different voices, each vocalizing their own distinct music. They all blend in perfect harmony when they all respond to the same score.

The various approaches to serving the Divine may be analogized to an orchestra and choir. All the forms of avodas Hashem, serving Hashem, must have their source in the same score -the Torah. To deviate even one iota is to destroy the harmony and distort the melody of the song of Torah.

שִׁחֵת לוֹ לֹא בָּנָיו מוּמָם דּוֹר עִקֵּשׁ וּפְתַלְתֹּל – '***Corruption is not His – the blemish is His children's***.' (32:5)

Teshuvah is a wonderful thing, but sometimes it comes too late to prevent the damage that has already been done. There is no time limit to teshuvah. It is always accepted, thus allowing for a person who has lived a life of abandon to die and leave this world as a tzaddik, righteous person.

There is, however, a collateral damage with regard to his children. This is a damage that is irreparable. When parents go along their merry way, living a life of abandon, a lifestyle that is antithetical to Torah, they must remember that their children are watching. When impressionable minds observe, they become influenced, and it becomes part and parcel of their psyche.

The parents, at one point in their lives, may decide that enough is enough. There is more to life than living for "today", with a total disregard for the consequences. One of these consequences is their

children, who have sadly learned a lifestyle that is wasteful and self-destructive.

This, explains **Melitzei Aish**, is the Torah's message. שְׁחֵת לוֹ לֹא, "Corruption, not him, בָּנָיו מוּמָם – his children, however, remain blemished."

Self-corruption may be repaired through teshuvah, but the children are lost – until they also come to their senses.

צוּר יְלָדְךָ תֶּשִׁי וַתִּשְׁכַּח אֵ-ל מְחֹלְלֶךָ - "***You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you, and forgot G-d Who brought you forth.***" (32:18)



Every faculty with which man is endowed can be used positively or negatively. Certainly, Hashem's desire is that we use these G-d- given faculties for a positive goal.

The Kotzker Rebbe, z.l., says that the ability to forget is a perfect example. Shikchah, forgetfulness, is a gift, a vehicle through which we are able to proceed beyond our past troubles. If we do not forget the unpleasant occurrences in our lives, they will gnaw at us, wreaking havoc upon our emotional stability. - Regrettably, some of us use this gift to forget Hashem's beneficence and patience with us.

The Dubno Maggid, z.l., explains this with a parable: There was once a man who was deeply in debt, able to pay his many creditors only a fraction of what he owed. One creditor, out of concern for his own debt, gave the hapless debtor an idea that would dissuade his other creditors from bothering him. He said, "When the creditors come to you, act foolish and silly, so that they will think

you are insane and will leave you alone. Afterwards, you can pay me what you owe me."

It was a great idea. One by one, the creditors came and left, some in disgust, others in sympathy. The pressure of the many debts must have gotten to him.

When the man who had given him this advice came to collect his debt, he was met with the same response as the other creditors. This was just too much. "Whom do you think you are fooling?" he asked. "Did you forget that it was I who advised you to act insanely? Do not try to use my own idea against me!"

Hashem Yisborach tells us the same thing. He gave us the faculty to forget, so that we would not be overwhelmed by destructive memories. We function because we are able to forget. What do we do in gratitude to Hashem? We forget Him!

It is one thing to neglect to think of Hashem, but to use an instinct with which He has endowed us against Him, is the height of audacity. But is that not what forgetting is all about?

הֲלוֹא־הוּא אָבִיךָ קָנֶךָּ - "***Is He not your Father, your Master?***" (32:6)



Horav Chaim Berlin, zl, translated the word "קָנֶךָּ" as a derivative of the word "ken," nest. This would then mean that Hashem is Klal Yisrael's nest, their home, their source of sustenance and protection. - He rendered this interpretation in light of an interesting story that occurred when he was Rav of Moscow.

One day a Jew came to him and implored him to circumcise his newborn son - secretly. This strange behaviour aroused the Rav's curiosity, and he questioned the man regarding his desire to keep his son's circumcision secret.

The man responded that he was a totally assimilated Jew who had absolutely no desire to publicize his ancestry.

"If you are so ashamed of your Jewishness," asked the Rav, "why do you want to circumcise the baby altogether?"

"You are right," answered the man, "but I do not want to close the door to Judaism for my son."

This poignant response indicates the reality that after all is said and done, every Jew, regardless of how far he has strayed from his people, maintains a spark of Yiddishkeit. His neshamah still glows with the warmth of Judaism.

Horav Berlin then interpreted the phrase in Shir Ha'Shirim 1:15 עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים - "your eyes are like doves," in the following manner: A dove will stray from its nest only so far that it can still keep its nest in sight. The nest serves as a base. The nest radiates a sense of security which renders it indispensable to the bird.

The same is true concerning Klal Yisrael. Although the individual Jew will, at times, surrender to his evil inclination and stray away from his roots, he never distances himself to the point of no return. He always leaves the option of teshuvah, repentance, open.

This is the interpretation of our pasuk, "Is He not your father - your קָנְךָ your nest": Regardless of how far you go away, your "nest" is always there - willing to take you back when you have acknowledged your errors.

This awareness serves as a security so that the wayward Jew does not to wander too far from home.





Why did Hashem create sleep if it's such a waste of time?

Why did He create hunger? It's a waste of time to eat! Why did He create the necessity to go to the bathroom? It's also a waste of time! It's a good question – I'll tell you why.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu made this world for the purpose of recognizing Him. Now, how can people recognize Hashem when they're so busy in this world? You're thinking only of your own affairs, and you forget about Hashem. So Hashem says, "I'm going to remind you of Me." And so, you get hungry. You have to eat; you need food and then when you get a piece of bread: "Oh, I thank You Hashem, what would I do without the bread?! I can't live without bread." And the bread causes you to be grateful and to love Hashem; now you're fulfilling your purpose in the world.

Let's say, a person is tired; he's very tired and his body gets worn out. And now he needs sleep to feel rested. Are you going to just sleep like a cat sleeps? So Hashem says, no. If you're able to go to sleep, you have to thank Hashem for that. Some people can't sleep; some people are sick, and they can't sleep. Sleep is a blessing and you have to thank Hashem for the sleep. That's why He makes you tired. Say it with your mouth: "Ah geshmakeh pleasant night's sleep!"

It's better than eating the most delicious things! In the morning you get up, and you're refreshed, you're a new person. **מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ** – "I thank You, Hashem." So the sleep is the for purpose of causing people to be more grateful to Hashem.

That's only one of the benefits of sleep. There are other benefits too, but this is one of the benefits of sleep that is included in the great program of making people more perfect in this world.



Working on our Middos

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, zt"l, used every minute to appreciate Hashem and everything Hashem had given and done for him, and each moment was a new opportunity to serve Hashem better.

During his simple meals, Rav Segal would learn Sefer Shemiras HaLashon, and inside his Sefer, the Rosh Yeshivah kept a small, folded piece of paper that contained his personal Kabalos, his resolutions for what he was working on that year.

One year, a Bochur got a peek at this paper. He saw a neatly numbered list of fifteen Kabalos. One of these Kabalos was: "To try not to do any action, even as small as stretching out a hand, without giving prior thought to it first."

The Bachur realized that for some people, this would be a very far-reaching goal. How is it possible to do every single action with thought? However, for the Rosh Yeshivah, this was well within reach. Rav Segal was able to focus his mind and allow Hashem's will to shape each minute. He did this by working to elevate each and every

moment of time into a Mitzvah opportunity, and taking Mussar and lessons from every aspect of life!

Pearls of Wisdom…A Word for the Ages

Someone once asked the **Bobover Rebbe, zt"l**, "How long is a person considered young? When is it that he become old?"

The Rebbe replied, "Someone is young as long as he is set to turn over a new leaf. This person is still young. Once someone believes that it is too late to restart, he then turns old, and there is no hope for him to grow any further!"

Pearls of Wisdom…A Word for the Ages

When the **Ponovezher Rav, zt"l**, was going to visit South Africa during this time of year in order to strengthen the Jewish community there, he first went to see the **Chofetz Chaim** for advice as to what message he should tell them.

The Chofetz Chaim told him that the main thing to tell over was this: "Teshuvah is very easy. Just regret the past and make a commitment to improve in the future. - Don't let the Yetzer Hara make you think it's too difficult and that you're unable to change!"

Rav Shach once told somebody suffering from hardships – "Hashem can help you, and in an instant, all your troubles can disappear."

He then brought the person a cup of tea with a teaspoon of honey, and said, "Bees may frighten and sometimes sting, but they also give us honey. Likewise trust that something sweet will come from your challenges."

Gerrer Rebbe, R' Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter *zt"l* (Sefas Emes) would say: "*Shabbos Shuva* is the first *Shabbos* of the new year and the Jewish people must be careful in its observance, as *Chazal* say: *'Had the Jewish people kept the first Shabbos (in the desert), no nation or people would ever be able to conquer them.'*

Since *Rosh Hashana* starts the New Year, the first *Shabbos* of the year 'sets the tone' for the rest of the year."



Rabbi Shlomo Kluger zt"l

- **Why was Moshe not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael?**

כִּי מִנֶּגֶד תִּרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁמָּה לֹא תָבֹוא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (32,52) "So from afar you will see the land, but you will not come there to the land which I am giving to the Children of Israel. "

Why does the verse contain so many words – it should have just said "but there you will not come". Why do we need the words "to the land which I am giving to the Children of Israel", something which we would automatically know.

We can answer with a Midrash, that the reason why Moshe was not allowed to enter the land was because if he did so the Beis Hamikdash would not have been destroyed (because he would have annulled the inclination for idol worship – one of the contributing factors which led to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash), and thus Yisrael would have been wiped out. (when they committed other grievous sins, since Hashem would have been unable to destroy the Beis Hamikdash as a substitute for their destruction).

This is what our verse is saying: That which I say to you "but there you will not come", do not think that it is because you yourself are

not fitting to enter the Land of Israel, but rather it is because it is "the land which I am giving to the Children of Israel", and if you come there the Beis Hamikdash will not be destroyed, and this will result in a loss for them. Therefore you must die here, and merely see the land.



◣ Always Relevant Reb Shamshon Raphael Hirsch

כִּי לֹא־דָבָר רֵק הוּא מִכֶּם כִּי־הוּא חַיֵּיכֶם וּבַדָּבָר הַזֶּה תַּאֲרִיכוּ יָמִים עַל־הָאֲדָמָה
"***For it is not a word empty from you; rather, it is your life, and through this matter shall you prolong your days on the land...***" (32:47)

In the Torah, there is not a word that does not have you, yourselves (Israel), as its content. Hence, the interpretation of this pasuk would be that this summons you to understand the law of the Torah and to observe it. - Not one word of the Torah is irrelevant. Every word in it contains truths vital to all of your existence and all of your aspirations.

"The only thing we can change is ourselves, but sometimes that changes everything." ~ Lubavitcher Rebbe, Reb Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994).



Hakaros Hatov

The passuk says לה' תִּגְמְלוּ זֹאת עַם נָבָל וְלֹא חָכָם הֲלוֹא הוּא אָבִיךָ קָנֶךָּ … 32:6. **The Ramban** explains that the word Nadiv is a term for somebody who gives altruistically with no thought of remuneration, whereas the term "Naval" is somebody who does evil to others even though those "others" have bestowed good upon him. The Ramban explains that in Hebrew the "Peh" is interchangeable with the "Beis". So the term "Naval" which can be read as "Nafal" is really somebody who "falls" out of the category of being *human*.

This concept of being aware and grateful of what others do for us is the Midah of Hakoros Hatov. Every person has to be aware of all the goodness that is constantly bestowed upon him. In Tehilim the passuk says, עולם חסד יבנה - Hashem built the world on kindness. The commentaries explain this to mean that we could not survive as a species without the symbiotic relationship that every human being enjoys. Each and every one of us requires many other people to live, i.e. butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers. This forced interaction should generate a feeling of gratitude toward all those people that are allowing us to function.

The Chovos Halevavos explains at length the obligation that we have to see the kindness that Hashem is constantly bestowing upon us. This is essentially the foundation to develop an understanding of the need to serve Hashem. All a person has to do is look around at the world to develop a sense of humility in that there is no way we can repay Hashem for the goodness He is constantly doing for us.

With this sense of humility, a person will be left with no recourse but to serve Hashem in lieu of all the kindness that has been granted him.

It is brought down that every sin that is transgressed, even the accidental sins, are a result of a lack of the midah of Hakoros Hatov, for if a person were to be more appreciative of their blessings, they wouldn't even sin accidentally. The Chovos Halevavos adds that the more a person is Makir Tov toward his creator, the better he will be able to serve Him!

The month of Elul is referred to as an acronym for the verse **אני לדודי ודודי לי** - I am to my beloved and she is to me. This verse can be explained as teaching that the quantity of gratitude and recognition that we have for Hashem is directly proportional to the recognition that Hashem will have for us.

May we be Zoche in this month of Elul to be successful in developing this tremendous Midah of Hakaros Hatov!

Hashem Never Lets Go

Parashas Ha'azinu contains Moshe Rabbeinu's parting message to the Jewish people—the song Ha'azinu. This was a landmark event, intended to take up a permanent place in the Jewish national consciousness. However, the words of this song seem to have a decidedly negative tone. The verses speak in depth about the Jewish people rebelling and abandoning the Torah. Each time they transgress, they receive punishment. This pattern is projected to occur until the era of Mashiach. Is such a topic appropriate for a song?

The Ramban writes that Ha'azinu's primary message is that Hashem's relationship with us will never cease. Despite all the suffering throughout Jewish history, our relationship with Hashem has endured. He loves us, and our connection to Him will last until the end of time. Even though it seems that Hashem had rejected His people when they rejected Him, it doesn't mean the end of the relationship, G-d forbid. Even punishments are expressions of His

love for us, for He cannot let us live empty lives devoid of a relationship with Him, disappearing into spiritual oblivion. The story of Jewish history is not the story of Hashem's abandonment, but rather the story of how Hashem will do anything to remind us of our relationship, even if it seems cruel to us. This is what makes Ha'azinu a song, and the message that we live with.

From the beginning of Elul until Shemini Atzeres, we recite chapter 27 in Tehillim twice daily. In it, David HaMelech declares (verse 4), "One thing I have asked from Hashem . . . to dwell in the house of Hashem all of the days of my life."

Was that all that David HaMelech needed? Surely he had other needs. After all, he was responsible for the welfare of the entire nation, and he fought its wars. Moreover, later he did ask (ibid., 5-6) for salvation from the Jewish nation's enemies. It is obvious that he felt the need to daven for other things. Why, then, did he refer to his request to dwell in Hashem's home as his only need?

The Malbim explains that though he indeed had other needs, all he ever wanted was to get back to the house of study. The purpose of the battles that he fought was only to gain the peace and tranquility needed for studying Torah. All that really mattered to David was his relationship with Hashem. He treated everything else as a means to this end.

We can learn from David HaMelech that the focus of our lives should be our service of Hashem. We all have responsibilities in life which we must fulfill. Nothing should distract us from our real mission.

Rav Avigdor Miller would suggest that people take on small things to get closer to Hashem. Just like small deeds can go far in deepening a relationship, so too numerous small efforts made with the intent of getting closer strengthen our love for Him. For example, Rav Miller suggested that one enunciate "I love you, Hashem" once a day, or sit on the floor for a moment to think about the destruction of Yerushalayim. He would carry fruit seeds in his

pocket and feel them every so often to remind himself of Hashem's kindness.

Rav Miller recommends that we declare before eating, "I am eating now so that I will have the energy to serve Hashem." He also advises that we do acts of kindness that no one else knows about, once a day. He would say that greeting a person with a big smile and considering that they were created in the image of Hashem can help us grow tremendously.

Even though these seem like insignificant activities, Rav Miller taught that when we take little things upon ourselves and aspire to gain closeness with Hashem, we are building a true relationship. Little by little, we will come closer to Hashem!

May we be zocheh to *strengthen* our relationship with Hashem!

102 Stories That Changed People's Lives – Rabbi Tzvi Nakar - The Spice Garden



Rabbanit Margalit Yosef, the wife of **Rav Ovadia Yosef** supported her husband in every way. She was ever alert and attentive to all his needs even without his saying a word. She was always thinking, What can I do to make things easier and better for my husband?

One thing among many is that she noticed how scrupulous Rav Ovadia was to say the brachah over besamim, spices, every day. Specifically, he was conscientious about making four blessings over spices -atzei

besamim, isvei besamim, minei besamim, and hanosein rei'ach tov b'peiros - as part of the quota of one hundred brachos a day.

To help him in this endeavor, Rabbanit Margalit kept planter boxes on their porch in which she had seedlings of herbs and spices. Every day she picked several leaves from her little "garden" and brought them to Rav Ovadia so he could make brachos over them.

When Rabbanit Margalit passed away, and during the ensuing period of mourning, there was no one to take care of the garden. Everyone was so immersed in their grief and pain over her passing that the plants withered and started to dry up. But no one noticed, so focused were they on their terrible loss.

One day early in the morning a neighbor stood at the door of Rav Ovadia's home. Menashe, a gardener by trade, looked agitated.

"I must speak to the rav," he said. "I have a message for him."

He was ushered in, and when he was standing in front of Rav Ovadia, he said, "The other night Rabbanit Margalit appeared to me in a dream. She said I must get up and come to the house to take care of the plants on the porch. It's up to me to ensure that the rav will be able to complete his hundred brachos every day.

"At first I thought it was just a dream, and I didn't attribute much significance to it, but then the dream repeated itself, and I realize there must be truth to it. - "So here I am. I've come to take care of the plants," he concluded.

So Menashe merited tending to the plants on Rav Ovadia's balcony, and Rav Ovadia once again merited every day to recite brachos on the spices and herbs that grew there.

Rav Ovadia recounted this story himself and pointed out how even after her passing Rabbanit Margalit was taking care of him and ensuring that he would be able to say his hundred brachos each day.

Toras Avigdor Snippets

A sampling of previous Toras Avigdor booklets



Life Advice

- **Adrift on the High Seas**

It would be very beneficial for us if we could have the privilege of hearing some words of instruction before we go into Yom Kippur – words that would help guide our lives during this coming year. And in *Parshas Haazinu* we have just that; if we open our ears, we can listen to a few select words from Hakodosh Boruch Hu that are intended as guidance for His beloved nation, words that should escort us for the rest of the year and the rest of our lives.

כִּי גוֹי אֹבַד עֵצוֹת הֵמָּה – *They are a nation who have lost counsel,* **וְאֵין בָּהֶם תְּבוּנָה** – *and they don't understand* (Haazinu 32:28). "I'm trying My best to give direction to My people," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "but what more could I do? They don't listen to Me and therefore they are lacking in understanding."

It's like when your friend is setting out on a long road trip so you give him a good map so that he shouldn't get lost in his travels but he thinks he knows better and he doesn't bother with the instructions; he thinks he'll be just fine. - That's what this world is; it's a tremendous ocean filled with strong waves and dangerous obstacles – and without direction we'll surely crash up on the rocks

of life; we'll be damaged and spring leaks. Some people might even sink. But whatever happens, it won't be the successful voyage it could have been.

- **The Torah's Advice**

And so it pays for us to discover this navigation system that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is offering us. We don't want to sink after all! And therefore it's a question that we have to answer: What is meant by that word *eitzos*, counsel? Where is this fountain of advice that we're ignoring?

And the answer given by the Sifri is as follows: **וְאֵין עֵצָה אֶלָּא תּוֹרָה** – *The word eitzah only means Torah.* You want direction for succeeding in life? You want a system for navigating your way on the ocean of life? *Ein eitzah ela Torah!* All the advice you could ever need is in the Torah that Hashem gave us!

- **Eternal Life**

Ein eitzah ela Torah is the introduction to the great subject of *ki heim chayeinu* – the words of the Torah are our lives – and it's an introduction that many have never learned properly. Because when *frum* Jews hear these words they think they know all about it: "*Ki heim chayeinu!* Torah is our life! Ah! It's *chayei olam;* it's *Olam Habo* – it's eternal life!"

- **Self-Help Books**

That's the truth! The advice is not in the self-help books. It's not in the advice columns or by the psychiatrists. It's in one place. *Ein eitzah ela Torah.* Not that it's *also* in the Torah; it's *ela Torah* – it's *only* in the Torah.

The Torah is full of advice for succeeding in this world. It teaches you how to deal with your parents and your children; how to handle a wife or a husband and in-laws too. From the Torah you learn how to deal with your Italian neighbor. It teaches you how to be *matzliach* in business and how to succeed in your own inner life.

Not only in your private life. How to react to public issues, how to make public policy – how to deal with the mayor and the governor. It's full of advice on how to deal with the gentile nations. Even health! The *Gemara* is full of advice on how to take care of your health. The truth is the number of people who have lost their lives for lack of taking counsel from the Torah has yet to be counted.

Even the stickiest problems can be resolved by listening to the Torah's advice. Many times it seems like there's no way out, that there's no solution to a problem, but when you hear the counsel of the Torah immediately the problem can be solved. In every phase of life, the Torah stands by a man's side and offers him practical advice for how to live successfully.



Menachem Tzion on "Binu Shnos Dor V'Dor"

The pasuk in Parshas Ha'azinu says, "Remember bygone days; understand the years of each generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your grandfather and he will say it over to you" [32:7]. Even on a very simple and basic level, this pasuk is teaching the importance of having an appreciation for history.

It is very important for us to have an appreciation for history. If a person has an appreciation of what was, of tradition, of what transpired over the years, then he is capable of dealing with the present. A person has an obligation to remember and understand and to try to see the Hand of G-d (Hashgocha) in history.

When Willaim Shirer wrote his book "Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" (1959), he used as an epigraph, a quote from U.S. philosopher George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are

condemned to repeat it." This is a truth. We must remember history (Zechor Yemos Olam).

On a simple level, the next words in the pasuk, which say, "Binu Shnos Dor V'Dor" [Understand each and every generation], seem redundant. It appears to be nothing more than a poetic restatement of the beginning of the pasuk. On a homiletic level however, the Menachem Zion offers a very nice interpretation of this expression.

Yes, we must understand history and learn the lessons of history and apply them to our generation, but in addition to that, "Binu 'Shnos' dor v'dor". **The Menachem Zion** explains homiletically that the word 'Shnos' is not derived from the word 'Shana' [year] but from the word 'Shoneh' [different]. The meaning is that you must understand the changes from one generation to the next.

We can not blindly apply the same rules that worked in the past to present situations. If you try, you will fall short. Each generation is different. We can not glibly say "That's the way it was; therefore that's the way it has to be". Binu Shnos Dor V'dor — learn the lesson of history, but bear in mind the changes from generation to generation. Times change, people change, and circumstances change. There are times when we must alter and redirect and not merely go with what was.

If someone today were to send a half million troops to the beaches of Normandy, he would rightly be called a "meshuganer". While 60+ years ago there was indeed a need to fight a battle on the beaches of Normandy, that battle is now over; that battle has already been fought; and that battle has already been won. We cannot always continually fight the same battles again and again.

Understand the changes ('shnos') in each generation. Understand that each generation has its own set of problems and own set of rules and own set of circumstances. We must remember the days gone by, but couple that remembrance with an understanding of the changes that take place in each generation.

In the past, I have quoted the 'Chassideshe vort' of **Reb Levi Yitzchak** regarding why Eliyahu HaNavi (rather than Moshe Rabbenu or anyone else) was the one designated to resolve all of the Talmud's "Teykus" [acronym used by the Talmud to indicate a question remains unresolved until Tishbi (Elijah) will provide the resolution].

The reason, the Berditchever says, is because Eliyahu never died — he has been around in all generations. We need someone who has an understanding of each generation to pasken the shaylos [issue Rabbinic rulings on Halachic questions] for that generation. Therefore, only Eliyahu, who was present during all generations, is qualified to resolve the "Teykus".



A Gadol's Guarantee by Rabbi Shlomo Landau

Today, R' Henoch is a veteran mechanech and beloved rav, but many years ago, R' Henoch was a young man learning in kollel in Chicago. One day, as he was learning in kollel, an unfamiliar fellow walked in, clutching an attaché case. R' Henoch walked over to the fellow and greeted him with a warm shalom aleichem. He asked for his name, and what it was that had brought him to the kollel. The fellow responded that he had recently authored a sefer on Krias Shema al HaMittah and that he had come to the kollel to obtain a haskamah - a letter of approbation from the rosh kollel.

R' Henoch made sure that the visitor had a seat, and he noticed that after the fellow sat down, he took out an oversized Gemara and began to learn. R' Henoch realized that he must have vision issues and that was the reason why he was using an enlarged copy text.

After seder, R' Henoch approached the fellow and asked him if he had trouble seeing. The fellow replied that he did. R' Henoch then asked the fellow if it was okay for him to share a story that he felt could give him chizuk. The fellow replied in the affirmative, and R' Henoch began.

Many years earlier, there was a young talmid chacham who began to experience difficulty seeing. He went to the doctor, who examined him and concluded that he had advanced macular degeneration and that if he were lucky, he had six months of vision left. After that, he would unfortunately lose his vision entirely. The young fellow was devastated. He spent his days learning and could not even imagine life without being able to learn from his precious sefarim.

Depressed and broken, he traveled to the home of R' Moshe Feinstein and broke down as he shared the doctor's prognosis. R' Moshe did not seem too perturbed, and he calmly responded, "The doctor says that you only have six months of vision?

Nu, so finish Shas!"

The fellow did not really understand what R' Moshe s telling him, but R' Moshe ended the audience and wished him well.

Perturbed by his encounter with R' Moshe, the fellow traveled to R' Yaakov Kamenetsky, hoping that at least R' Yaakov would give him a berachah that would help him with his waning sight. Yet, R' Yaakov's response was very similar to R' Moshe's. R' Yaakov said, "If the doctors are saying that you have only six months of sight left, then go ahead and finish Shas..."

The fellow thanked R' Yaakov and walked out with no more clarity than he had when he arrived. Nevertheless, the fellow said to himself that if America's two gedolei hador have the same response, then he must listen. On that very day, he began learning Shas.

At this point in the story, R' Henoch leaned in toward the guest and said excitedly, "Rumour has it that it's been many years since he

met with R' Moshe and R' Yaakov, but they say that he still has his vision and that he is still working his way through Shas!"

The guest courteously interrupted R' Henoch and said, "Thank you so much, but I already know this story."

R' Henoch apologized. The fellow smiled and told R' Henoch, "In case you are wondering how I know the story, I have some news for you - I am that yungerman, and while I still struggle with my vision, it's been many years and baruch Hashem, I am still able to see and read."

R' Henoch was blown away, but managed to inquire, "Let me ask you something did you finish Shas?"

Once again, the visitor smiled and replied, "Not yet. I am making my way through really slowly because I know that as long as I am still learning through Shas, I have the gedolim's guarantees that I will retain my sight!"

Story of the Week Compiled by Aaron Leitner

My Blinding Ego

I decided to share my story after reading about the son of a Holocaust survivor who only realised who his father was after he died. I, too, am guilty of the same thing. I'm not proud of what I'm about to impart, but if it serves to open the eyes of another son or daughter, it will have been worthwhile.

I'm going to come right out and say it: I was ashamed of my father. This kind and gentle man who worked hard so my sister and I could have a good life had a son who snubbed him; that's the only way I can describe it. When I was a child, I used to cross the street so I wouldn't have to walk past my father's shop. I was afraid that if he noticed me I'd have to go inside – and what if someone saw me and figured out the connection? I hated that store. It smelled like

leather and glue. I hated watching my father bent over his cobbler's bench in his stained apron.



I was deeply embarrassed of him, and he didn't deserve my disdain. He was a good father. He was always interested in whatever was going on in my life. He didn't deserve a son like me, someone who only saw him as a simple labourer who put on his apron and cap every morning and knocked nails into shoes. I wanted a father like those of my friends, men who were successful businessmen or in chinuch, not a father who did menial work, whose hands were rough and black no matter how hard he scrubbed them, and who spoke with a heavy Russian accent that never faded, no matter how many decades he had lived here.

My father had come to the United States from the Soviet Union as a teenager. He'd had several different jobs until the opportunity to buy the shoe repair shop where he was employed presented itself. When he was 26 years old, he married my mother, whose parents had immigrated from Israel. Together, my parents built a nice but humble life. They were so happy that they could send my sister to Bais Yaakov and me to the local cheder. They were very proud of us and always let us know.

But I wasn't proud, because we weren't like other families. I wanted us to be like the families who drove nice cars and lived in their own homes with fancy furniture and chandeliers. Our apartment was a

fourth-floor walk-up, and I never wanted my friends to come over. Interestingly, my sister always invited her classmates and other girls from the neighbourhood. She was confident and popular and had no issues with it, but I didn't want anyone to meet my parents or see how we lived.

I already knew from a young age that my father was different. Other fathers wore hats and jackets and their hands were clean. My father wore a plaid shirt and cap, and his hands were always discoloured from the dyes he worked with.

I'll never forget the day a boy from an older grade spotted my father through the shop window as our school bus drove by. I had made the mistake of looking out the window when we passed by. My father was standing outside and waved excitedly when he saw me.

"That's your father?" the boy snickered. "The shoemaker? Does he fix your shoes for free?" Another boy made believe he was hammering while faking a heavy Russian accent. The heat rose up my neck. That night, I replayed their mocking laughter in my head until I fell asleep. I never told my parents when it happened or how I felt about it, but after that I always tried to keep my father's occupation a secret.

For years I dreaded my barmitzvah. I didn't want anyone to come. Luckily, my parents decided to make it in Eretz Yisroel so my mother's extended family could be part of it. It was also their dream for me to get my Aliyah at the Kosel. Ironically, they asked me if I was okay with my friends not being able to attend. I didn't tell them that this trip was the perfect solution to my greatest nightmare.

When I went away to yeshivah and started living in a dorm, I made sure that no one knew who my father was. If anyone asked me what he did for a living, I would say, "He manufacturers shoes." I was careful to never say shoemaker. When I called home, I spoke mostly to my mother. My father would always come to the phone, but I'd

rush to get off. His heavy Russian accent and, occasionally, awkward syntax were in stark contrast to the polished image I was trying to present. He'd ask me questions about my learning and tell me how much nachas I brought him. "You're doing what I never could," he once said. I barely responded. I was too focused on keeping my distance, on not letting anyone in yeshivah associate me with someone like him.

When my parents came to visit whilst I was learning in Eretz Yisroel, I made sure that they never crossed paths with anyone from my dirah. I told them that the boys didn't like it when parents visited, which wasn't far from the truth. It was bad enough when my father stood outside on the sidewalk in his old Shabbos suit, beaming with pride. I'd keep looking over my shoulder, dreading that someone I knew would see him. I made excuses not to introduce him to my friends. "They're busy," I'd say. "Maybe later."

My father never seemed hurt and never pushed. "I'm so proud of you," he'd say, handing me a small envelope with a few twenties before he left. "Just a little help for your seforim."

Then everything abruptly changed. I had made a name for myself as one of the top bochurim in yeshivah. I couldn't believe my good fortune when the shadchan told my parents that the Engels – a prominent family – were interested in me for their daughter. Mr Engel, who was a wealthy man, always chose the top boys in yeshivah for his daughters regardless of their background. I became his third son-in-law. Suddenly, I no longer had to hide who I was. Or at least that's what I thought. My father-in-law was a respected talmid chacham and a prominent businessman. He spoke effortless about stocks and real estate. My father talked about whether the soles on an old pair of boots could be saved.

I spent more time at my shver's house than at my own parents. When my parents asked if we were coming for Shabbos, I usually had a reason why we couldn't. It was always "the kids have a programme

on the other side of town" or my in-laws really want us this week." My wife was actually very friendly to my mother and would often urge me to invite them, but I never agreed. And if my parents ever resented it, they never let on. This went on for many years.

And then, from one minute to the next, my father was gone. He had a massive heart attack right there in the shop in which he'd spent much of his life. The Levayah was a lot bigger than I expected. People I didn't recognise crowded the street. The next morning, the shiva house was full – not with my friends or cousins, but with my father's customers.

A man with a limp told me my father had fixed his special orthopaedic shoes for free. A mother of six said he'd quietly paid for her son's sneakers more than once. An older widow described the envelopes of cash that appeared in her mailbox. "No name," she said, "but we all knew who it was from." A man in a crisp suit walked over to me and said, "You're Chaim Stern's son? When we were kids, we'd pass by his shop on the way to cheder. He always gave us lollipops. He was such a nice guy."

Something shifted inside of me during the shivah. The same words that had once made my stomach twist – "your father's a shoemaker" – were now being muttered with respect.

The next day, a man who came to daven Shacharis told me, "Your father saved my life. I was in a dark place. I came in one day to get something fixed but your father sensed that something was wrong. He sat me down and made me a cup of coffee. He talked to me as if I mattered. That conversation stopped me from doing something…. permanent. Your father didn't just fix shoes. He fixed people, too.

On the third day, a broad-shouldered young man with tattoos snaking around both forearms hovered by the doorway before stepping forward. He was holding a scuffed shoebox. "Your father gave me a job one summer," he said. "No one else would hire me. He told me,

"You've got two good hands and I've got work for you. That's all that matters." He lifted the lid. Inside the box, cushioned in crumpled tissue paper, lay a pair of black leather shoes, polished to a mirror shine. "He said these were his Shabbos shoes. He wanted me to have them for when I got my life together. I think he'd want you to have them now."

After the shivah, I walked over to the shop. The window looked smaller. The gold letters on the sign that said "H Stern – Shoe Repair" had lost some of the shine. Inside, nothing had been moved: the bench, the tools, the jars of glue and polish. I breathed in the smell that I used to avoid.

In the back, I found my father's ledger. The names were written neatly and there were careful notes. Some read "paid in full," others read "half price." Many of them simply indicated the type of repair he'd made. On the bench sat a child's shoe in a paper bag, tagged: Greenblatt. Needs new Velcro. No charge."

Now my eyes had been opened to what a prince my father had been, I felt lower than a worm. I, who prided himself on being a talmid chochom, was nothing but a shallow vessel, an empty barrel.

My father's shop is now gone. It has been replaced by a bagel store. But whenever I pass by, I slow down and remember the small child who used to cross the street. These days, I wish I could walk inside and visit him again, seeing his eyes crinkle up and his broad smile when he notices me.

Instead, all I can do is visit his kever, and give my mother the kovod she rightfully deserves. Now that he's in the World of Truth, I hope he knows that I've changed. What a pity I didn't come to my senses whilst he was still in his workshop.

Good Shabbos - Aaron Leitner

Rabbi Yerachmiel Cofnas by Rabbi Moshe Boruch Katanka



Rabbi Cofnas's life was divided into three distinct tekufos. The first tekufah was the years of his youth in the shtetlech in Poland, and the time he spent in yeshivah at the feet of Gedolei Yisroel as Rav, shochet, mohel, teacher and counsellor. The next tekufah was his years of dedicated service to the Birmingham community. The third tekufah was the years he spent in Manchester where he transformed himself in both mind and body back to the world in which he had been brought up.

In Manchester he would infuse the ruach of times gone by into present-day living, having stood in such close proximity to the gedolim of yesteryear and having merited sitting together with them in the botei medrash. The fact that in his later years his physical appearance reminded many of the Chofetz Chaim himself, added to the sense of reality that had transferred itself almost directly from Radin, Grodno, Brisk and other great Torah centres, to Manchester.

What was amazing was the fact that all this had not dissipated during the middle tekufah in Birmingham. On the contrary, his responsibilities and his delight in being marbitz Torah was a positive contribution to his growth and ability to maintain the standard by which he was reared.

Our dear zeida, Rav Yerachmiel Cofnas zt"l, was one of these people. He was so dedicated to the Torah, so sincere in his avodas Hashem, and so caring in his bein odom lachaveiro.

The family surname in Poland was "Tzofnas' - a word that is mentioned once in the Torah. (Upon arrival in England it was read as

'Cofnas', since the Polish sound "Tz' is represented by the letter 'C'.)

Zeida is now, no doubt, enjoying his Olam Habo. These are the days that he worked towards his whole life, as he would from his Rebbe, the heiliger Chofetz Chaim zt'l: '*In the next world we are like pensioners - living from the savings that we say have set aside in this world.*'

May this sefer be a merit for him, as we learn from his and from the messages of the Gedolei Yisroel that he passed down to us.

Moshe Boruch Katanka



Dekeshene

Reb Kalman, Basya Ethel and their family settled in Dekeshene a small village between the large cities of Grodno and Vilna, and re-assumed the old family name Cofnas. Dekeshene was an all-Jewish village of about thirty-five families. There was one 'Shabbos goy' who was also the shepherd of the village flock. The whole shtetl was like one big family. All the houses in Dekeshene were on one side of a single road. On the other side of the road were large areas of empty land where the animals would graze. At the back of every house were long stretches of land that were used for farming, as well as a barn to store fodder and straw for the animals. The terrain used for growing produce was scattered in many different areas. Everyone worked hard on the land – men, women and children.

There were no shops in Dekeshene. Olkenik, a larger village with about two hundred families, a few shops and a post office, was about three miles away. The post office had a telephone, and if there was an urgent phone call for a resident of Dekeshene, a messenger would be sent from Olkenik instructing him to come to the post office at a certain time the next day to receive the call!

It is told that the following question was once posed to a local Rav. One of the townsfolk received a message to come to the post office on Shabbos. A phone call was such a rarity in those days that the Rav paskened that it was, in most likelihood, a case of pikuach nefesh. Under such circumstances the call must be attended to even on the holy Shabbos!

Mazal tov - a baby boy!

Shortly after their arrival in Dekeshene, Reb Kalman and Basya Ethel were blessed with a baby girl, Shayna. On the 15th January 1913, a baby boy was born. He was called Yerachmiel and was to be the youngest of their seven children.

Poverty

The people in the village were farmers and were allotted long stretches of land by the Polish government. It was mostly barren wasteland that could not be used for growing produce. Some of the land was fertile and they would grow potatoes, corn, peas and other vegetables, but it did not produce enough to sustain the family.

During the First World War and in its aftermath, the financial situation was particularly difficult. The villagers in general did not have enough grain or seeds to plant and were lacking the necessary manpower and horses to work the land. There was a tremendous shortage of food. Reb Kalman acted as the Rav of the settlement and was also the local shochet, but earning a living during those years was very hard.

The Cofnas family lived on a level of poverty which is tough to imagine. At times they had one loaf of bread between them all for a whole week. If visitors came to stay, the little food that they had would be shared with their guests. Basya Ethel would prepare a soup made from certain types of edible nettles which grew in the area, as there was no other form of nutrition to cook with the water. They

would be content if they could obtain potato peels from a neighbour. Sometimes they would even have to eat grass to fill their stomachs.

When the situation improved somewhat the family managed to buy a cow to provide milk, as well as some chickens which would lay eggs for them to eat. Reb Kalman shared a horse with another villager, and he would use it on alternate days to plough the land. There was also a river near the shtetl where they would sometimes catch fish to eat.

The children had only one set of clothing each — a shirt, trousers and tzitzis. This they wore everyday - weekday, Shabbos and Yom Tov. At times they had to wear clothes made from sackcloth as they had nothing else. The Polish summer is warm, but during the winter the temperature drops significantly, and they would suffer from the cold due to insufficient clothing.

The First World War brought with it other more frightening issues, There was no police force to turn to for protection, and robbers and soldiers would come into the village and plunder whatever they could find.

Once a soldier came into their family house and shot into the air above their heads. He told them to put their hands up and give him all their money. Fortunately, they didn't have anything to give him. It was terrifying! They put their trust and faith solely in Hakodosh boruch Hu to look after them.

Their house was made of wood, as were all the other homes in the village. The roof was covered with thick layers of straw. The Cofnas home had a front room, a little side room and a brick oven which was in the centre of the house. The other side of a small partition was called 'the kitchen'. There was not much furniture, and they all slept on straw. The floor was earthen, as in most houses in the shtetl, and there were no floorboards. Many years of treading on the floor had made it firm, and when it became dirty it was swept clean; it was never washed. There was no indoor bathroom or toilet. Water had

to be drawn from a well located about two hundred yards from their home. In later years, a water pump was installed.

Not only did the family suffer from starvation, they also caught many serious illnesses. Once Levi came back home from yeshivah to visit, only to find that the whole family had caught typhus. Since their illness was contagious, he was unable to enter their home. He waved at his family through the window and returned to the yeshivah! The family also suffered from cholera and diphtheria.

The only medical aid available was a 'doctor' who would use very primitive methods. To treat an infection he would heat a round glass in hot water and then place a candle inside (bahnkes'). The heat would draw out the infection, leaving the skin red. To treat constipation the 'doctor' would pour hot water down a long pipe into the affected area!

Ruchniyus

Dekeshene boasted one local shul where a minyan took place each day. The villagers were all misnagdim and they davened nusach Ashkenaz. After a hard day working on the land, they went to shul to daven and say Tehilim. There were no forms of entertainment or other places to go; this was their enjoyment in life.

Reb Kalman would give a shiur for half an hour in the evening, and although the people were worn out from a hard day at work, they would come together to learn. There was no electricity and during the week people would simply go to sleep when it became dark. If they needed light, they would create primitive candles by peeling long thin strips of wood and placing them in a special stand. The strips would be lit from the coal-cinders, or by the heat of the sun shining through a glass. Paraffin lights would only be used on Friday night in honour of Shabbos!

There was no mikvah in Dekeshene. People would tovel in a stagnant pond that was just outside the village. Although it contained dirty

water and was out in the open, there was no alternative. During the winter it would freeze over, and the ice would have to be broken before tevilah.

If the townspeople needed a wash during the week, they would sit in a bowl and rinse themselves with some cold water from the well. To heat a kettle of water would mean burning fire- wood and could take about two hours!

Shabbos and Yom Tov

On Friday the whole town would go to a little hut which was the public bathhouse. It was like a Turkish bath. Stones would be heated up from an oven below and water would be thrown onto the stones to create steam. Many people had only one set of clothing, which was often full of vermin. They would take off their clothes and place them in a warm room next to the bathroom so that the steam would kill any insects that were on their clothes, rendering them clean. Rav Cofnas would describe this room as a 'delicing' room!

Heating up an oven involved gathering a large amount of wood from the field. For this reason, the villagers would come together to cook their cholent for Shabbos in one large communal oven. They would heat up the oven on Thursday, and on Friday a member of each family would bring their pot of cholent and put it into the oven. Although Dekeshene was built along one road, there was an eiruv at both ends of it, and after davening on Shabbos morning they would collect their cholent and take it home.

Shabbos and Yom Tov were enjoyable days, despite the fact that resources were so limited. Due to shortage of food, chuppos were held on Fridays, and the Friday night meal would serve as the chasunah seudah.

On Pesach,during times of poverty, they did not have four cups of wine and instead would drink four cups of another drink and make a bracha of shehakol.

Education

Reb Kalman did not hit his children if they misbehaved. but he would give them a mussar droshah and explain to them the severity of their actions. Young Yerachmiel was once caught pretending to smoke. Reb Kalman told Yerachmiel to lie over a bench as if he were to be hit, and made him promise that he would never do it again!

There was no public schooling in Dekeshene. Reb Kalman taught his young children Torah and basic maths. They did not have pens or paper, and the children would write with chalk on a kind of marble slab, crossing out their work where necessary.

Whilst his father was working the field, Yerachmiel would sit in a corner and revise the Chumash or Mishnayos that he had been taught. Reb Kalman would stop from time to time to supervise and test him on his learning!

With the Melamed

In the neighbouring village, Olkenik, there was a melamed who taught a number of boys Chumash, Mishnah and Gemora. At the age of eight Yerachmiel joined this group and at the beginning of every week would travel to Olkenik to learn together with them for five or six hours a day.

Unfortunately, although he was indeed knowledgeable and a tzadik, the melamed was unable to discipline the boys and a lot of time was wasted. On Friday the young Yerachmiel would return home to his family in Dekeshene to be with them for Shabbos.

After a year or so a similar arrangement was made for Yerachmiel and his friends to be taught by a Melamed in the shtetl of Eishyshok.

It was arranged that Yerachmiel would eat at the home of one of the local baalei batim. There was very little to eat, just a piece of bread or something small. Tuesday was a treat - on that day he ate lunch at the home of the local butcher!

Other basic general knowledge was not taught to the children and they had to pick it up by themselves. Youngsters were not given the chance to express their opinions or discuss their problems, and consequently they would bottle up and suppress their feelings.

Vilna

At age eleven Yerachmiel left home with two of his chaveirim to learn in the Ramailes Yeshivah Ketanah in Vilna. Vilna is a major city thirty miles north-east of Dekeshene. The yeshivah was headed by Rav Hirsch Grodzensky zt"l, a brother of the esteemed Rav of Vilna, Rav Chaim Ozer. It was difficult for the young boy to adapt to life away from home, in a large town and as a complete stranger.

Basya Ethel travelled to Vilna with Yerachmiel and asked a 'friend of a friend' if he and his family would be able to house her son during his stay. Although they didn't have a spare room, they were good-hearted people and kindly agreed for Yerachmiel to sleep in a corner of their living room where they would put some chairs together.

With no alternative Yerachmiel would sleep on three wobbly chairs; during the night he would often fall between them! He was the last to go to sleep, having to wait for all the members of the family to retire before 'making his bed'. In the morning, he was the first to awake, as his 'bedroom' was transformed back into a living room. With nowhere to dress or keep his few possessions, life was difficult for the young boy.

This setup was not always feasible. On one occasion Yerachmiel had nowhere to sleep for the night. An announcement was made in shul after Maariv asking if anyone had room for a young yeshivah boy!

The yeshivah provided dinner but did not serve any other meals. Yerachmiel did not have any money of his own and had to rely on the kindness of the local baalei batim to invite him for meals. He would often cry at his situation, being away from home under such difficult circumstances. The first Friday night in Vilna was particularly

saddening. Following an unknown baal habos into an empty house was a lonely and pitiful experience. It was, of course, a great chesed of the host family, and they tried their best to make the young Yerachmiel comfortable.

A story was told about an aging Dayan in Eishyshok who felt that his strength was ebbing and his end was coming near. Having held the responsibly of guiding the community for so many years in multiple different areas of halochah, he was concerned that perhaps some of his decisions had been incorrect.

After some thought he travelled to Radin, the neighbouring shtetl, and approached the saintly Chofetz Chaim with a unique request: that the Chofetz Chaim test him on the entire Shulchan Oruch so that he can live his final days with the assurance of having his rulings affirmed and the confidence to face the Heavenly Court in the next world.

The Chofetz Chaim acquiesced, and the Dayan passed his farher with distinction. Having completed the test, the Chofetz Chaim began to cry. "Who knows if I will pass my test? How much suffering will I be afflicted with for rulings that I have rendered and written in the Mishnah Berurah!"

Eishyshok itself was home to a famous yeshivah ketanah and R' Yerachmiel returned home shortly after his bar mitzvah to live with his parents and learn in the local yeshivah back in Eishyshok.

The only time Yerachmiel saw an orange before he came to England was when he was in a hospital in Vilna and the nurses were trying to revive a friend of his with some fruit!

When Rav Cofnas would complete a hospital form asking for details of his state of health, he would tick almost all the boxes to confirm that he had endured many of the different illnesses listed there!

Rav Cofnas would say that the air in Wales reminded him of the fresh air that he was used to in Poland.

Kobrin

At the tender age of fourteen, Yerachmiel left Eishyshok to travel a hundred and fifty miles southwards to learn at the famous Kobrin Yeshivah. The yeshivah had a student body of approximately one hundred yeshivaleit at the time and was led by the esteemed Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Pesach Pruskin zt'l.

During that period Levi, who had already returned from Chevron to live in Manchester, sent his brother Yerachmiel a pair of pyjamas. Yerachmiel had never seen pyjamas before and thought in all innocence that it was a modern colourful suit. - When he wore it to shul on Shabbos, he couldn't understand why people were staring at him and laughing!

Visiting Radin as a Child

Radin was a small shtetl with only four or five roads and about two hundred and fifty families. Yerachmiel was no stranger to Radin. His father had taken him on a number of occasions to visit the renowned gadol hador Rav Yisroel Meir HaCohen Kagan zt'l, known by the famous sefer he authored the "Chofetz Chaim", for advice and brochos.

On one such occasion there were a number of people around the Chofetz Chaim and being just a young child, Yerachmiel was pushed to the side. The Chofetz Chaim noticed that the young Yerachmiel was squashed and motioned for him to come forward. He told those who were present: "Leave him, take care of the boy. This one's father (Reb Kalman) came all the way from England back to Poland for the sake of the Torah."

After spending a year studying in Kobrin, R' Yerachmiel, now known as Yerachmiel Ostriner (from Ostrin), travelled to Radin to learn in its yeshivah ketanah.

Acceptance into Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim

Once a bochur was capable of understanding the Gemora well and could learn Rishonim far zich' (by himself), he would apply to join the kibbutz in the famous Radin Yeshivah Gedolah. R' Yerachmiel and some friends approached the Menahel of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim, Rav Yehoshua Levison, and asked if they could be accepted into the yeshivah.

The yeshivos, along with large sections of the general population, faced great poverty and deprivation, and a communal fund, the Vaad Hayeshivos, was founded by Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky and the Chofetz Chaim to help finance the yeshivos. In spite of this assistance, the financial situation of the Radin Yeshivah remained precarious and Rav Yehoshua informed the hopeful applicants that the yeshivah could not possibly accept any more talmidim. The yeshiva's limited funds did not cover the basic expenses of those already learning there. The decision was non-negotiable.

R' Yerachmiel and his friends were not deterred. With tremendous mesiras nefesh they moved into the yeshivah building, learning and sleeping in the beis hamedrash with the hope that the hanholah would see their sincerity and firm resolve and accept them into the yeshivah.

It was a very difficult period. With no other source of income, they had to borrow money to somehow pay for their basic needs. After six full months Rav Eliezer Kaplan and Rav Yehoshua Levison - the hanholah, finally yielded and agreed to help with partial support. At the completion of the year, they were fully accepted into the yeshivah!

Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim

About three hundred and fifty bochurim aged fifteen to thirty learnt in the yeshivah. There was a shortage of even the most classic seforim. If a bochur would want to learn from a sefer such as a Ritvo, he would add his name to a list. Even then, it would take about a week until it would be his turn!

Few were able to accept the financial responsibility of supporting a married man in raising a family whilst seeking to progress in his learning. Many bochurim postponed marriage until well into their thirties. Indeed, the student body in Radin included a number of unmarried bochurim of that age.

The thunderous sound of so many people learning Torah was a tremendous spiritual experience. The yeshivah provided neither accommodation nor communal dining facilities. Bochurim would hire a room from a local baal habos to sleep in and would eat dinner each day at a different home. This was known as 'teg'. A baal habos could end up with ten to twelve boys at his table for a meal!

The townsfolk were poor and much of the income of the villagers came from the yeshivah. The yeshivah would provide some funding to pay the baalei batim. The amount that the yeshivah gave was largely dependent on how long the bochur had been in the yeshivah.

In Radin, water would have to be carried from a well which was quite a walk from the yeshivah. Care was taken not to use excessive amounts of water for tasks such as washing hands as every drop was precious.

Levi would send over some money from time to time, sometimes as much as £1, to help ease the difficult financial plight of his brother R' Yerachmiel. R' Yerachmiel would share whatever he could with other bochurim, particularly with boys who were, unfortunately, enlisted in the Polish army and could not otherwise obtain kosher food.

Rebbetzen Feige Zaks o"h, daughter of the Chofetz Chaim, would often be seen walking around Radin with her two children even when it was cold. She wanted to ensure that her husband could prepare his shiurim at home without being disturbed.

Many years later Rav Cofnas heard that the elderly Rebbetzen was residing in Yerushalayim. On contacting the family he was informed that although the visit may prove futile as she had suffered a stroke, could hardly hear and was almost in a state of coma, he was more than welcome to visit her. Rav Cofnas entered the room and sat in front of her. Two granddaughters informed her of his arrival; they repeated to her about six times in Yiddish: "This Yid learnt in Radin! This Yid learnt in Radin!"

At that point she understood what they were telling her and became animated. Her family had not seen her so active for weeks - it was almost as if she had been brought back to life!

The Rebbetzen called out in excitement, "Learnt in Radin!" She continued to reminisce about her younger years, "Radin, Radin, oy, my father tried for three years to come to Eretz Yisroel and was never able to make the move."

Before leaving, Rav Cofnas asked her to give him a brochah, saying that her husband was his Rosh Yeshivah and that she was an eishes chover. She replied, "I should give you a brochah? Hakodosh boruch Hu should give you a brochah to have a long and healthy life, but how can I give a brochah?"

On hearing this, Rav Cofnas was reminded that those were the very words of the Chofetz Chaim. He would say: "I should give you a brochah? Why go the long way round when you can go direct? Go straight to the Ribono shel Olam. Take out a Tehilim and daven to Him. That is what I do. I speak straight to my Father. A father wants to hear directly from his children, not from a second-hand source..."

The Chofetz Chaim

Afternoon seder finished at seven and was followed by Maariv. Many bochurim would stay up late, learning into the early hours of the morning. The Chofetz Chaim would object to them staying up after midnight, as he felt that it would invariably make them tired and unable to concentrate properly the next day.

In his younger years the Chofetz Chaim himself would come into the beis hamedrash at midnight and put out the lights. On Thursday night some bochurim would stay up to learn throughout the night and then prepare for Shabbos. This was acceptable as there was no official seder on Friday afternoon.

The Chofetz Chaim was famous throughout the world and his advice and guidance was the final word in matters relating to World Jewry. Nevertheless, if someone wanted to ask advice or receive a brochah, there were no shamoshim, no secretaries and no appointments. One would simply push open the door to his home and walk in. The Chofetz Chaim would be found bent over the sefer he was holding, deep in thought, oblivious to his surroundings. It was an incredibly awesome sight; within this small man was kol HaTorah kulo'!

Watching the Chofetz Chaim learn was intriguing. Although the Chofetz Chaim was holding a sefer, it seemed that he was really learning by heart with the sefer, merely giving the impression that he needed to read the words.

The Chofetz Chaim's home was small and bare. Inside there was a table with a few plain benches (each bench comprised of a board with legs at both sides). The Chofetz Chaim himself sat on a simple chair with a little back support. By the time that R' Yerachmiel was in Radin the floor of the Chofetz Chaim's home was covered with floorboards, which were installed towards the end of his life. Prior to that, he had a simple earthen floor as did many other Radin residents.

It is well known that in his earlier years, the Chofetz Chaim would leave his home and move into a local beis hamedrash to dedicate his time to writing his seforim. He would sleep on a bench with a cushion, and food would be brought to him there. One erev Pesach when the cushion was to be cleaned, it was nowhere to be found. It transpired that a poor person had approached the Chofetz Chaim for funds, and the Chofetz Chaim had given it away to him.

Davening with the Chofetz Chaim

The Chofetz Chaim held a minyan in his home for davening. Only ten to fifteen bochurim from the yeshivah would go to daven with him. R' Yerachmiel would frequently attend the minyan; he considered it a tremendous privilege and honour to daven with the Chofetz Chaim. He would remark many years later that often, when something is readily available, people don't appreciate it that much!

The Chofetz Chaim did not daven at mizrach but sat at the middle of a table with bochurim around him. R' Yerachmiel would particularly enjoy standing next to the Chofetz Chaim whilst the Chofetz Chaim was davening. Although he frequently davened with the Chofetz Chaim, R' Yerachmiel never saw the Chofetz Chaim wear a gartel. The Chofetz Chaim wore a peaked cap, even on Shabbos.

Shabbos

On Shabbos the Chofetz Chaim's skin was fresh like a young child's; one could see the Shechinah glowing on his face.

The Chofetz Chaim possessed the supernatural ability to determine if a visitor was shomer Shabbos or not. Once, on a visit to Warsaw, the Chofetz Chaim was inundated with people requesting brochos and advice. One particular visitor was refused a brochah. The man was extremely saddened to have been discriminated against. Said the Chofetz Chaim: "Shabbos itself is the greatest brochah for the Jewish people. If you keep Shabbos you will have brochah; if not, how can I bentch you?"

The humility of the Chofetz Chaim was outstanding. Although he had authored many seforim that were famous throughout the Jewish world and was an accepted leader of World Jewry, he was an unassuming and modest person. A shaalah once arose during Friday night davening in his home. Upon hearing the commotion, the Chofetz Chaim asked for a Mishnah Berurah. He opened it at a certain page, looked inside and said: "The Mishnah Berurah paskens (so and so), and therefore the halochah is (such and such)." - It was as if he was reading from a sefer that someone else had authored!

Shmuzen in the Yeshivah

When R' Yerachmiel learnt in Radin, the Chofetz Chaim was already at an advanced age and rather frail. His mind, however, exceedingly clear, and once or twice a month he would ask to be brought into the yeshivah to say some words of chizuk.

He lived only a short distance from the yeshivah, but, because of his fragile state, had to be taken there by horse and cart. The Chofetz Chaim refused to allow the yeshivaleit to serve him, and a dedicated wagon driver would take him there.

There were a couple of occasions that one of the yeshivaleit sat in the place of the driver, so that the Chofetz Chaim would not notice that the designated wagon driver could not manage to take him! From the wagon the Chofetz Chaim would be carried into the yeshivah on a chair to give a mussar shmuz. Sometimes he would arrive at the yeshivah to speak without prior warning.

Although the Chofetz Chaim would speak for no longer than ten minutes, his words were 'miyut hamachzik es hamerubah' (few words that contained an important message). He would explain how a person should behave using straightforward and easily understood ideas with the aid of a parable or story. One could feel that the words spoken came directly from the depths of his heart, like a mother talks to her child. It left a tremendous impression on all those present.

Proportionally very few bochurim went to yeshivah. In general, a yeshivahman was viewed as a 'batlan'. The feeling in the street was to ridicule those who were learning. Rabbonim were considered out of touch and antiquated.

The Chofetz Chaim was particularly concerned about the chinuch of the girls. In the 1920s the Beis Yaakov Schools under the guidance of Sorah Schenirer, was beginning to blossom. The Chofetz Chaim once asked to be brought into the beis hamedrash in the middle of seder and made an impromptu speech:

"Boruch Hashem we have wonderful yeshivos for the boys to learn in, but what will happen to the next generation if the girls are not given a Torah education to become true Yiddishe mamas?"

Tzidkus

The Chofetz Chaim would enter the shul at night, open the Aron Kodesh and daven and plead for Klal Yisroel. Sometimes people would hide between the benches in order to hear his holy words! He felt greatly indebted to the Ribono shel Olam for all the goodness that He had bestowed upon him, and would continually thank Hashem.

Another aspect of his greatness is the way that he alerted the world to the terrible sin of speaking lashon hora. He published the sefer Chofetz Chaim in 1873, the name by which he himself became known. Although people are naturally interested in speaking and hearing all the latest gossip, many thousands of people changed their attitude and the way they speak because of his sefer.

The outstanding yiras Shomayim of the Chofetz Chaim is evident in the sefer Mishnah Berurah that he authored, as well as in his other halachic writings, where he includes words of mussar instructing how a Jewish person should behave. There were others who wrote similar halachic works, it is no doubt that his seforim were so well accepted in the Jewish world because of the tremendous yiras Shomayim and bakoshas ho'emes that permeated his works.

The Chofetz Chaim would ensure that others wouldn't speak lashon hora to him. As soon as he was approached by someone, the Chofetz Chaim would greet him with a warm shalom aleichem' and steer the conversation in the direction he wished. It just was not possible to tell him loshon hora.

The Chofetz Chaim clearly foresaw the horrors that we were subjected to by the Nazis. The Chofetz Chaim had ruach hakodesh and saw things in the world that were unknown to others.

When Dayan Yechezkel Abramski zt'l was imprisoned in Russia, the Chofetz Chaim was deeply pained by his situation. One day the Chofetz Chaim suddenly exclaimed: "*Boruch Hashem mun hot eim arois gel- ost, er is shoin frie* (they have let him out, he is free)."

It later transpired that the Chofetz Chaim had spoken at the exact moment that Dayan Abramski was liberated!

R' Yerachmiel would tell the following story that he heard from a chaver who witnessed it himself: "Towards the end of his life, the family of the Chofetz Chaim would protect him from hearing distressing news. They were concerned that in his frail elderly state the pain would affect his health.

"Once when he was sitting with his son Rav Aryeh Leib, son-in-law Rav Mendel and others, the Chofetz Chaim surprised them all and said that he could hear a terrible noise. The room was silent; those around him were perplexed. The Chofetz Chaim was hard of hearing, how could he hear a noise that they all couldn't? The Chofetz Chaim repeated twice, then three times that he could hear a terrible noise. He then asked them to tell him of the latest news in the world.

"The family didn't want to tell the elderly tzadik, but he insisted. With no choice, Rav Mendel admitted that a letter had come to the Chofetz Chaim asking him to daven for the kehilah of Vienna because their situation was very dangerous following a significant increase in anti-Semitism.

"The Chofetz Chaim opened his heart to the Ribono shel Olam. "Klal Yisroel have suffered for so long! Have mercy on us. We daven on Yom Tov: 'Ato bechartonu mikol hoamim (You have chosen us from all the nations)'. Did you select us out in order to punish us more? I pray on behalf of the Jewish people to have mercy! We have suffered enough with 'Tach Vetat', pogroms and so many korbanos'. Please avert this decree that this should not happen and bring the redemption." - It was clear that the Chofetz Chaim was tuned in to a different wavelength than the others in the room!

On Yom Kippur the yeshivaleit would wear socks. People could not afford to buy slippers or the like.

People were extremely impoverished and did not have excess funds to pay for the mitzvos of Purim. For mishloach monos they would simply swap with each other whatever food they had for their Purim seudah, as the halochah requires under such circumstances!

Finance

The financial situation of the Chofetz Chaim was extremely insecure towards the end of his life. The Chofetz Chaim would not take any funds from the yeshivah. His income was solely from the meagre proceeds received from the sale of his seforim. In fact, many people could not even pay upfront for the seforim that they purchased and would send a few pennies at a time as they managed to put them together.

The Chofetz Chaim's son-in-law writes that the Chofetz Chaim's household is short of some of the basic necessities, and the financial situation of the yeshivah is very difficult. He requests, in the name of the Chofetz Chaim, that those who have bought seforim on credit should send some payment. - It is hard to imagine that a world-famous leader could not afford to buy food to eat.

The Chofetz Chaim's wife once considered purchasing curtains for the windows in their home, mentioning that even Rav Chaim Ozer

Grodzensky's house had curtains. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "Of course Rav Chaim Ozer needs curtains, as befits the gadol hador. He is the nosi of Klal Yisroel, and the Rav of Vilna. I, however, am only a poshete baal habos..." The Chofetz Chaim looked upon unnecessary material objects as wasted pages of Gemora. The time spent earning money to buy these items could have been used for learning.

There is a famous story of a wealthy visitor who came from America to visit the famed Chofetz Chaim. Seeing the Chofetz Chaim's simple house the visitor was shocked. "I would like permission to furnish your home" requested the man, "and I will gladly pay for it." The Chofetz Chaim asked him a question in return, "Where is your furniture?" Puzzled, the man replied, "My furniture? At home! I am just a visitor to these parts." The Chofetz Chaim explained himself, "I am also just a visitor here in this world. I don't need anything more than the basics."

The Chofetz Chaim was extremely concerned not to cheat anyone in his business dealings. Each sefer to be sold had every page checked, either by himself or by a member of his family, to ensure that there were no printing errors or missing pages. He also made a detailed reckoning of the price of his seforim to ensure that he would not inadvertently overcharge anyone.

Eretz Yisroel

It is well known that the Chofetz Chaim had an aspiration to move to Eretz Yisroel, and tried to do so, albeit unsuccessfully, on a number of occasions. A house had even been prepared for him in Petach Tikvah, but for various reasons he was unable to make the move. There was a mekubal at the time who said outright, "Lo yaaleh velo yavo (he will never go)." When asked to explain himself, the mekubal replied:

"At the moment there are two strong conflicting opinions as to whether a State should be created for the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel. If the Chofetz Chaim were to go, he would be obliged to

meet with leaders of one of the sides, and hence the Chofetz Chaim's seforim will not be accepted amongst those who do not agree with this outlook. To ensure that his seforim will be fully accepted throughout Klal Yisroel, Hashem will never allow the Chofetz Chaim to go!"

It is told that the Chofetz Chaim was asked why he was so determined to live in Eretz Yisroel, since when Moshiach comes everyone will go there anyway.

The Chofetz Chaim would explain: "It is not so simple that everyone will be worthy of going to Eretz Yisroel when Moshiach comes; maybe I will not merit being included with those who are to go. My only hope is that if I am already in Eretz Yisroel, I won't be thrown out!"

The last Torah thought that Rav Cofnas heard from the Chofetz Chaim left a particularly powerful message: "When a person takes leave of this world after one hundred and twenty, it can take many more years until he merits to attain a position where he can be 'neheneh miziv HaShechinah' (enjoy being close to Hashem). In this world, however, one just says the words 'Hashem sefosai tiftach' (Hashem open my lips) at the beginning of shemoneh esrei and the Shechinah is already standing in front of him. - Take hold of the opportunity that one has in this world three times a day!"

His Final Days

It was told to R' Yerachmiel by those who were there at the time, that on the last day of his life the Chofetz Chaim was in a kind of coma. Many bochurim were with him in his room saying Tehilim for his recovery. At Minchah time a number of bochurim went out to daven. The Chofetz Chaim opened his eyes, looked around, and could see that although a minyan remained there with him inside the room, many others had left to daven. The Chofetz Chaim asked those who remained in bewilderment, "Is this a time to look for mitzvos?!" The Chofetz Chaim meant that those who had left to daven Minchah should have stayed with him to be present at the time of yetzias

neshomah. Two hours later, the Chofetz Chaim was niftar on the 24th of Elul 5693 (1933).

With the passing of the Chofetz Chaim just a few hours before Shabbos, a shaalah arose as to when the levayah should take place. On the one hand, a burial is not to be delayed unnecessarily, and some felt that the funeral should therefore take place immediately. Others were of the opinion that the levayah should be postponed until Sunday to allow time for people from out of town to come to Radin and participate in honour of the Chofetz Chaim.



The levayah of the Chofetz Chaim

The Rav of Vilna, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, concurred with this second opinion, and the levayah was scheduled for Sunday morning. Telegrams were sent to all the Rabbonim in Poland informing them that the Chofetz Chaim had passed away and that the levayah would take place on Sunday morning.

R' Yerachmiel himself was at home in Ostrin when the Chofetz Chaim was niftar. On that Motzoei Shabbos he travelled throughout the night by horse and cart, a distance of about forty miles, to be in Radin in time for the levayah.

It was announced that only those who had been to the mikvah were permitted to hold the aron. Hespedim went on throughout the day until the late afternoon when the burial took place. More hespedim were given during the week as Rabbonim from throughout Poland came to Radin. Everyone was crying bitterly and could not imagine how Klal Yisroel would manage without him.

Studying Shechitah Back Home in Ostrin

While R' Yerachmiel was in Radin, his mother Basya Ethel became ill and passed away. R' Yerachmiel returned to Ostrin to help his father Reb Kalman and his sister Shayna, and to keep them company. His father used the time to teach R' Yerachmiel shechitah, and a local Rav, Rav Chaim Nochum HaCohen Lubavitch zt'l, wrote him a letter of approval.

During the summer R' Yerachmiel accepted a position as a temporary shochet in Skidel, a shtetl twenty miles south-west of Ostrin. It was a wonderful opportunity to practice his newly learnt skills. In Skidel he received a letter from the Rav, Rav Meir Nochum Vershovski zt'l, stating that he was a qualified shochet. R' Yerachmiel became an accomplished shochet which was a profession that stood him in good stead years later in Birmingham.

Grodno

Having qualified as a shochet, R' Yerachmiel returned to the yeshivah-world to study in the famous Yeshivas Shaar HaTorah in Grodno under the leadership of the great gaon and Tzadik Rav Shimon Yehuda Shkop Zt'l.

Rav Shimon cared for each and every talmid in the yeshivah and they in turn were dedicated to him. On one occasion R' Yerachmiel was about to leave the yeshivah building when Rav Shimon noticed that one of R' Yerachmiel's buttons was missing from his coat. Rav Shimon explained that to wear a coat with a button missing was not befitting a ben Torah. Rav Shimon there-upon took the coat home to his Rebbetzen who promptly sewed on a new button!

Semichah - Brisk and Vilna

During R' Yerachmiel's golden years of learning Torah in Grodno at the feet of the Gedolei Yisroel, ominous clouds of war were forming over Europe. Rav Levi, R' Yerachmiel's eldest brother, was deeply concerned for his welfare and that of the rest of the family. Having

been born in Poland, R' Yerachmiel required employment to enable him to move to England. A number of suggestions were made including joining Rav Yehuda Unterman's yeshivah in Liverpool, but none of them were practically viable.

Rav Levi was Rav of the Hurst Street Synagogue in Birmingham at the time. Following discussions with the executive committee of the community, and with their consent, Rav Levi stepped down from his position to serve just as a shochet. This would allow R' Yerachmiel to officially take over his brother's rabbinical position and thereby immigrate to England.

To do so, it was necessary for R' Yerachmiel to study for semichah and become a qualified Rabbi. The Grodno Yeshivah, however, did not allow bochurim to learn Yoreh Deah in order to qualify for semichah. They encouraged learning Torah lishmah, purely for the sake of the mitzvah of learning, and not as the means to a profession.

R' Yitzchok Blecher Hy'd, a close friend who was also learning in Grodno at the time, heard that Dayan Isser Yehuda Malin Hy'd was opening a kollel horo'ah in Brisk to study for semichah. Together R' Yerachmiel and R' Yitzchok joined three sons of Dayan Malin and another seven yeshivaleit to study in Brisk for a year and a half. All members of the kollel ate daily at the home of Dayan Malin; his Rebbetzen Chana Rochel Hy'd catered for them every day.

Dayan Simcha Zelig Riger

R' Yerachmiel and the other members of the kollel were examined by Dayan Malin as well as by the Senior Dayan of Brisk, Dayan Simcha Zelig Riger Hy"d. As a young man, Rav Simcha Zelig joined the Beis Din as instructed by Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l. It was therefore a great honour that he gave his consent to ordain them with semichah.

At the farher, Rav Simcha Zelig asked R' Yerachmiel how many pages of Gemora they covered on average during a zman in Grodno. When he replied that they learnt around forty blatt over a zman, he

replied in shock, "Is that all? Mun darf op lernen (one must learn more pages)!"

Brisk is well known for its deep and analytical approach to the study of Gemora, based on the 'derech' of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt'l, and his son, the Brisker Rav zt'l. Rav Simcha Zelig objected to those younger yeshivah bochurim who would involve themselves in this method of study. He would quote the Gemora that says that once a child reaches the age of six or seven, "Asfi lei ketura (literally stuff [the Torah] down [his throat] like [one would force feed] an ox!)," - meaning that a child should be well versed in the breadth of Torah knowledge from a young age, and only when he is older should he engage in deeper analytical discussions.

As Rav Cofnas spent much of his time in the kollel beis hamedrash, he only saw the Rav of Brisk, Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik zt'l, on a couple of occasions. He would however recall the sons of the Brisker Rav, who later became great rosh yeshivah, learning in the beis hamedrash whilst still young children in Brisk.

Semichah from Rav Shimon Shkop

On completing his rabbinical programme in Brisk, Rav Cofnas returned to Grodno to receive semichah from his Rebbe, Rav Shimon. Although Rav Shimon did not usually give semichah, he made an exception to enable Rav Cofnas to obtain a rabbinical position and thus leave the country.

The farher took place over two mornings with Rav Shimon asking 'sevoradik' questions on the subject matters covered. Rav Shimon advised him that although a communal Rabbi is involved in many issues, he must ensure that these do not infringe on his personal avodah. "A Rav must make sure to learn at least six to eight hours a day," he said. - Rav Cofnas took the words of his beloved Rebbe to heart. During his tenure in the rabbinate, as well as in retirement, he spent many hours a day learning and studying the Holy Torah.

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky

After Brisk, Rav Cofnas travelled to Vilna for a few months and studied milah under the senior mohel of Vilna, Reb Moshe Peckler zt'l. At the completion of the course, Reb Moshe signed a certificate stating that Rav Cofnas was a proficient and capable mohel. This diploma was further endorsed in writing by the legendary Rav of Vilna, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky.

The meeting with Rav Chaim Ozer made a tremendous impression on Rav Cofnas. At first sight he felt the Rav's warm, friendly and lebadik nature. His bright eyes reflected the legendary love he had for every Jew.

When asked to countersign the diploma, he answered immediately, "Zicher (of course)!" before adding a number of lines to it. With a warm "Zeit matzliach" Rav Cofnas left, honoured to have received a brochah from the gadol hador for all his future endeavours.

Leaving Poland

On return to his family in Ostrin, he received two more letters" of semichah from the local Rav, Rav Chaim Zvi Aryeh Bozdanski zt"l. Bidding farewell to his father, step- mother, younger sister Shayna, brother-in-law Binyomin Dombrovski and their two young children, Rav Cofnas began his journey to England. He was never to see them again.

His journey from Ostrin to Birmingham was not an easy one by any means. He would describe his voyage:

"It was Wednesday 25th January 1939, a few months before the war broke out, when I left Ostrin. I was to stay Wednesday night in Warsaw, and from there to travel on Thursday morning by train through Germany to Holland. A first-class ticket was booked with Cook (the travel agent) to travel by boat on Thursday from the Hook of Holland, to arrive in England on Thursday night. Unfortunately there was a delay at the border of Germany and Holland, which

meant that I had to take a train from Germany that left three hours later than I had planned. I therefore missed my boat to England.

What could I do? After speaking to the travel agent and explaining my predicament it became apparent that the only possible solution (apart from taking the boat on Friday - which was out of the question as it would arrive on Shabbos) was to take a train to Vlissingen, another port in Holland, and to take a boat from there on Thursday night to arrive in England on Friday morning. The problem was that I did not have money to pay for the train to Vlissingen, and also that my brother, Levi was waiting for me at Liverpool Street Station in London!

I was in a really difficult position. Like an angel, a hotel owner in Holland offered to help me. He lent me money for the train and even sent a telegram to my brother explaining the situation! It was a terrific act of kindness.

"At Vlissingen there was another problem, because the boat was only for second-class ticket holders, and I had a first-class ticket! Nevertheless, with siyata dishmaya, they eventually allowed me to travel."

On Friday 27th January 1939, Rav Cofnas arrived in England. Upon arrival, he threw any remaining Polish coins that he had with him into the sea, to start afresh in a new country. It was the end of an era and the start of a new beginning.

The World That Was Left Behind

In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. According to the terms of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact between Germany and Russia, Poland was split between the two empires. Part of the Jewish population found itself in the path of the murderous Nazis ysh"v. The others were now under the authority of the anti-Semitic Russians ysh"v.

Rav Yerachmiel received a letter from a friend in Poland stating that the Russians had entered Ostrin but treated his father with respect

in spite of the fact that they were particularly malicious to religious people. His brother-in-law, Binyomin, had been called up to the Polish army, and sent word that Shayna had left for Vilna at the beginning of the war. Rav Levi sent some money to help her, but they then lost contact.

Shortly after the war, the Red Cross informed the family in England that Reb Kalman and Shayna had perished during the war Hy'd.

Once the Germans overtook Vilna in June 1941, it became increasingly dangerous for those who remained there, which included the Grodno Yeshivah. Some of the yeshivaleit had found their way to Shanghai, China, along with the Mir Yeshivah, and in that way were saved. Tragically, most of the Grodno Yeshivah, including Rav Shlomo Harkavi were killed al kiddush Hashem, Hy"d.

R' Yerachmiel narrowly escaped the annihilation which destroyed so many of his friends and family. He was to become one of the few upon whose shoulders would rest the responsibility of passing on a vibrant Yiddishkeit and a love of Torah to a new, orphaned generation.

Birmingham - A Foreign Land

The culture in England was very different from that which he was used to. Rav Cofnas would describe his arrival in England:

"In Poland we didn't know what freedom was. We always felt terribly restricted because of the anti-Semitism. When I first arrived in England, I was collected from the station by my brother-in-law, Rav Yaakov Kahan. He was always a friendly person, but I couldn't believe my eyes when he patted a policeman on the back to ask him the way to the office for enemy aliens!

In Poland, if a policeman was on one side of the road, you would cross over to the other side! I was so afraid; I thought that he would arrest us!"

The Jewish community of Birmingham is one of the oldest outside of London, with the first Jewish settlers having arrived in the mid-18th century, attracted by the then-developing industrial opportunities. However, despite the size of the city and its importance as a commercial centre, the Jewish community never attracted particularly large numbers of immigrants, who tended to settle in the port towns where they had arrived, or in the textile manufacturing centres.

Without the regular arrival of new immigrants from the Continent, with their more vibrant religious enthusiasm, the community as a whole was prone to assimilation and to a more liberal attitude towards Judaism in general.

It was not easy for him to settle in Birmingham. Rav Cofnas was brought up in an intensely religious atmosphere and had never known anything different. Never had he experienced such chilul Shabbos, with Jewish shops brazenly open as usual on Shabbos. It was a tremendous culture shock. The fact that he was unable to speak English made matters even worse. Rav Cofnas considered returning to Poland, but with the onset of war, he was in England to stay.

Park Road Shul

Although he officially held a position at the Hurst Street Synagogue (later known as the New Synagogue on Park Road), this had been organized only to enable him to flee Poland. In practical terms he was unable to serve the congregation until he could speak English. - For the first few months he had no source of income and relied on Rav Levi for financial support. He lived in his brother's house and was taught English by his sister-in-law.

There were three shuls in Birmingham at that time. Singers Hill, built in 1856, was the anglicised synagogue of the city. The Central Synagogue, also known as the Beth Hamedrash, and the New Synagogue of Hurst Street and later Park Road, had been formed at the turn of the century as independent orthodox kehilos. These

were originally founded by newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe who were dissatisfied with the services in Singers Hill. However, by the time Ray Cofnas arrived, the communities were largely composed of the next generation, English born-and-bred Jews.

Despite the various differences between the congregations, the Rabbonim of the different shuls would work together for the betterment and unity of the community.

Second World War

To escape the main threat of bombing, Rav Levi moved from the centre of Birmingham, where the shul was, to the outskirts of the city. From their new home there was a walk of three-quarters of an hour to the shul. Bombs still fell very close to where they lived. They would sit in bomb shelters which would not have saved them from a direct hit, but at least provided a form of protection from shrapnel. It was frightening to hear the bombs landing nearby.



During the war food was rationed. This became a major topic of discussion - people would continuously grumble about the lack of food. Rav Cofnas couldn't understand what the whole tumult was about. In the yeshivos back in Europe food was always rationed, and at times there was nothing to eat at all! Why should anyone complain?!

In December 1939, just after the outbreak of the Second World War, Rav Cofnas visited his brother Heschel who lived in Ireland. On his return back into England, the authorities cancelled his visa, and Rav Cofnas was sure that he would be sent back to Poland. The thought of being deported was terribly upsetting for him. Thankfully, the Alien

Office eventually confirmed that they would be unable to send him back as war had broken out.

Shepherd to His Flock

Shortly after his arrival in Birmingham, his brother Ray Levi moved to America, and Rav Cofnas officially took over his brother's position as minister of the shul, then on Hurst Street. Hurst Street was part of a small neighbourhood in which the Jews lived.

Rav Cofnas had a particularly friendly and pleasant nature, and people found it easy to converse with him. He would look for the good in others and would praise and thank them for their help. If he heard that someone was making a simchah, he would write to wish them mazal tov. If they were suffering from bereavement, he would send his heartfelt condolence wishes. - In this way he built up a special relationship with the members of his shul, as well as with the wider Birmingham community.

His sincere love of his fellowman made people feel that he was their friend and confidant, with an understanding and listening ear. His success in this area is demonstrated by the following amusing incident:

A member of the community felt that his son was becoming too religious and wanted to confide in someone who would sympathize with him and persuade the boy to pursue a career. After much thought he went to Rav Cofnas, thinking that he would surely understand his feelings and convince the boy to take a more secular path!

Rav Cofnas was able to relate to Jews of all ages. There was a time when it was difficult to ensure that there would be a minyan on weekday mornings. Rav Cofnas would go around the universities to invite Jewish boys to the minyan and for breakfast afterwards. Rav Cofnas himself would be found cheerfully frying eggs for them after davening!

Marriage

In 1943, at the age of thirty, Rav Cofnas married Brynne (Bertha) Sternberg o'h, the daughter of Reb Yoel Yaakov and Bluma Leah Sternberg zt'l. Reb Yoel was a wonderful person and was known as a man who kept his word. He was a pillar of the Machzikei Hadass Congregation in Manchester.

They were married on Wednesday 13th January 1943 by Rav Dovid Feldman (Rav of Machzikei Hadass, Manchester), at the Higher Broughton Assembly Rooms. Rav Moshe Yitzchok Segal zt'l, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, was also at the chupah. - Being a wartime wedding, it was a simple, but joyful, affair.

The Rebbetzen had a tremendous record of her own in Birmingham. She was chairlady of the Friendship Club for twenty-five years and would distribute funds involving thousands of pounds to those who needed it.

The Rav and Rebbetzen were both very involved with the Chevrah Kadishah. There were many poor people in Birmingham who could not afford burial. The treasurer of the chevrah gave Rav Cofnas full authority to help families of those who were in a difficult financial position. The Rav and his Rebbetzen would also assist many refugees who were completely broken from the destruction of the War, and help them both emotionally and financially.

Milah

Rav Cofnas was an expert mohel and was on the executive committee of the Initiation Society. As a mohel, he became a close confidant of many young parents, by reassuring them in his sweet and supportive manner that all was well. In this way he created a family-like bond with a lot of his congregants.

He was frequently called upon to travel throughout the Midlands, Wales and beyond to perform bris milah on hundreds of babies. His mechutan, Rav Moshe Schwab zt'l, the beloved Mashgiach of

Gateshead Yeshivah, spoke highly of Rav Cofnas's proficiency in performing milah.

A surgeon once came to watch the expert way in which Rav Cofnas performed bris milah. He in turn, asked Rav Cofnas to come and observe him perform a difficult surgery. After the operation Rav Cofnas let him know what he thought of the manner in which he performed the surgery. "You are a butcher!" was his response.

Shechitah

Rav Cofnas also served the community as a shochet. Although he was a soft-spoken person, he knew how to deal with the tough non-Jewish workers at the slaughterhouse, as well as with the relevant kashrus authorities. He would be very firm and unyielding where he felt it was necessary.

At times the kashrus situation was difficult to control in Birmingham. There was one particular butcher who could not be trusted. When Rav Cofnas would enter the shop to inspect it, the butcher would say aloud, "Hello Rabbi, how are you..." to alert his workers in the back that the Rabbi had arrived!

One Shabbos morning there was a bar mitzvah, with a catered luncheon prepared for after davening. When Rav Cofnas discovered that something was not halachically sound in the shul kitchen, he announced from the pulpit that only cold food would be served at the meal. He warned that the names of anyone who tried to undermine his authority in this matter would be announced from the pulpit!

He had a love for nature and wildlife, and although he was a shochet for many decades, he always retained a feeling for animals. He once took his children to visit the abattoir on the day before he was to shecht the animals. He stroked the animals and let them suck his fingers. Although he had been an outstanding shochet for many

years, he would be visibly distressed for a few days after having performed shechitah on animals.

Chinuch

There was a Jewish primary school in Birmingham under the auspices of the Hebrew Congregation. Being approved by the government, the school accepted non-Jewish children as well. The situation was not ideal, but there was no alternative.

Rav Cofnas would teach in the cheider of the shul, but unfortunately it was only for an hour or so in the evening, five times a week. Rav Cofnas would encourage and support the children in the activities of the Bnei Akiva; it was the only religious youth group in the community at the time.

Together with the Rebbetzen, they put much effort into educating their own children on the Torah path. At times it was difficult for the Cofnas children, particularly on Shabbos, as they could not integrate fully with many of the other children. The family served as an example of a true Jewish home.

Talmud Torah

Throughout his tenure in the Rabbinate the words of his Rebbe, Rav Shimon, echoed in his ears: "A Rav must ensure to still learn at least six to eight hours a day." The environment and surroundings of the West Midlands did not perturb his strong determination to remain affiliated with the yeshivah-world.

Rav Cofnas had a rigorous learning routine. He would arise early in the morning to learn an hour or two by himself; on Shabbos he would begin even earlier. The children would awaken to the sweet sound of his learning. On an early morning walk in Llandudno, North Wales, a holiday maker was astounded to find Rav Cofnas sitting outside on a bench learning Torah, oblivious to the world. It was five-thirty in the morning!

When Rav Cofnas would face a difficult situation and consider how to strengthen himself to overcome it, he would think of the ruach and of his chaveirim in the yeshivos of Radin and Grodno; the Chofetz Chaim and Rav Shimon Shkop. This would be a great source of chizuk and inspiration to him.

His children recall seeing him standing by the window with tears in his eyes, crying that he had no chavrusos to learn with! He would be mechazek himself through his learning. He would go into his room, open a Gemora, and start to learn out loud, transferring his thoughts to the world of Torah. Rav Cofnas would learn Neviim, particularly the books of Yeshayah and Iyov, as they would be a source of comfort to him.

He was once asked how he managed to remain so strong in his Torah learning and Yiddishkeit although he lived for so many years in Birmingham, without a significant religious environment. He replied that, when he had the chance, he would go to London and spend some time in Golders Green learning in (Hagers) Kollel, where the atmosphere of Torah would give him a spiritual boost.

America

In 1957 a vacancy arose in America, and Rav Cofnas travelled there for a Shabbos to consider taking the position. Being well suited for the community, immediately after Shabbos he was offered the job and was asked if he would be able to start within a couple of weeks! Rav Cofnas explained to them that although in principle he was interested in making the move, it would be impossible to accept the position without first giving notice to his community in Birmingham, to allow them time to find a replacement and make other necessary arrangements.

On returning to England he handed in his notice, and when he announced before Neilah on Yom Kippur his decision to leave Birmingham for America, people in the congregation began sobbing. They felt very close to their Rabbi and, although he was considered

strict with regard to religious matters and would not give allowances that were halachically unacceptable, they were saddened to hear that he intended to leave them.

Ultimately the move did not come to fruition. The job in America was only on a one-year contract, and after further consideration he felt that in such a position he would have no confidence to lead the community. Furthermore, he felt that it would be unfair to uproot his family from their environment if it was possible that it would only last one year. Rav Cofnas withdrew his notice and decided to stay in Birmingham.

He was also approached by the London Beis Din to accept the position of Rosh Hashochtim in London, but this offer was declined for various reasons.

Towards the end of his tenure in Birmingham, Rav Cofnas tried a number of times to retire, but on each occasion the community convinced him to postpone his decision, determined not to lose their beloved Rav. They eventually came to an agreement whereby Rav Cofnas and his Rebbetzen would spend four weeks over Pesach and four weeks over Succos in Eretz Yisroel. This arrangement continued for the last five years that they were in Birmingham.

Manchester - A New Lease of Life

After fifty years of loyal service to the Birmingham community, Rav Cofnas and his Rebbetzen moved to Manchester in 1988.

Throughout his tenure in Birmingham, Rav Cofnas continually dreamt of the time that he spent with his chaveirim learning Torah in the pre-war yeshivos. He yearned to be able to learn in a yeshivah environment once again. This wish was granted to him with his retirement. The last twenty-two years of his life were spent immersed in learning. He was even busier in Manchester than he had been whilst serving the community in Birmingham!

Rav Cofnas and his Rebbetzen would both speak highly of the outstanding chesed activities that are performed within the Manchester kehilah. They were enthralled by the number of people learning in its yeshivos and kollelim, and by the many talmidei chachomim who walk its streets. Rav Cofnas in particular appreciated the ability to live in a 'malchus shel chesed', and the tremendous privilege to be able to live in relative freedom.

He would stress that the level of Torah knowledge and observance of the average Jew today is far superior to the level in Poland before the war. He would frequently say:

"People are now aware of shmiras halashon. In the street one hears, 'It's lashon hora — don't say it.' Even in Radin, which was a very frum place, the average person didn't know much.

Talmud Torah

Shortly after his move to Manchester, Rav Cofnas began attending the daf yomi shiur given by Rav Simcha Bamberger.

He had a chavrusa every morning for around seventeen years with Rav Ephraim Gastworth zt"l and they would prepare the daf together. It was a tremendous chizuk for youngsters to see such esteemed elder talmidei chachomim, learning every day like young men.

The shiur was his lifeline and the focal point of his day. He would marvel at Rav Simcha's lucid manner of explaining the Gemora. In turn, it was an honour to have him as a member of the shiur, and there would be a buzz of excitement whenever the Chofetz Chaim or Rav Shimon Shkop would be mentioned.

Rav Simcha would ask Rav Cofnas to relate to the shiur the Torah that he had heard firsthand from Rav Shimon over seventy years earlier!

He had other chavrusos throughout the day well into his nineties and would learn bechavrusa in kollel with young men a fraction of his age.

He was once asked to provide the authorities with a letter from the kollel to prove that he was a student. They couldn't believe that a man in his nineties was still studying. The letter confirmed that he was learning dayonus!

People had keviyusen (fixed times to learn) with him on the way to and from davening and learning. Boys would stop him in the street and ask about the Chofetz Chaim.

When he could no longer drive, people would offer him lifts to take him to his shiurim, or to davening. He was extremely grateful to all those who helped him in this way.

He had many interesting tales to tell about the greatest of the Gedolei Yisroel, but he felt that to relate them during the time dedicated to learning was in essence bitul Torah. Before agreeing to learn with a new chavrusa, he stipulated clearly that he would not interrupt their learning to discuss such stories.

On one occasion he began to say a story but stopped himself in the middle, reminding his chavrusa of the condition that they had made when they first began to learn together.

It was an inspiration to see him learning with youthful enthusiasm and a sweet learning-tune, completely unaware of anyone else's presence. He could be found standing at the amud (in Belz Kollel) learning by himself on Friday afternoons, or at other hours when the beis hamedrash would otherwise be empty. On Shabbos afternoon he would learn standing at a shtender so that he would not fall asleep.

Once, some coffee spilt on the beis hamedrash floor during seder and Rav Cofnas's chavrusa, who was in charge of the decor of the building, went to clean up the mess. Rav Cofnas asked him, "Is the floor of a beis hamedrash like a talmid chochom who is not allowed to have a stain on his clothes?!"

His chavrusa understood the message. Although cleaning up is a way of showing honour to the beis hamedrash, learning at the allotted time is a greater honour for the Torah.

He would often say, **הַמְּלָאכָה מְרוּבָּה, וּבַעַל הַבַּיִת דּוֹחֵק** (there is a lot of work to do, and the Owner (Hashem) is pushing for it to be done)." He used to quote the words of the Gateshead Rav, Rav Betzalel Rakow zt"l, that it is not the hours spent learning that make a person great – but the seconds!

On his return from collecting his pension from the local post office one afternoon, Rav Cofnas was attacked and the money was stolen from him. Although he was already in his nineties and in a state of shock from the attack, he continued on his way to the local beis hamedrash to learn for a couple of hours. It was only after he arrived at home much later that his family discovered what had happened.

The excitement of the week was the Wednesday night Gemora shiur given by Rav Gavriel Knopfler, Rosh Yeshivas Shaarei Torah. He would tape the shiur whenever possible. He also enjoyed the Rosh Yeshivah's Minchas Chinuch shiur on Shabbos. When Rav Gavriel would mention Rav Shimon or the Chofetz Chaim, all eyes would turn to Rav Cofnas, who would become animated.

He also loved to frequent the shalosh seudos of the Chortkover Rav, Rav Yisroel Friedman, and would tell others how much he enjoyed his divrei Torah. When it became too difficult for him to walk so far, he would comment how much he missed hearing Rav Yisroel's divrei Torah.

He would frequently repeat divrei Torah that he saw in Oznayim LaTorah and Darkei Mussar. He also loved to read the recently published beautiful biographies of the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Shimon Shkop, Rav Boruch Ber Leibovitz and the Brisker Rav. He told a grandson that he found it hard to put down the biography of Dayan Yechezkel Abramski.

Avodas Hatefilah

Every word of davening was from a siddur, with his talis over his head throughout. His prayers were said with sincerity and great kavonah; it was as if he was in a different world. He would stand throughout Krias HaTorah even in his old age. People would love to hear his sweet voice and the deep feeling that he put into the words when he davened from the omud on a yahrzeit. He would come to davening on time. The parts of the tefilah that he did not manage to daven in shul would be caught up at home afterwards.

He loved to daven in a yeshivah, surrounded by the vibrant atmosphere of bochurim. He chose Yeshivas Shaarei Torah as his makom tefilah and was particularly close to its roshei yeshivah. When asked to sit at mizrach, he refused to the point that he was ready to leave the beis hamedrash rather than sit there. In his later years, when the walk to Shaarei Torah became too difficult, he would daven in the Yeshivah Letzirim which was closer to his home.

During the Yomim Noraim he would stand up throughout the davening. One year after shemoneh esrei, he told one of the men who had been davening near him, "*Mun hot nisht vos tzu shmemen fun Radin* (the davening here is as good as in Radin)."

He would marvel at the way that nowadays yeshivah bochurim do not feel intimidated and can discuss openly with their mashgiach, maggid shiur or Rosh Yeshivah matters that are bothering or disturbing them. He felt strongly that in this respect the yeshivahs nowadays are far better than when he was young. He would stress the importance of talking about one's problems with one's Rebbe, rather than allowing them to build up inside.

Bein Odom Lachaveiro

Although he was a tremendous zoriz and did not waste time, Rav Cofnas would not give the impression that he was in a hurry. He would speak to people with patience and was very much me'urav im habrios.

Their flat in Brantwood Road was a busy home. People would come regularly to help and visit them. Others would come to ask for brochos or to hear about the Chofetz Chaim and other pre-war gedolim. The Rav and his Rebbetzen would often become tired from the many people who came to visit, and entertaining them was difficult in their advanced age. Nevertheless each person was given a warm smile and welcome.

Many people in Manchester looked up to them as grandparents. They, in turn, would find a way to make each person feel important and show them that their visit was appreciated.

One Purim during his later years, Rav Cofnas found it extremely difficult to welcome the many visitors who came with mishloach manos and for brochos. He nevertheless insisted on opening the door to all who came to see him. Only after much coercion did he finally agree for a notice to be put on the door that he is unable to accept visitors, and only on condition that he could take down the notice as soon as he had regained some strength.

A talmid related that when he was sitting shivah in Birmingham with his two siblings, each of them received a separate phone call from Rav Cofnas. At first this puzzled them, but after some thought they understood his strange behavior. He had called each one of them independently, in order to show his deep care for each one of them!

He once fell over and a granddaughter found him cleaning his wounds. "Please don't tell Grandma," he said. "I don't want her to be worried!"

He would try to reply to every tzedokah appeal that came through his door and would give presents to those who made a simchah. He would send letters full of brochos and warm greetings to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, wishing them much success in their endeavours, particularly before Yom Tov, or in honour of a birthday.

Rav Cofnas would cut wedding invitations into bookmarks as he was used to saving and re-using paper and card. It would disturb him to see food wasted, and he would choose to eat old rather than fresh bread to ensure that it would not be wasted.

Rav Cofnas once related to the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal zt"l, that when Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l first became the Rav of Brisk, members of the executive committee were concerned that he was finishing his shemoneh esrei too quickly. They approached the new Rav and suggested that he should 'think in learning' for a short while before stepping back for 'oseh shalom'. This way it would look like he was davening a longer shemoneh esrei. Rav Chaim replied, "I do that already!"

After they finished conversing, Rav Cofnas reconsidered what he had said to the Rosh Yeshivah and was concerned that perhaps he had offended him, as it is well known that the Rosh Yeshivah spent a long time davening shemoneh esrei. Only after being convinced that the Rosh Yeshivah had definitely not taken any offence, did Rav Cofnas allow the matter to rest.

A number of years ago, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah came to visit Rav Cofnas in his flat after hearing that he was unwell. Rav Cofnas was so overwhelmed that the Rosh Yeshivah should visit him, that he said, "It feels mamesh as if Hakodosh boruch Hu himself has come, like he visited Avrohom Ovinu!" The Rosh Yeshivah replied immediately, "Say 'lehavdil'!"

Zkeinecho V'yomru Loch

Rav Cofnas was the last living connection to the Chofetz Chaim in Manchester, and he would often speak in schools, yeshivos and seminaries about the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Shimon Shkop, and other gedolim of yesteryear. He enjoyed speaking in the local schools about the Chofetz Chaim as he felt it was an aliyah for the neshomah of his Rebbe. He was also happy that the talks he gave were taped so that others could benefit from listening to what he said.

Both boys and girls alike would receive tremendous chizuk from his words. Chasanim, bar mitzvah boys and many others would come to him for brochos. He genuinely could not understand why they did so. He would repeat the words of the Chofetz Chaim: "Why come to me for brochos when you can get brochos directly from the Ribono shel Olam through keeping the Torah...?"

It disturbed him when people called him a 'talmid muvhak' of the Chofetz Chaim. He would ask, "*Vos vilen zei alleh fun mein leben* (What do all these people want from me)?"

One Purim after davening someone seized the opportunity to ask him for a brochah. Within two minutes there was a whole line of people waiting to do the same!

Once someone came to him for a brochah and explained that he wanted a brochah from a talmid of the Chofetz Chaim. Rav [Cofnas] replied: "We are all talmidim of the Chofetz Chaim." Anyone who learns the seforim of the Chofetz Chaim is a talmid of the Chofetz Chaim."

Once, when someone asked him for a brochah, Rav Cofnas asked, "Why do you want a brochah from me? I am not a Rebbe or anything."

The man replied quoting the Gemora, "**שֶׁלֹּא תְּהֵא בִּרְכַּת הֶדְיוֹט קַלָּה בְּעֵינֶיךָ** (A blessing from a simple person should not be taken lightly)."

"So why davka me?!" retorted Rav Cofnas in sincerity.

He was invited to speak to high school girls prior to a trip they were making to Poland. The girls returned with video footage of the places they had visited, including the Radin Yeshivah building as it stands today. When Rav Cofnas saw the video, he burst into tears. He saw the shtetl that had once been so vibrant and full of Torah life, standing forlorn and empty of yiddishkeit.

He also noted the changes to the landscape that had taken place. The houses that used to surround the yeshivah had been demolished,

and the yeshivah building at the top of the hill now looked even more imposing.

Yemei Ziknah

Rav Cofnas was fit and active well into his nineties. He would love to go on long walks and would swim frequently to keep his mind and body fit.

Rav Cofnas and his Rebbetzen spent Succos 2005 in Liverpool together with his family. Although he was extremely sick (and on Chol Hamoed was later admitted to hospital), he forced himself to go to shul, albeit with considerable difficulty and stopping a number of times on the way. Whilst walking arm-in-arm with a grandchild, he said:

"You know, people think that when life starts to become difficult one should take it easy. This is a very big mistake. To the contrary — one must try to keep pushing oneself harder and keep up with everything..." With this in mind he carried on walking!

On that very Yom Tov, after one of the seudos, he told the following story about the Netziv of Volozhin to his family who were sitting around him. The Netziv would never visit a doctor when he was unwell, so it was a great surprise to his family when he once asked to see a doctor. The doctor examined him and gave him a prescription. Immediately after taking leave of the doctor, the Netziv took the prescription and ripped it up! The family were baffled by his behaviour. Why did he suddenly agree to go to the doctor, and then tear up the prescription?

The Netziv explained:

"Normally when I feel ill or weak in my foot or my hand, etc., I understand that that particular part of my body is not keeping its mitzvah properly, and I therefore know which mitzvah needs to be improved, or which aveirah I need to do teshuvah for. This time, however, I could not work out which part of my body was the cause

of the illness. I went to the doctor to find that out. Once he told me which part of the body it was, I had no need for the doctor's prescription; I know what to do to make myself better! Illness is a direct message from Hashem."

He was admitted into hospital on Chol Hamoed. The way he said the brochah on the arba minim whilst in hospital is something quite unforgettable. Each word was pronounced slowly, loudly and clearly. Even at that time he was particular, whenever possible, to make brochos wearing a hat or cap as a second head covering. Whilst he was there, he was advised by the doctors to undertake a difficult procedure. He was willing to do so but not before receiving a brochah from one of the senior Rabbonim of Manchester. Boruch Hashem the operation was successful and he was later discharged.

Even during that period of his life, his day was packed with learning and chavrusos. He had a chavrusa between ten and twelve in the morning to learn Mishnah Berurah, and from twelve to one he learnt daf yomi. In the afternoon he learnt Mishnayos keilim.

Although in his later years he had many appointments with various doctors and hospitals, he would remember the date and time of all of them without using a diary. In his mind, everything was in order and in its place. He would also remember phone numbers by heart. When he would attend an appointment, he would bring along a bottle of whisky to give to those who took care of him, as a token of his appreciation for their help.

As he became older, he became increasingly concerned that he was unable to daven and learn properly, and he was deeply upset that he sometimes came late. In order to placate him, a chavrusa told him that he also finds it difficult and does not always come to shul on time. Not only did this not appease Rav Cofnas, but it made him even more distressed!

As she was also of a considerable age, his Rebbetzen began to suffer from various health issues. At that time he carried out household

chores, cooked dinner and washed clothes, as well as looking after his wife's every need. He would say, "It is difficult for me to learn as I used to, being very busy looking after Grandma and other personal issues, but I consider that at the moment the mitzvah of 'וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ כָּמוֹךָ' is the greatest obligation upon me..."

Thereupon Rav Cofnas related:

"Someone once came to the Chofetz Chaim to bemoan the fact that it was hard for him to remain in shul to learn after davening because his wife and family needed his help. The Chofetz Chaim at the time was in the middle of his meal and, before he had a chance to say why he had come, he began to recite 'מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד... אַךְ טוֹב וָחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּי' (Only goodness and kindness shall pursue me all the days of my life).'

The man understood the meaning of the Chofetz Chaim's prophetic words. He was to look at life in a new light. Every person suffers some sort of tribulations in life. If he must be pursued, may it be by the obligation to help and support his family, rather than by other more menial or difficult tasks."

When it became difficult for them to live by themselves, Rav Cofnas told a chavrusa: "I have made a cheshbon hanefesh, and can see that it is only the yetzer hora that is trying to make things difficult in order to stop us from continuing our avodas Hashem..."

The Beenstock Home

In the spring of 2008, Rav Cofnas and his Rebbetzen moved into the Beenstock Home, Manchester for Pesach. The move became permanent when it was no longer possible for them to look after themselves.

On Friday night he would make a point of visiting every table and wishing all the residents "gut Shabbos". He began to daven closer to home in Chodosh, Machzikei Hadass, or Adass Yeshurun.

When he could no longer drive, many friends would offer him lifts to shul or other appointments. He would ensure that this would not involve any feelings of resentment.

On the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah's yahrzeit, he asked his regular driver, a close confidant of his, to come immediately. On arrival Rav Cofnas explained to him, "Somebody has offered me a lift to the yahrzeit seudah but I don't want you to feel bad if you are there at the hall and you see someone else bringing me in."

A yungerman once asked him whether he should consider taking up a position in a provincial community in England. Rav Cofnas answered that the kehilos in England need Rabbonim to look after their spiritual needs. He then added, "On the other hand, who knows if I did the right thing (to lead the community) in Birmingham? I will only find out after a hundred and twenty!"

Towards Elul 2009, age began to catch up with him. He would still force himself to attend the daf yomi shiur and try to keep up with his learning. On one occasion he felt so unwell that he had to leave the room during the shiur. He was shaking and looked white as a sheet. People offered to help him home, but he refused. He explained to them that if he were to go straight home, his Rebbetzen would realize that he had returned early because he wasn't well. He didn't want to worry her.

During his last few months, he stopped participating in the daf shiur. In his younger years he would always prepare the daf before going to the shiur. He told a close confidant, "If I haven't prepared for the daf shiur, how can I go? I can't just go and sit there!"

He was also afraid that he may have to leave the shiur early and his departure would disturb others. Furthermore, it was difficult for him to remain awake and to fall asleep during the shiur would be a disgrace to the holy Torah. These were his concerns in his late nineties!

Shortly before the Yomim Noraim of that year, Rav Cofnas was admitted into hospital, suffering from various health issues. Whilst in the hospital and on a drip, his chavrusa came to learn Mishnah Berurah with him. Finding Rav Cofnas sleeping with a Chumash open, he waited for the Rav to awaken. When he awoke, Rav Cofnas apologized profusely for wasting his time and they began to learn. After learning with his first chavrusah, he continued to learn for another two hours with his next one!

There was a blind man together with him in the ward and Rav Cofnas noted that the nurses were treating him particularly well. He went over to them and said:

"It is so wonderful how you treat this patient with such respect and decency. I was the Rabbi of a community for fifty years and I want to tell you that nothing goes unnoticed. You will be paid from Above for the kindness that you do..." - He continued to thank and bestow them with brochos. The nurses were astounded!

The family were informed that his health was declining rapidly and the doctor felt his days were numbered. On hearing the prognosis, a grandson contacted one of the tzedakah organisations in Eretz Yisroel who were sending a group of talmidei chachomim to daven at the kever of the Chofetz Chaim. He asked them to daven at the kever for a talmid of the Chofetz Chaim who wants strength to be able to continue learning Torah.

On that very day, an advisory specialist accompanied the doctor in the hospital and, after examining Rav Cofnas, turned to the doctor and asked, "Don't you think that you are exaggerating with your diagnosis? This patient still has plenty of time to live!" - He lived another nine months!

Before his last Yom Kippur he was informed by his doctor that due to his poor state of health he would not be able to fast on Yom Kippur, but rather he must eat shiurim. Although he was a Rav in his own right for so many years, he insisted on going to Rav Menachem

Mendel Schneebalg, Rav of Machzikei Hadass, to ask him what he should do and how much he should eat. He was crying bitterly and could hardly open his mouth to ask the question.

"For ninety years I have not eaten on Yom Kippur, and this year I should eat?" - Even after being reminded of the story of Rav Yisroel Salanter who ate on Yom Kippur in front of the whole shul during a cholera outbreak, Rav Cofnas was still disturbed. He was later found by a distinguished local Rav, pacing up and down outside the Beenstock Home and weeping.

The Rav calmed him and put him at ease, "The same Ribono shel Olam who obligates you to shake the arba minim on Succos and to eat matzah on Pesach obligates you to eat on Yom Kippur!"

After Neilah, although he was exhausted from a day full of tefilah, he went over to Rav Schneebalg and told him how much he had enjoyed the Rav's Neilah droshah!

His last public droshah was at the Simchas beis Hashoavah in the Beenstock Home on that Chol Hamoed Succos. He spoke emotionally of the Chofetz Chaim's 'Chevras Baalei Teshuvah'. Although he was weak and found it difficult to talk, he gathered strength to speak about his heiliger Rebbe.

A few days later he was taken again to hospital, as his breathing was poor. He was on oxygen for about a week. Nevertheless, he had chavrusos at his bedside who would learn with him for hours.

The nurses would take away his negel vasser during the night. This disturbed him greatly, as he couldn't daven in the morning without washing his hands. He spent the day thinking of places to hide the water from them!

Whilst in hospital he told one of his children that he was terribly pained because he had not managed to learn anything the whole day. When it was explained to him that he was completely exempt as he

had endured a day full of yisurim, he replied that in Shomayim they will ask for an account of every single day.

When asked, "Bameh he'arachtah yomim?" (in what merit have you been granted such a long life?), he replied that it could be for two reasons:

"Either Hakodosh boruch Hu is giving me my full reward in this world, as He does to the wicked who are to have all their punishment in the next world, or perhaps Hashem is allowing me time to do teshuvah." Someone once asked him, "How are you?" He replied, "I am trying to justify my being in this world!"

In the month or so before his petirah, he became increasingly weak, and found it difficult to eat, learn and move around. He told a grandchild, "As life becomes more difficult, one can see with even more clarity that Olam Hazeh is just a world of dimyon, as the very forms of benefit and enjoyment that one is used to having in this world are no longer enjoyable at all." He then said, "Although it is becoming more difficult in this world, who knows if it won't be worse in the next world, at least until the cheshbon is sorted out."

The Mishnah Berurah

Whilst serving as a pastoral Rabbi, Rav Cofnas did not have the opportunity to study the Mishnah Berurah properly in order and in its entirety with a chavrusa; he would mainly learn Kitzur Shulchan Oruch or Chayei Odom with his baalei batim. During the last four or five years of his life he undertook to learn the six-volume Mishnah Berurah together with a chavrusa. He said, "How can I go to the Chofetz Chaim without having learnt his Mishnah Berurah?"

He revealed to a grandson that he had dreamt that the Chofetz Chaim came to him and asked, "Nu, what will be with (the learning of) the Mishnah Berurah?"

He learnt the material thoroughly. If they encountered a difficulty whilst they were learning, Rav Cofnas verified its meaning in the

Oruch Hashulchan or a similar sefer to check up the halochah, or a dictionary for the translation of a difficult word. When a difficult posuk from Tanach was quoted, he would look it up. If the phone rang, he would politely ask the caller to ring again later when he would have finished learning.

Having been brought up on a farm, Rav Cofnas had a remarkable knowledge of agriculture. When learning the practicalities involved in making linen for tzitzis, for example, his knowledge was most enlightening.

They began at the beginning of the Mishnah Berurah and it was clear that he was aiming to finish all six volumes. Often he would check to see how much was remaining, particularly during his last few months. Together with his chavrusa they managed to learn almost the whole of the Mishnah Berurah together.

On Thursday 29th April 2010 (15 Iyar 5770), he was learning with his chavrusa in the gardens of the Beenstock Home. They were discussing the halochah that an adult should take the arba minim himself on the first day of Succos before giving them to a child, as on that day the arba minim must belong to the person who takes them and if a child takes them first and acquires them, he cannot transfer the ownership back to an adult.

When asked to explain the depth of this halochah he became particularly excited and spent about twenty minutes recounting the explanation that his Rebbe, Rav Shimon Shkop, had given over seventy years earlier.

Shortly afterwards Rav Cofnas uncharacteristically closed his Mishnah Berurah in the middle of their kviyus, the first and only time that his chavrusa had seen him doing so, gave his chavrusa a kiss and said, "Thank you so much for learning with me, we won't be learning anymore." - He was taken into hospital that Shabbos and, indeed, it was the last time they learnt together.

That Shabbos was two and a half weeks before his petirah, and it was clear that his time was coming to an end. With his children by his side he said viduy whilst his mind was still clear. He gave individual brochos to each member of the family, and proclaimed that he was 'mekabel yisurim be'ahavah', to accept whatever Hakodosh boruch Hu had planned for him. He also declared that he had absolute emunas Chachomim.

During his stay in hospital, he could be heard saying Tehillim in his sleep as they were an intrinsic part of him. He would awaken a number of times during the night to see if it was time to daven and put on tefilin. His biggest concern, however, was the fact that he could not continue with his daily learning routine.

In the hospital his son read Tehillim to him. Despite his weakness Rav Cofnas said the words by heart, and was even some words ahead of his son. When his son told him something he was learning, he understood the inyan clearly and at one point even corrected him.

He was particularly concerned about the welfare of his Rebbetzen; he did not want her to worry about him whilst he was in hospital. A young man who was engaged to be married was attending to Rav Cofnas in the hospital and took the opportunity to ask him for a piece of advice for a successful marriage. Rav Cofnas's expression immediately changed and he replied in all seriousness, "Whenever you have an argument with your wife, just remember — she's right! If you always do this, you will be assured a happy marriage."

Mos Yeshorim

After a week in hospital, he was discharged just before Shabbos and returned to the Beenstock Home. He was still very weak, but was not in any particular pain.

He was fortunate to have friends with him twenty-four hours a day from the time that he was admitted into hospital. He really appreciated the chesed that was being done for him and, although

he could hardly breathe, he told a grandson who had come to visit him from out of town to immediately go and thank those who had been looking after him.

Friends came to visit on Shabbos and Yom Tov, to sing zemiros with him and he appreciated it. He knew Shavuos was coming as people would count the omer with him.

Whilst he was in this state, one of his attendants asked him what the mon tasted like if the person eating it didn't have any particular taste in mind. Rav Cofnas immediately answered with the words that the Chofetz Chaim told Rav Shimon Schwab, "As mun tracht nisht hot dos ken taam nisht (If someone doesn't think, it has no taste)!" The Chofetz Chaim taught with this an important lesson. A person only gains spiritual enjoyment and excitement from doing mitzvos in accordance with the thought and effort that he puts into doing them.

During his last few days he was well aware that he did not have much longer to live. This was the time that he had spent his life preparing for. On his last Friday, Rosh Chodesh Sivan, he asked if there was still time (in this world to do teshuvah). On Friday night he participated in the seudah as much as he could. He drank some of the grape juice, ate some chalah and enjoyed the zemiros, particularly the Volozhin nigun "Boruch Hu Elokeinu shebronu lichvodo". He said many times that the "neshomah vill aheim gein (soul wants to go home)", and asked if his 'Father' was here yet. He kept on repeating, "VeliYerushalayim irchah brachamim toshuv (and to Yerushalayim Your city bring us back with mercy)," as he was looking forward to going to Yerushalayim, which was indeed his eternal place of rest.

After Shabbos he began waiting for Shavous. On Tuesday afternoon, erev Shavuos, he was lying with his eyes closed and feet up when he was asked if he would like to daven Minchah. Although he did not have the strength to say the words, he lay his feet down and was

clearly listening to his aide who davened Minchah aloud for him to hear. At the end of Minchah Rav Cofnas put his feet back up. On that day he pushed a spoon of water away from his mouth, as he had not said a brachah. A few hours before his petirah, he asked, "When is Shavous? Ven kumt on der Shechinah? (When is the Shechinah coming)" Some close friends sang to him late that afternoon and Rav Cofnas appreciated it.

It was a privilege to behold the dignity and avodas Hashem that he demonstrated in the final hours that he breathed in this world, and it was a tremendous inspiration to all who were with him. Even his non-Jewish nurses and carers were emotionally stirred and affected by his constant yearning to daven and fulfil whatever mitzvos he still had strength for. In turn, he was extremely grateful to all those who came to care for him, and constantly thanked the nurses, carers and friends who looked after him day and night.

During the first night of Shavuos 5770 (19th May 2010), at the age of 98, Rav Yerachmiel Cofnas returned his pure soul to His Creator, to accept the Torah anew 'biyeshivah shel Maalah'. The levayah took place on Friday morning, the day after Shavuos, from Machzikei Hadass. Hundreds of people were present. As was his request, his son Rav Mordechai Leib Cofnas delivered heartfelt divrei preidah.

He was provisionally buried in Phillips Park, Manchester, and on 4th Tamuz 5770 was brought to Yerushalayim where his grandson Rav Yoel Cofnas emotionally delivered words of preidah in front of many people who had come came to accompany him on his final journey. He was then reinterred in Har Hamenuchos.

Rav Yerachmiel Cofnas is survived by his son Rav Mordechai Leib, son-in-law Rabbi Chaim Warshawski, daughters Julia Warshawski and Shoshana Sylvia Cofnas, grandchildren and many great-grandchildren, all of whom follow in the path of Torah and avodah that he paved for them.

As the sun sets, an era draws to a close. Our physical connection with the great pre-War gedolim may be severed, but as we follow and emulate the outstanding example that they taught us, we ensure that their memory remains alive.

It is our deepest hope and prayer that we merit to see the rising of the sun, Yerushalayim restored to its former glory with the redemption and rebirth of the Jewish nation.

ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב.



Memories of the Chofetz Chaim zt"l - By Rabbi Yerachmiel Cofnas zt"l

The Yahrtzeit and the Levaya

This coming Friday marks the 72nd yahrtzeit of the saintly Chofetz Chaim, **זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה**. Remarkably, the year of his passing fell on the same calendar as this year—with Rosh Hashanah beginning on Wednesday night. He was niftar on Friday afternoon, the day before Rosh Hashanah and Selichos.

A question arose about whether to bury him immediately in Radin. Since most people could not attend the levaya, they consulted Reb Chaim Ozer **זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה**, who was close to the Chofetz Chaim and the renowned rav of Vilna. Reb Chaim Ozer was so famous that a letter once reached him addressed simply to "Reb Chaim Ozer, Europe."

The two worked hand in hand. When issuing communal appeals, the Chofetz Chaim insisted that Reb Chaim Ozer sign first, deferring to

him as the nasi of Klal Yisrael. Though the Chofetz Chaim was older and a kohen, he placed Reb Chaim Ozer first.

Reb Chaim Ozer ruled that the levaya be postponed until Sunday morning to honor the Chofetz Chaim's stature and allow more people to attend. Telegrams were sent throughout Poland announcing this decision.

I was in Ostrin at the time, a small town between Radin and Grodno, where my father was the shochet. I traveled by horse and cart through motzei Shabbos and arrived Sunday morning—the first day of Selichos and the day of the levaya. Many came, though some prominent rabbonim could not arrive in time. Eulogies continued throughout the day until the burial in the late afternoon. Hespedim resumed throughout the week as more rabbonim arrived from Poland. We wept bitterly, unable to imagine how Klal Yisrael would continue without his guidance. He was involved in everything—communities, education, yeshivos, and matters affecting Jews worldwide.

His Growing Legacy

Yet remarkably, his fame has only grown. Year after year, his name spread throughout the world. There is scarcely a person or family who has not heard of the Chofetz Chaim. Here in Manchester, children of ten or eleven often stop me on the street asking, "Please tell us something about the Chofetz Chaim."

Why did he become so great? He devoted himself to improving the spiritual state of the Jewish people through approximately thirty-six seforim. The Mishnah Berurah—six volumes taking over thirty years—is consulted in every yeshivah by great talmidei chachamim. He wrote guides for Jewish soldiers facing kashrus and Shabbos challenges in the army, where facilities were unavailable. He wrote extensively about the severity of loshon hora, basing his work on the pasuk in Tehillim: **מי האיש החפץ חיים**—"Who is the person who desires life?" He continued: **מי האיש החפץ חיים אוהב ימים לראות טוב**

נצור לשונך מרע—"Keep your tongue from speaking evil." Through his efforts, the prohibition against loshon hora became known worldwide.

He was particularly concerned about Russian Jewry under Communist restrictions, which prohibited kashrus, tefillin, milah, and kiddushin. He spoke constantly about their plight and how to help them. Parcels with matzah were sent for Pesach. He grieved that young generations grew up without Torah education or knowledge of the **רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם**.

If the Chofetz Chaim were alive today to see the change in Russia—the yeshivos now flourishing—he would bless every boy and person learning in yeshiva, cheder, or school about yiddishkeit. He would remind you of your great responsibility to rebuild the fulfillment of Jewish torah u'mitzvos in Russia.

A Personal Encounter

I had the great honor to spend three years in the yeshiva in Radin and often davened in his private minyan. By then he was nearly 94 or 97—his exact birthday was uncertain. Though mobility was difficult, he occasionally came to address the yeshiva, traveling the 500 yards by horse and cart. He came to offer words of chizuk about the dinim of the Torah.

To the boys in Pinsk and Russian yeshivos: the Chofetz Chaim would have blessed you. For years he prayed for change in Russia. You are becoming pioneers of the Jewish people. Klal Yisrael watches you with great admiration and pride, wishing you Bracha V'Hatzlacha.

His Character and Humility

Despite his worldwide fame, the Chofetz Chaim's home had no shamashim, no appointments—you simply entered. Inside was a small, bare room with a plain table and benches. He refused to benefit from Olam Hazeh and took nothing from the world-famous Radin Yeshiva, which supported 350 bochurim. He lived from modest

income from his seforim sales, often on credit. Letters from his son-in-law reveal that even years before his death, his household lacked basic necessities. Yet he was upset about the yeshiva's financial difficulties.

He was meticulous: before distributing seforim, he had his daughter check each page to ensure none were folded or misprinted, lest he deceive buyers. He was so nizhar, so careful. He was such a great tzadik.

His home was plain, yet on Friday nights before Shabbos, the Shechinah visibly rested upon him. He sat constantly with a small sefer, learning. He knew the entire Talmud, Midrashim, Tanach, and halachos by heart—a genius evident in the Mishnah Berurah we study today.

His Spiritual Perception

People came for blessings, and he tried to help all. Yet he had an uncanny ability to sense those not shomer Shabbos and would refuse them, saying: "Shabbos itself is the greatest brocha for Klal Yisroel. If you keep Shabbos, you have a brocha. If not, I cannot add mine." He had such sensitive feelings. He was like a novi, a prophet.

He knew what happened worldwide with no telephone or secretaries. When the Mashgiach mentioned rumors of Stalin's death, the Chofetz Chaim asked if this meant Russian Jews could now learn Torah and observe Mitzvos. Told no, he replied it was not a besurah tovah. The true besurah tovah would come when Russia allowed Torah learning and mitzvos observance. His sense of nevuos proved prescient; today we witness the flourishing of Yiddishkeit in Russia.

Conclusion

These are merely fragments of his life. Seven volumes have been written about him, with more to come—his greatness and service to Klal Yisrael are inexhaustible.

📖 The Guardians - bringing Jewish history to life!



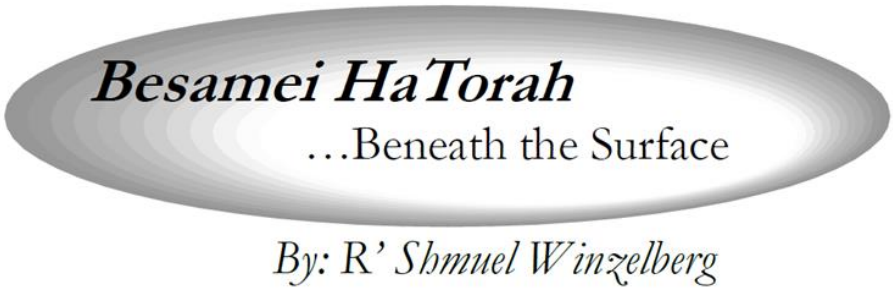
Why "Child-Slaughterers"?

Why would a famed poet and rabbi give his halachic sefer the shocking title "Shochet HaYeladim": "Child-Slaughterers"?

The phrase originates in Yeshayahu (57:5), where it describes idol worshippers who sacrificed their children. But here it takes a startling twist: this was the title of a halachic poem on the laws of shechitah, written by none other than **Rav Yisrael Najara of Gaza**, the author of the beloved Shabbat hymn Kah Ribbon Olam.

The sefer is written entirely in rhymed verse, and in its introduction Rav Najara explains the strange title: the laws are presented so clearly that even children could learn to shecht from it.

Over a century ago, scholar R. Avraham Berliner quipped sarcastically: "A book called Shochet HaYeladim—fortunately the antisemites never discovered it, or they would surely have used it as 'proof' of ritual slaughter!"



יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחִי תִּזַּל כַּטַּל אִמְרָתִי – '***May my teaching drip like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew.***' (32:2)

Rav Shaul Brach, zt"l, in his Sefer 'Givat Shaul' asks: In this Pasuk, why does rain precede dew? Isn't rain less frequent than dew, as dew never stops from descending each day? Rain is not always pleasant for man, sometimes it is inconvenient, and sometimes it falls down with force, which is not so with dew. Therefore, dew should precede rain in the Pasuk.

He explains that this is also the order in learning the holy Torah: At the beginning of one's learning, it is difficult to accept the taste of learning and develop continuity in learning. Thus, it is in the category of "rain". But as one continues and he has learned much – then the words are sweeter than honey and it is compared to "dew". (U'Matuk HaOhr)

Parshah Thoughts - Ideas and Reflections - Rabbi Aron Moshe Jacobsohn

"זְכֹר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם בִּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דֹּר וָדֹר" – '***Remember the days of old, ponder the years of every generation***.' (32:7).

The Sfas Emes (Likutei Yehudah) suggests that "Yemos Olam", the days of old, refers to Rosh Hashanah, and "Dor VaDor", every generation, refers to Yom Kippur.

We are being reminded to reflect on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur throughout the year, because they are the building blocks, the foundation of the entire year.

Parsha Points to Ponder by Oizer Alport

How many words are in Parshas Haazinu, and what is the significance of this?

The Vilna Gaon points out that there are 613 words in Parshas Haazinu, which corresponds to the number of mitzvos in the Torah, because Moshe alluded to the entire Torah in Parshas Haazinu.

נפלאות הבורא- Hashems Amazing World – Parrotfish



Hashem created this fish with a few very interesting capabilities, here's a just a few of its unique traits.

Sleeping Bags - As we head out to sleep in our Sukkot this Yom Tov, wouldn't it be nice if we would be able to create a protective shield around ourselves at night in order to protect us from any insects? Well the parrotfish can do just that! Scientists have discovered that Parrotfish protect themselves from biting isopods, (a marine equivalent of mosquitoes,) by covering themselves in mucus before going to sleep at night.

I admit it sounds a little disgusting, however it does the trick! Parrotfish are active and often very social in the day, but when night falls, they find a hiding place for the night. They create a mucus bubble or cocoon to surround them and protect them from predators. It's thought that the cocoon hides the scent of the sleeping parrotfish, making them difficult to find. It also works as an alarm system; if a predator gets too close and pops the bubble, the parrotfish will wake up and escape. The mucus bubbles are either blown from their mouths or secreted from an organ on their head.

Colour Variations- It is estimated that there are more than 60, and possibly as many as 90, species of parrotfish. Parrotfish are polychromatic, meaning they can change colour throughout their lives. Juveniles will change their colour patterns as they become adults, and males and females also differ in colours.

Gender Changes- Parrotfish can change gender throughout their lives. Most parrotfish start out as females, and when they mature, they travel in groups with one dominant male. If the male dies, one of the females will grow larger, change colour, and change into a male to take over the group. Different species of parrotfish have different means of changing genders through their lifecycles. In some species, the fish can change from one gender to the other and then back to its original gender. Other species can start as females, and only a few of them change into males. Having so many females is great because it allows for the potential for numerous offspring.

Makers of Sand- Think back to your favourite white sandy beach. The golden sunlight reflecting on turquoise water as you sink your toes into the soft, warm sand. Well, you are stepping in parrotfish waste (yuck). Parrotfish eat algae that grow on coral, but to get to the algae they use their beak of fused teeth to bite into the coral.

To obtain the algae, teeth in the throat help crush the coral down to small grains of sand. Then they get rid of the sand by excreting it, and thus, we have parrotfish um… waste, otherwise known as sand. It's fairly common to see parrotfish underwater with a cloud of sand behind them. Ma Rabu Maasecha Hashem!! ~ ***(Rabbi Eliyahu Tobal)***



יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחִי – "Just as rain does not benefit every plant equally, so too the Torah affects each person according to his capacity and preparation." ~ Ohr HaChaim.



Pearls of Wisdom…A Word for the Ages

The Aruch HaShulchan (55:4) writes that each day, everyone should try to fulfill the word 'Tzadik' (צדי"ק). The first letter, Tzadik in Gematria (numerical value) equals 90, and one should try to answer 90 Ameins every day. The letter Daled equals 4, and one should say Kedushah 4 times a day (3 at Shacharis and 1 at Minchah). The letter Yud equals 10, and one should respond to Kaddish 10 times a day, and the letter Kuf equals 100; one should recite 100 Brachos a day.

Pearls of Wisdom…A Word for the Ages

During World War I, many Jews were uprooted from their homes. Whole families were forced to move into single rooms in other people's homes or into public buildings. The conditions were extremely difficult. Organizations were created to deal with the hardships and alleviate the suffering of the many who were distressed, and often penniless.

At that time, the Rabbanim and community leaders held a meeting which **Rav Chaim Brisker zt"l** attended. The topic of discussion was how to better help these people, who had poured into every neighborhood in the city. They were suffering greatly from lack of supplies, and some were even going for days without proper food.

One of the Rabbanim then asked, "Why are only talking about the physical needs of these people? What about the fact that many may be without Tefilin and Taleisim?

Those present nodded their heads and wondered why they had not thought of this. However, Rav Chaim dismissed these questions and pointed out that while all the people could fulfill the Mitzvah by sharing one pair of Tefilin, they certainly could not all satisfy their hunger with one loaf of bread!"

The Weekly Vort

כי חלק ה' עמו – *For Hashem's portion is His people* (32:9).

Once, **R' Chaim of Volozhin** was learning the Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu, which states that Hashem is **שמח בחלקו**, satisfied with His lot. R' Chaim found this difficult to understand. The entire world and everything in it are His; how can we speak of *His* portion or lot?

R' Chaim presented the question to the **Vilna Gaon**, who cited the above *pasuk*, as follows: Bnei Yisroel are Hashem's portion and He rejoices over them no matter what their spiritual condition. Even in our times, when our health is failing, Hashem still rejoices that we, rather than any other nation, are His portion. (**Chofetz Chaim**)



When **Rav Yakov Galinsky זצוק"ל** began to speak publicly, the **Ponevezher Rav** told him the following: Imagine that a person falls asleep and dreams that he is walking through the forest. Suddenly a lion appears, and then a tiger springs up ready to attack, then he sees a wolf coming with his jaws open wide. The man is terror-stricken, he is about to be attacked. - "What would you advise him, the Ponevezher Rav asked?"

Rav Yakov considered different possibilities, but the Ponevezher Rav told him that none of the possibilities that were running through his mind were the right one. - The Ponevezher Rov continued, "The only thing you must do is wake him up! Then all the wild animals will disappear. It's a dream! It's the same when you speak; all you need to do is wake people up. They will do Teshuva themselves.



Inspired by Time - The Siyum After the War – Rabbi Yehoshua Frankenhauis

This Shabbos Is No Ordinary Shabbos It is Shabbos Chazak, a moment of spiritual culmination and renewal, when we complete another

It was shortly after the Second World War. Europe was still a graveyard of shattered souls, and the few survivors who walked its streets carried invisible wounds.

One evening, word spread that a fellow Yid was making a siyum — a celebration for completing a masechta of Gemara. People came, curious and cautious. When they arrived, they were astonished. The tables were laden with food — not the meager fare of the postwar years, not a few pieces of herring or a dry slice of cake, but a full meal, lavish and rich.

Someone finally asked, "Why such a siyum? After all we've been through, who makes a feast like this?"

The man smiled, his eyes moist. "Let me tell you why," he said quietly.

"In the camp, I shared a barracks with another Jew — a pale, frail man who never stopped murmuring. Day and night, lips moving, whispering, whispering. At first, I thought he'd lost his mind. One day, I asked him, 'What are you murmuring all the time?'

"He looked at me and said, 'I'm learning. I'm reviewing Shas. I know most of it ba'al peh — by heart. I repeat the Gemara, the Aggadah, the stories, the sugyos — over and over, so that I don't forget. As long as I can murmur Torah, they haven't taken everything from me.'

"We were surrounded by death, by hunger, by darkness — yet this man was alive with Torah."

The survivor paused, his voice trembling. "One night, that man turned to me. His face was thin, his eyes burning with a strange light. 'My friend,' he said, 'I don't think I'll make it out. I can feel my strength leaving me. But I have one request. There's one masechta I never learned — Nazir. If you make it out, please... learn it for me. Finish it in my place. Make a siyum for me.'

"The next morning," the man continued softly, "he was gone. I buried him with my own hands, in the frozen ground behind the barracks. And I made a promise — if I ever walked free again, I would learn Maseches Nazir for him."

He took a deep breath. "Baruch Hashem, I lived. When the war ended and I found myself free, I could hardly stand, hardly speak — but I remembered. Slowly, when I regained the strength to hold a Gemara again, I began Nazir. I learned it as if he were sitting beside me, whispering along. I learned every daf for his soul. And today... today, I've finished it."

The room was silent. Then someone asked, almost in a whisper, "But tell us — why such a big siyum?"

The survivor's eyes glistened. "Because this isn't just a siyum on a masechta. It's a siyum on the neshamah of the Jewish people. It's a celebration of the indestructible Jewish spirit. Think of it — a man in Auschwitz, facing death, and what is on his mind? Not food, not freedom — but Torah! He's worried about who will finish his masechta!

"This meal, this joy, is in honor of that. It's in honor of a Jew who died with Shas on his lips. It's in honor of a nation that can be starved, beaten, and burned — but can never, ever have the Torah torn from its heart."

"Happiness multiplies when you share it."

"Plane" And Simple - Flashes of Inspiration by Rabbi Shlomo Landau



When Elchanan* married a girl from London, he knew that even though they would be living in Brooklyn, there would be many trips across the Atlantic. Yom Tov with his wife's mishpachah, family simchos — the flights would add up. At first, it was manageable. He booked tickets early to keep costs down, and with just the two of them, things were simple. But as their family grew, so did the cost and complexity of the trips: packing, making the airport runs, and keeping everyone calm and comfortable on the long flight.

Our story begins as Elchanan and his family were heading to London for his wife's sibling's wedding. The past twenty-four hours had been a blur of packing, repacking, and double-checking every item they'd need for the week. A van brought them to the airport, and in the rush of preparation, Elchanan had not yet managed to daven Minchah. He hoped to find a quiet corner at the terminal, but long lines at check-in and security erased that possibility. By the time they reached the gate, boarding had already begun.

Walking down the jetway, he noticed the sun dipping low. Just minutes remained. He quickly settled his family in their seats, then asked a flight attendant if he could say a short prayer at the back of the plane. The attendant agreed. Elchanan slipped to the rear, whispered Ashrei, and began Shemoneh Esrei.

He had barely finished saying the berachah of Mechayeh HaMeisim when an announcement blared over the PA system: "Ladies and gentlemen, this flight has been overbooked. We are offering a thousand dollars to any passenger willing to give up his seat and take

the next available flight. Please see a crew member if you're interested."

Even as he davened, the words echoed in his mind. Five seats. Five thousand dollars. Enough to cover their entire trip. His yetzer hara whispered urgently: Nu! Just walk over and say yes before someone else takes the offer! - But another voice, his yetzer tov, spoke louder: Elchanan, you are in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei. You are speaking with the Melech malchei hamelachim! That is worth far more than money.

Elchanan steadied himself. He blocked out the repeated announcement and focused on his words to the Borei Olam. This was his test. Would he show how much he valued tefillah? At last, he took three steps back. He had resisted the temptation, even at a seeming cost of $5,000. - But then, as he returned to his seat, the PA crackled again: "Ladies and gentlemen, since no one volunteered, we are raising the offer to $2,500 per seat."

This time, Elchanan smiled. He hurried back and volunteered his family's five tickets. An hour and a half later, they were comfortably seated on the next flight. Elchanan reached into his pocket and pulled out the airline voucher written out for $12,500. It was, quite literally, "plane" and simple: $5,000 for giving up their seats, and $7,500 for showing Hashem how much his tefillah meant to him.

What is a Ben Torah?

Being a ben Torah goes beyond how many hours you learn Torah. When a ben Torah walks down the street, he represents the Torah, and his every nuance, the words he uses, the places he goes to, the way he reacts - it all has to create kvod Shamayim.

A ben Torah is someone who reflects the light of Torah 24 hours a day. ~ R' Noach Isaac Oelbaum.

Staying Positive

Staying positive doesn't mean pretending everything is perfect. It simply means believing that even in the struggle, something good is forming. When a photographer can't change the scene, they adjust their angle to capture the best of it. In the same way, when we can't control the circumstances – which is more often than not – we can control the lens we use to view them. A new angle, a change of perspective, can reveal hidden blessings, unexpected opportunities, and strength we never knew was there.

Be a filter, not a sponge. Don't absorb every negative emotion or fear that comes your way, but don't ignore it or suppress it either. Filter it, learn from it, and let the rest of it pass through. Our mind is a magnet, and when we consciously look for the good, we train our brain to find it more easily. Over time, reframing becomes a habit, and hope and positivity become our default.

Our brain is a powerful machine that follows the patterns we feed it. Keep supplying it with the same doubts or fears, and the world will look dim. But feed it with growth, gratitude, and new perspectives, and even familiar challenges begin to look different. Change the input and you change the outcome. New ways of thinking inspire new actions, and those actions create a new reality.

Sometimes the light we need isn't a dramatic breakthrough; it's a shift in mindset, a change in perspective, or a moment of clarity. Life will always present obstacles, but with a growth mindset, we can choose to see setbacks as stepping stones, failures as feedback, and obstacles as opportunities. We may not understand everything now, but the willingness to look for the good is what will lead us to it.

Guard your thoughts, train your focus, and build from within – because when your perspective shifts, your entire life begins to shift with it. ~ Inspired by the teachings of the Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (1789-1866)

"I Stayed Milchig To Enjoy Your Blintzes"





Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva, would have to raise millions of dollars for the Yeshiva. The pinnacle of the Mir's fundraising efforts is their yearly dinner in New York. You would imagine that a yeshivah the size of the Mir with so many alumni would host a dinner ten thousand people strong. But in fact, less than a tenth of that number attended, and each and every one of them had to be reminded, worked on, or coerced to be there.

One time, as the Rosh Yeshiva was about to depart for the Gala dinner, his hostess at the New York home he was staying offered him some blintzes. But Rav Nosson Tzvi was too nervous to partake. And there was good reason to be nervous: the weather was stormy, which could definitely impact disastrously upon attendance, last minute confirmations had not come through, pledges had not been secured in advance and the Rosh Yeshiva had to appeal to some one thousand individuals to assist him in footing the cost of the yeshivah. However, baruch Hashem, the dinner was a huge success, and later that night, a victory celebration was conducted at his host's home. Some of the yeshivah's closest supporters were there, and they

sang the Rosh Yeshiva's favourite song, "Kee Orech Yamim" and danced.

Then it was finally time for some food. It was at this time that Rav Nosson Tzvi informed his hostess that despite the fact that he was at a gourmet dinner in the gala Brooklyn Marriott, with an elaborate smorgasbord and a feast catered by one of New York's premier food furnishers, he had remained milchig so that he could eat her blintzes that she offered him earlier! [From For the Love of Torah, By Hanoch Teller, Feldheim]

Chizuk In Our Lives

Teima Kornfeld was a young girl from a Gerrer family who found herself in a French refugee camp during the Holocaust. The inmates were expected to work seven days a week of hard labour and anyone who wasn't able to work was either shot or deported to a death camp.

When a new group of girls arrived in the camp, they were met by the Nazi camp commander who told them that they were expected to work seven days a week.

Young Teima announced, 'I will not work on **שבת**'. The commander was incensed and screamed, 'You won't work on **שבת**?! I will send you straight back to Hitler if you won't work on your **שבת** '!

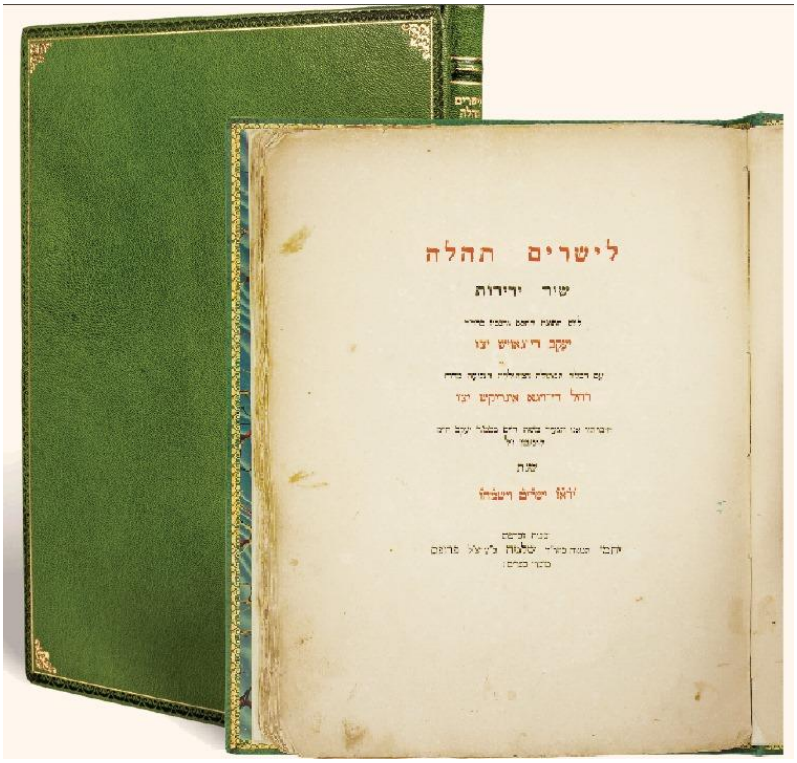
Teima stood her ground, looked the commander in the eye and said, 'I will work my fingers to the bone for the other 6 days of the week. I will even work overtime to make up for the missed work. But I will not work on **שבת**.'

The other inmates waited with bated breath, sure that this would be one of Teima's last days in this world. The commander responded, 'If you are willing to die for your **שבת**, I will not make you work on your **שבת**. Everyone else has to work for seven days a week, but this girl only needs to work for six days'!

Teima survived the war and moved to Switzerland where she met a young man called Reb Aharon Leib. They subsequently moved to **ארץ ישראל** where she changed her name to Tamar and became the famous Rebbetzen Tamar Steinman, wife of the **גדול הדור** - **Rav Aharon Leib לקראת שבת לכו ונלכה כי היא מקור הברכה... זצ"ל.** -

📖 The Guardians – bringing Jewish history to life!

📜 The Rarest Work of the Ramchal - Printed in Just 50 Copies!



We all know Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, the Ramchal, famous for his classic work on Jewish ethics, Mesilat Yesharim. But few realize how many worlds he contained: beyond his depth in Kabbalah, he was also a gifted poet and playwright.

✨ In 1743, the Ramchal composed a wedding poem titled "Shir Yedidut" in honor of a distinguished couple, Yaakov de Gaonsh and Rachel da Veiga Enriquez. It was printed in Amsterdam in exquisite style, one of the most elegant Hebrew printings of the 18th century, and in an edition of only fifty copies.

Already forty years later, the scholar R. Shlomo Dubno wrote of its rarity: - "The author himself printed this book in Amsterdam in 1743, no more than fifty copies, and only for the treasuries of the wealthy Sephardim of Amsterdam. Whoever seeks it now cannot find it, unless he offers great wealth for his love of it."

A Quick Mayseh - A Story to Warm the Heart

The year was 1843. At a Rabbinical conference called by the Russian interior ministry, leaders of the Haskalah joined forces with the czarist government to advance their agenda of forced assimilation of the Jews of Russia.

During the conference, the holy **Tzemach Tzekdek, Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch**, was arrested a grand total of twenty-two times for his outspoken stance in defence of traditional Jewish life. Miraculously, his efforts eventually met with success.

The following story took place a short while after the convention. Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, Rebbe Menachem Mendel's wife, was known to recite Tehillim constantly, but with many mispronunciations.

On one occasion, the Rebbetzin turned to her son Yehuda Leib, future Rebbe of Kopust, and said, "Isn't it strange? One would assume that after all these years, I should know the Tehillim perfectly, by heart!"

"Indeed", replied young Yehuda Leib. "But each time you recite them with new mistakes!"

The Rebbetzin later related this exchange to her esteemed husband and added that perhaps she had better stop her custom rather than distort the holy words.

"No," insisted Rebbe Menachem Mendel, "please continue to recite as before." - Later, the Rebbe admonished his son and instructed him to ask his mother for forgiveness.

"What do you know?" he said. "My entire success in Petersburg was solely in the merit of your mother's Tehillim."

Never underestimate the power of heartfelt sincerity, no matter how unpolished its expression may appear.



On The Boat

Shmuel had served faithfully as the *shochet* in the city of Hamburg, in southern Germany, for decades. He was known for his precision, his *yiras Shamayim*, and his wholehearted devotion to the community.

One day, Shmuel inadvertently violated a long-standing *takanah* — a communal ordinance that had been in place for generations. The breach was unintentional, but the leadership saw no room for leniency.

He was dismissed. Just like that.

Without his position, Shmuel's modest income shrank to nothing. His already meager wealth soon dissolved into real poverty. He sold possessions, skipped meals, and kept up a facade of stability for as long as he could. But the truth was undeniable: He had become a pauper. And sympathy faded. He was alone.

R' Yoel Rosenstock, however, could not simply watch this unfold. A man of compassion and quiet strength, he refused to let Shmuel's story end in humiliation. Silently, without seeking recognition, he collected funds from friends, arranged the immigration paperwork, and purchased passage for Shmuel to sail to America.

"Start again," he urged him.

And amazingly, Shmuel did.

America was thirsty for *shochtim*, and Shmuel's skill was welcomed. His life slowly rebuilt itself. He found work, stability, and dignity. He carried R' Yoel's kindness in his heart with unwavering gratitude.

Back in Europe, however, darkness was gathering. The rise of Hitler was no longer a rumor — the roaring tide of antisemitism was hitting one country after another. Panic spread through Jewish streets. Families scrambled to escape. But leaving Europe was not as simple as buying a ticket. America required immigrants to produce an affidavit, a formal guarantee from a citizen accepting responsibility for the immigrant, ensuring that the newcomer would not become a public burden.

No affidavit, no entry.

No entry…no future.

R' Yoel's daughter, Mrs. Gittel Adler, lived in Vienna at that time — one of the first cities that would fall under the shadow of the Nazis. As the political climate worsened, fear seeped into every home. The streets began to change. Neighbors grew colder. Posters appeared. Jewish businesses were vandalized. The sense of menace was unmistakable.

When the danger became unbearable, Mrs. Adler rushed to the American consulate. She was desperate, trembling, and out of options.

"Please — give me the address of Shmuel," she requested.

But Shmuel had a common name. The clerk handed her a list of several men with the same name scattered across America. With no time to lose, she wrote to every single one, pleading for help. She sent each letter with tears and prayers:

"If you are the Shmuel my father once rescued…please help us now. We need affidavits for all eight of us. Our lives depend on it."

Days passed. Then a week. Then another. Every knock on the door made their hearts stop. Would it be a letter — or the Nazis?

And then, finally, a reply arrived.



A packet. Thick. Heavier than expected. Inside were eight affidavits…all signed by Shmuel. *The* Shmuel.

With these lifesaving documents, the Adler family secured passage to America. In a miraculous turn of timing, they boarded the *last boat* that left Vienna before the country was sealed off and swallowed by Nazi invasion.

Only later, standing safely on American soil, did the full realization strike them:

R' Yoel had believed he was simply helping a broken, impoverished *shochet* rebuild his life. But in truth, years before danger ever appeared, Hashem had guided him to save his **own** daughter and grandchildren.

His act of *chessed* had circled back in the most unimaginable way — transforming a simple kindness into the salvation of an entire family.

R' Yoel thought he was lifting up a stranger.

In truth, he was planting the seed of his own family's salvation.

Sometimes the mitzvos we do seem small, inconvenient, or directed toward someone who appears to bring little benefit back into our lives. But no act of chessed, no kindness, and no moment of generosity is ever wasted. Hashem weaves every mitzvah into the eternal fabric of our destiny.

"Trusting in Hashem means having faith that He will provide for us, even when we cannot see how." – Rabbi Yisroel Salanter

Rabbi Yoel Gold - The Parsha of Shidduchim

We may not always view it as such, but *Sefer Bereishis* is the *sefer* of *shidduchim.* Deriving from each of the names of the Parsha and the literal meaning behind them, we arrive at the sequential process and trajectory of a *shidduch.*

Bereishis—in the beginning—*Noach*—a fellow by the name of Noach—*Lech Lecha*—was walking on the street—*Vayeira*—and he saw—*Chayei Sarah*—a girl by the name of Chaya Sarah. *Toldos*—He wanted to find out who's daughter she is, so he called a *shadchan. Vayeitzei*—so they went out. *Vayishlach*—but she sent him home, not wanting to date him any further. *Vayeishiv*—But he called the *shadchan,* who put them back together. *Mikeitz*—and at the end. *Vayigash*—they grew closer to one another. *Vayechi*—and they lived happily ever after.

After I shared this, someone told me that you could do it in the context of *Sefer Devarim* too.

Devarim—when people started talking and putting *shidduchim* together. *Va'eschanan*—everyone starts davening. *Ekev*—then someone is suggested, but one person says, "Because of this and that reason, I don't want to go out." *Re'eh*—A second person says, "Maybe I'll go out; we'll see." *Shoftim*—a third person, they judge you. *Ki Seitzei*—finally someone says yes and they go out. *Ki Savo*—and they come home and get married. *Nitzavim*—the rule of thumb is that if everyone stands their ground and nobody gives in. *Vayelech*—he goes home, and she goes home. *Ha'azinu*—but if they listen to each other. *V'zos Ha'Beracha*—then they will have the ultimate blessing.

There is always something to learn from the Torah. Even the names of the *Parshiyos* tell a story about our lives.

Working on our Middos

It says in Sefer Shabbos Kodesh that **Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt"l**, would stress that there is a practical way to merit the Kedushah of Shabbos. All we need to do is welcome Shabbos when it arrives, and give it a proper greeting. - Our problem is that when Shabbos arrives, we're usually not ready. As much as we try to be ready on time, it doesn't work.

Why is it so hard to be ready to greet Shabbos when it comes?

This is not just a matter of time mismanagement. There is a spiritual reason for it. A person can begin early in the morning and still barely make it in time for Shabbos until the last minute.

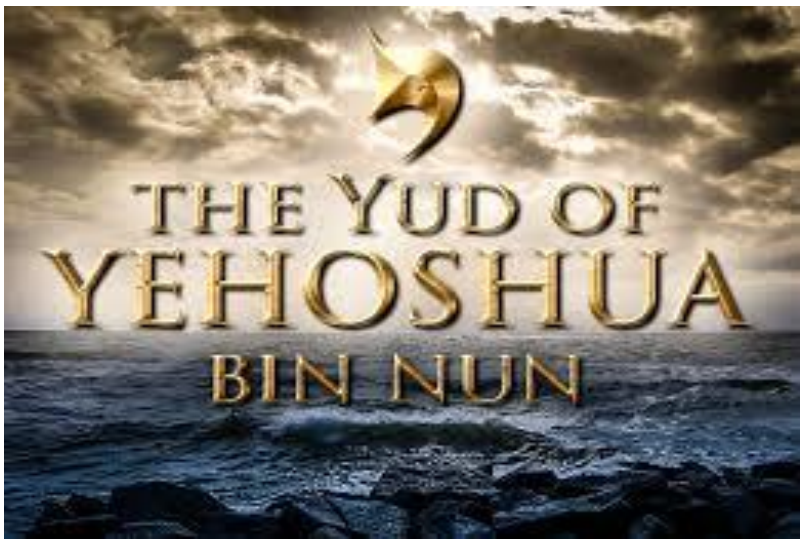
Something strange is going on here. Rav Shimshon explains that it is written in Seforim HaKedoshim, that all the forces of evil that plague us during the week, they disappear on Shabbos. The Yetzer Hara knows it is about to be put out of commission. It will be banished for 24 hours. Therefore, it works hard and makes an extra effort beforehand.

This effort generates many obstacles and delays on our path as we are trying to properly prepare for Shabbos. However, this is our chance to tap into the tremendous potential of Shabbos Kodesh. The way we begin Shabbos, is how Shabbos will continue, and it behooves us to put in extra effort to welcome Shabbos in the best way possible!

Rav Hutner — "Do not be ashamed of your struggles, for they are the tools of your greatness. The ladder to the highest places is built from the rungs of past failures. Rise — and the ladder rises with you." (Pachad Yitzchak, Igros)

Parsha Potpourri - Rav Ozer Alport

ויבא משה וידבר את כל דברי השירה הזאת באזני העם הוא והושע בן נון (32:44)



Prior to sending the twelve spies to bring back a report about the land of Israel and its inhabitants, Moshe blessed Hoshea and changed his name to Yehoshua (Bamidbar 13:16). From that time onward, he is always referred to by his new name. Why in our verse does the Torah suddenly revert and once again refer to him as Hoshea?

Chanukas HaTorah answers by noting that the Gemora in Sanhedrin (107a) teaches that when Sorah's name was changed from **שרי** to **שרה**, the letter י complained that it would no longer be used in her name. It was only appeased when Hashem "paid it back" by adding it to Hoshea's name when Moshe changed it to Yehoshua. Sorah's name was changed when she was 89, one year before the birth of Yitzchok. Since she died at the age of 127 (Bereishis 23:1), the י was neglected for the final 38 years of her life.

Hoshea's name was changed to Yehoshua when the spies were sent in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt. The events of Parshas Haazinu took place at the end of the 40th year of their sojourn in the wilderness. As such, it comes out that the י which was added to Hoshea's name to pacify it over its removal from Sarai's name, had already been used for 38 years, which is precisely the amount of time that Sorah lived after her name was changed. At this point, the י had received its full "compensation," as hinted to by the Torah referring to him once again as Hoshea.

Our National Anthem, By R' Shlomo Katz



R' Avraham Shimon Halevi Ish Horowitz z"l (1876-1943; Mashgiach in Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin in Poland) used to urge his students to study this week's parashah, Ha'azinu. After all, the Torah commands **וְעַתָּה, כִּתְבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, וְלַמְּדָהּ אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, שִׂימָהּ בְּפִיהֶם** (31:19): ***"Write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, place it in their mouth"*** – i.e., this song must be fluent and regular on the lips of Israel.

He would say: If the Jewish people would remember the words of this song, which has within it the entire course of events in This World and the World-to-Come, there would be no room for the filth of This World to enter the heart.

"Please, my students, learn this song with the explanations of the Sages and the masters of the Divine inspiration," he would repeat. "Sing this song with a pleasant tune, for every nation has a national anthem, and we, the holy nation which Hashem has chosen, have been given the anthem of Ha'azinu."

Through the words of this song, one can attain faith in, and also understanding of, the way G-d directs the world towards the ultimate tikkun / completion.

The words of this song include everything from the giving of the Torah to the resurrection of the dead – everything that will happen to us over time. In the words of the Sages in the midrash Sifrei: "This song is great, for it includes the present, the past and the future; This World and the World-to-Come." (Naharei Eish)

The story is told about a student of the holy Ramban, R' Moshe Ben Nachman ZT"L.

The student, Avner, was a charismatic and knowledgeable scholar, however, he strayed from the true path of Torah and without warning renounced his religion. Avner became very accepted among the non-Jews and, in fact, became a respected minister. It was no small act in the eyes of the gentiles that a highly respected Jewish scholar, a glorified student of Nachmanides, should give up on Judaism, and for this they embraced him.

One year, on the day of Yom Kippur, Avner sent his emissaries to fetch the Ramb"an. Wishing to show his contempt for his Jewish roots, he slaughtered a pig, cooked it and ate it, all on Yom Kippur in the presence of his former teacher!

The Ramb"an, understandably, was horrified and heartbroken. He turned to his former disciple and asked, "Tell me, what caused you to renounce your religion?" Avner smiled harshly. "As a matter of fact, it was a lesson I heard from your very lips!" he replied smugly.

"One time, when we were studying the portion of Ha'azinu, you said that everything in the entire world, including all of the Torah's 613 commandments are alluded to in that portion. Now, Ha'azinu is not a large portion, and I couldn't believe that it was possible. How could the entire Torah, everything in the entire universe for that matter, be contained in such a tiny portion?

When I realized that this was not possible, I lost faith in you and concluded that everything else you taught me must also be untrue or exaggerated. Thus, I abandoned Judaism." "But it's true!" the Ramb"an insisted. "There is nothing in this entire world that is not alluded to in Parshas Ha'azinu."

Avner challenged him. "If what you say is true, show me where my name, Avner, is written in this parsha." The Ramb"an agreed and went into a corner to pray. Then he took out a chumash. "Here," he

showed him, "take the third letter of every word in this posuk and you will see your name."

Avner read, אָמַרְתִּי אַפְאֵיהֶם אַשְׁבִּיתָה מֵאֱנוֹשׁ זִכְרָם - ***"I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make their remembrance cease from among men."***

The Ramb"an explained. "The third letters are **ר-א-ב-נ-ר** forming the name Rabbi Avner. So, you see, the Torah is teaching us the amazing power of repentance. When a Jew sincerely returns to G-d, the Torah honours him. Whatever he did in the past is discounted; it doesn't even matter if his spiritual condition is not presently what it should be. For all Jews will ultimately return to G-d-and are deserving of a title of honour!

When Avner saw this, he became distraught. "How can I make amends for all of my transgressions?" he tearfully asked his mentor. "Just do what it says in the posuk," replied the Ramb"an. ***'I would make the remembrance of them cease from among men.'*** Nothing must remain of your former glory."

R' Avner did Teshuvah and immediately left for places unknown, he was never heard from again.

People who constantly seek wealth do not have pleasure from their lives. They are always engaged in preparing for life rather than living. Their focus is on gaining more and more money which is only a preparation for life.

They think they are trying to obtain money for themselves, but are really amassing wealth for others who will eventually inherit it. ~ Chochmah Umussar

During the Days of Repentance, the holy Rebbe of Sanz, R' Chaim Halberstam ZT"L, used to tell over the following parable:



There was once a poor women who had many children. They asked her for food to eat, but she did not have any to give them. Once she found an egg. She called her children to her and told them, "My children, we no longer have anything to worry about. I have found an egg. And since I am a person who is foresighted, we will not eat this egg. I will ask our neighbour to allow me to place this egg under one of his hens, and there will come from it a small chicken.

And we will not eat the chicken, since she will be able to lay eggs. And these eggs we shall not eat but we shall place them under her and there will be more eggs and more chickens. We shall not eat of them, but we shall sell them and I will buy a calf. And we shall allow the calf to grow and become a cow. The cow will have calves, and we will allow them to grow, and we shall have many cows and calves. Then I will sell them and buy a field, and we shall have fields and cows and calves and chickens and eggs. We will not be lacking for anything." And while she said this to her children the egg fell from her hand and broke.

The holy Rebbe explained, "This is the way people act. When the holy days come, everyone makes plans in his mind and accepts upon himself to do teshuva, thinking he has all the answers to turn himself around. But when the days have passed and nothing gets done, all the plans fall to pieces, and he is left with nothing. Therefore, people must sincerely do what they say."

Reb Nochum'ke's Prayer To Protect a Wealthy Man from Fire Loss

A wealthy merchant once approached the *tzaddik* **Rav Nochum Kaplan of Horodna**, known as Reb Nochum'ke, with an interesting proposition. Though modest and unassuming, Reb Nochum'ke was renowned for working wonders through the power of his prayers and blessings.

The merchant was planning to purchase an insurance policy with fifty silver coins to protect his estate from damage by fire. He offered to give the entire sum to Reb Nochum'ke for his tzedakah distributions, if the *tzaddik* would assure him that fire would never cause him financial loss.

R' Nochum'ke told him, "Only Hashem can give a guarantee. I can only offer my blessing that the merit of your giving tzedakah should protect your property from damage by fire." The merchant was satisfied.



One hot summer morning, ten years later, the merchant awoke to the smell of smoke. In the corner of a field, the roof of a huge warehouse filled with thousands of rubles worth of whiskey, was aflame. Before long, the warehouse and his entire estate would go

up in flames. Then suddenly the merchant exclaimed, "But the *tzaddik*, blessed me! His blessing must come true!" Just as these words left his mouth, an unusually strong wind blew across the field. Instead of fanning the flames, it swept them away from the building! In a matter of minutes, the fire on the roof was extinguished and the man's merchandise was saved.

His faith in the *tzaddik's* blessing had been complete. When R' Nochum'ke passed away, this merchant tearfully cried out, "The *Aron HaKodesh* has been taken from us!"

The Shtefenesht Rebbe's Reflections on the Lessons Of the Game of Checkers by Mrs. Michal Horowitz



A story is told about the **Rebbe, R' Nachum of Shtefenesht**, the son of R' Yisrael of Rizhin (1796-1850). He once entered the Beis Medrash and found some of his chassidim playing checkers.

The chassidim were aghast when they saw their rebbe in the doorway and were certain that he was going to berate them for wasting their time.

To their surprise, however, a little smile played on the rebbe's lips.

"Do you know the rules of the game of checkers?" he asked them. The chassidim did not understand what the rebbe was alluding to, but he continued, "The rules of checkers are basically the same rules as avodas Hashem. Let me teach you how to play.

"Number one: In the game, you always move upward. Similarly, a servant of Hashem always has to look upward and strive to reach

higher levels in his avodas Hashem. "Number two: You can't jump two spaces at a time. Similarly, in avodas Hashem, a person can't jump more than one level at a time. "Number three: At times it is worth giving up the opportunity to move ahead one space in order to move ahead two spaces later.

Similarly, a Jew has to know that sometimes he has to withdraw in order to attain a higher level later on. "Number four: When you reach the top of the board, your piece becomes a 'queen,' and is able to move in any direction. Similarly, when a person conquers his evil inclination and elevates himself spiritually, he is better fortified to cope with any situation."

Reb Shmuel Donn- Remez לעילוי נשמת יהושע ע"ה בן ברוך הלוי נ"י

כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ.32:9 ***For the portion of the L-rd is His people, Jacob the lot of His inheritance.***

We, Klal Yisroel attest to the oneness of Hashem, and Hashem testifies that we- Klal Yisroel are one nation. When are we considered one nation – the only nation beloved in Hashem's eyes? When we are united and Be'achdus. Hashem is **אחד** and wants us to be **אחד**.

The Remez is right here in our Posuk.. **כִּי חֵלֶק יְ-ה-וָ-ה, עַמּוֹ**. If we divide the Gematria 26, we get the number 13 which equals **אחד**. There are two times the Gematria of **אחד** in hashem's name.

On Rosh Hashono, I was approached by a holocaust survivor. "I want to show you something" he said. Rolling up his sleeve, he looked at me, " Read the number on my arm" **1 8 4 8 0 5** . These numbers that the Nazi beasts inked into my arm add up to **26** Gematria **יְ-ה-וָ-ה**.

But there is more **184 = 13 [אחד] and 805 = 13 [אחד]**

Here before me stood a giant of a man with the name of Hashem and twice אחד permanently marked on his body, who endured the most terrifying Gehinom on earth.When he cries out in heartfelt Tefilah on the Yomim Noiroim, who can fail to be inspired.

He told me that he doesn't know how he survived the Holocaust, but that these numbers and connotations saved him.

Peninim on the Torah – פנינים על התורה

32:29 לוּ חָכְמוּ יַשְׂכִּילוּ זֹאת יָבִינוּ לְאַחֲרִיתָם ***Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end.***

There are some things that we only seem to comprehend at the end, after we have had the bad experience, and everything good that we believed would occur does not materialise. Only then do we realise our foolishness for not listening to the voice of reason.



The Kaf HaChaim, zl, offers a powerful analogy to explain the pasuk.

A man was married to an exceptional woman. She possessed superior intelligence as a result of her sharp acumen. She was exemplary in her middos tovos. Indeed, she personified the eishes chayil, true woman of valour. Her husband was acutely aware of this most wonderful gift with which he had been blessed, and he made every effort to show her his appreciation.

Once, he was on a business trip which took him to a small town where he enjoyed the hospitality of the local Jewish innkeeper. It had been a long – but successful – trip and he saw no harm in relaxing from his

tensions with a good hearty shot of whiskey. One shot led to two, and, before long, the man was in a state of total inebriation. The innkeeper saw an opportunity to benefit from his guest's present "relaxed" state.

It seems that the innkeeper had a daughter who was neither blessed with exceptional physical looks, nor was she unusually bright. These deficiencies created a situation in which she was challenged with regard to shidduchim. The innkeeper approached the inebriated guest and proposed his daughter to him as a wife. "But I am already married", the guest countered. "Nu, so what is wrong with a second wife?" the innkeeper asked. Back and forth, they talked, until in a moment of total imbecility, the guest agreed to marry the innkeeper's daughter.

Quickly, the father called two witnesses and made a makeshift tenaim, binding engagement. Voila! His daughter was practically married! The guest stepped out into the cool night air, and, after a short time, his head began to clear. He suddenly realised what he had done. Now what? His wife would probably be furious with him. On the other hand, if he were to renege on the marriage, he will have lost a good friend and hurt the feelings of an innocent girl.

He had only one course of action. During all the years of his marriage, whenever a difficult decision came before him, he would discuss the issue with his wife. The man came home and, meekly, he began to present the entire debacle: how he became drunk and betrothed to this other woman. She looked at her husband and said, "I think you should keep her as a wife." He looked at his wife incredulously, "Do you know what you are suggesting? Her father expects me to marry her within the month!" "Why wait a month? I think you should get married this week", his wife answered.

The husband thought that he would lose his mind. "How can I get everything ready within a week?" he asked. "I do not have an apartment, furniture and the various accoutrements that go with

setting up a house." "Do not worry," his wife replied. "You can use our house. We will all live together as one happy family. I will leave the day of the wedding and live with my father for a month. I will return home after the month. This will give you the opportunity to get to know your bride. There is, however, one condition: during the month that I will be gone, you may not contact me. Under no circumstances may you reach out to me during this time – regardless of the situation!"

Reluctantly, the husband agreed to his wife's advice. He notified his kallah's parents that he wanted to get married the following week. His wife helped prepare the dinner and even decorated their home to welcome the new bride. The wedding took place, and he brought his bride home with him. Now that he was stone sober, he looked at her and saw a different woman than the one he had seen in his inebriated state. Well, looks are not everything. Perhaps her seichal, common sense was her strong point. He asked her, "What is today?" She replied, "Wedding." "I know that. What day of the week is it, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday?" "Wednesday," she repeated. "What was yesterday?" "Wednesday" she repeated – again. "What is tomorrow?" he asked. "How should I know?" she replied. "We will wait and see and when tomorrow arrives, we will know what it is."

Seeing that he had really fallen in, he figured that maybe she might at least be proficient in the kitchen. He asked her, "Can you please bring me a glass of water?" "From where?" she asked. "From the kitchen," he replied. "Where is the kitchen?" she asked. This went on for a while until the husband realised that this woman was clueless concerning anything. She obviously was physically and mentally challenged.

He returned with his wife to her father's home and petitioned for a divorce. He had been duped into marrying a woman who was not for him. The man sat at home for an entire month – lonely, depressed, and miserable. Oh, did he miss his wife! She was so special. Now he

realised how fortunate he was to have such a special wife. He now understood why she had readily agreed to the marriage. She knew it would not work. She was acutely aware that he had to discover for himself that such an arrangement was doomed. Had she told this to him, however, he would not have believed her. He would always wonder: Perhaps she would have been good for me. Maybe the marriage would have worked. He had to find out for himself the hard way that such a relationship was not for him.

The Kaf HaChaim sums up the analogy. The Torah is compared with a faithful wife without peer. It guards over us and protects us from harm. Along comes the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, and attempts to push "her," the Torah, aside. It tempts us with another spouse. We defer to our desires, falling into the trap of blandishments set for us by the king of guile, the yetzer hora. We follow our heart, falling prey to its passions, until we realise too late that this is a poor imitation of Torah. ***לוּ חָכְמוּ יַשְׂכִּילוּ זֹאת, "Were they wise, they would comprehend this."*** They would realise that absolutely nothing can replace the Torah. There is no wisdom like the Torah's wisdom, no lifestyle like the one prescribed by the Torah.

Too many have wandered off to chase their dreams, only to wake up to a bitter nightmare. They thought that another spouse, a life detached from Torah observance or one in which they could inject a little modernity, some progressive thinking, would add to their geshmak, enjoyment of life. Yavinu l'acharisam; 'They would discern it from their end.' In the end, they have lost everything. Their past is gone; their present is filled with frivolous foolishness, nothing of enduring value; their future is likewise gone, because the decisions they made earlier in life took their toll on their children, who are now completely divorced from Judaism. Thus, the sooner they realise the folly of their ways and come to their senses, the better are their chances of salvaging their present and future.

R' Shmuel Winzelberg- Torah U'Tefilah

ובדבר הזה תאריכו ימים לב:מז ***And through this matter shall you prolong your days*** *(32:47)*

The Shach states, sometimes a man will go to a Torah Shiur and he will not understand anything that the one giving the Shiur is saying. However, there is a guarantee as it states (Mishlei 4:22): **' כי חיים הם למצאיהם ולכל בשרו מרפא'** – ***'For they are life to he who finds them, and healing for all his flesh.'*** Do not read it as '**מצאיהם**' ,'*who finds them*', rather, read it as '**למוציאהם**' ,'*who states them*', with his mouth, even if one just says the words verbally – one merits life.

This is hinted at in this Posuk, ***'and through this matter'*** – just saying the words, even without understanding what is taught, 'shall you prolong your days' – you will merit long life.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם שִׂימוּ לְבַבְכֶם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מֵעִיד בָּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תְּצַוֻּם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת ***Moshe warned the Nation to remember their experience in the Midbar and to teach it to their children*** (32:46).

Rav Shimon Sofer explains that Moshe was cautioning the Nation that in the Midbar it was easy to see Hashem's interaction in their lives with the Monn and their ease of Mitzvah observance. However, once they would enter Eretz Yisroel, they would be responsible to work to earn their food and they would face the challenges of daily life. Therefore, they had to teach their children of this special time that they had in the Midbar, and that if a person actually follows the way of Hashem, He will provide for them just as He provided for the Nation in the Midbar.

Rav Gamliel Rabbinowitz taught a Mashal.



A certain town once built a very high building, and in order to reach the top of the building, one had to climb thousands of steps. An announcement was made that whoever could make it to the top floor by climbing the stairs would win a large reward. Many people came to test their ability to climb the stairs. The first one made it to the tenth floor, and he then gave up. The second one made it to the twentieth floor and the third person made it to the thirtieth floor, but then they had to stop. This continued with all the competitors, and not one of them was able to make it to the top floor.

Finally, a Jew came along, and he began to climb the steps. He was much slower than the others, but amazingly, he did not get tired, and he did not give up like the others did. He was able to continue climbing until he was able to reach the top floor!

After he received the reward, everyone asked him, "How is it that you were able to succeed in climbing when no one else could?" He replied, "When I first started climbing, I did not plan or expect to climb to the top of the building I just wanted to get to the first floor. However, when I saw that I could do this, I decided to climb just one more floor. I kept telling myself to climb just one more floor, and I continued to climb in this way. Although I was exhausted, each time I pushed myself to go just one more floor, I was eventually able to reach the top of the building!"

Rav Gamliel teaches that Tzadikim have written that in regard to any matter of Kedushah, the proper way to overcome it is 'little by

little'. Chazal have taught us (Rosh Hashanah 4b) that if you grab a large amount, then you have not taken anything at all, but if you have taken a small amount, you will at least have taken that amount.

Sometimes a person has a strong desire to grow a lot in Ruchniyus, even 'to conquer the entire world in just one day', however, this can only be from one's Yetzer Hara who is trying to get him to take short cuts in his service to Hashem. The Satan is hoping that he tries to change the world in a moment, and then, when he sees that he has failed, he gives up hope completely and he won't even make a small change in himself. However, if a person decides to do it 'little by little', then he is much more likely to succeed. This is similar to going up a ladder— one can't skip any rungs. Rather, he must go up 'little by little', so that he doesn't slip and fall all the way down the ladder!

R' Shmuel Winzelberg- Torah U'Tefilah



כי שם ה' אקרא הבו גודל לאלקינו לב:ג ***When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d.*** *(32:3)*

When a boy reaches the age of thirteen, he is considered a full-fledged adult. He can lead Davening as a Shliach Tzibur and he can join in for Zimun with Birchas HaMazon.

These Halachos are all hinted at in this Pasuk. **הבו גודל לאלוקינו** — the word **הבו** has a Gematria of 13. Thus, from the age of 13, when this boy is now a Gadol, he can begin to glorify Hashem our G-d through his Tefilos as a Shliach Tzibbur and with Zimun in Birchas HaMazon. (Chaim shel Torah)

Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages

Towards the end of his life, **Rav Moshe Mordechai Biderman, zt"l,** the Lelover Rebbe, suffered a tremendous amount of pain, though he never complained about it. His doctors could not understand how he could bear it silently, without crying out, and they asked him how he was able to do it. His explanation was simple. "If one keeps in mind that everything comes from Hashem and that everything that happens reflects Hashem's will, then one can learn to tolerate anything.

I wholeheartedly believe that Moshiach will arrive at any moment and all pain will disappear. Since I know that my suffering will last only seconds longer, it is easy to tolerate!"

אָמַרְתִּי אַפְאֵיהֶם אַשְׁבִּיתָה מֵאֱנוֹשׁ זִכְרָם 32:26

The Baal HaTurim states that the last letters of אַשְׁבִּיתָה מֵאֱנוֹשׁ זִכְרָם spell Moshe, and the next word is "lulei" (were it not). This hints at the Pasuk in Tehilim (106,23) ***"And He said that He would destroy them, had Moshe His chosen one not (lulei) stood in the breach."*** (in reference to the Golden Calf).

If not for Moshe Rabeinu, who Davened for us on a number of occasions and was moser nefesh for us, we would not be here today.

Rav Yerucham zt"l quotes from the סידור אשי ישראל citing the name of the צדיק, Rav Eliyohu Kartinger zt"l who wrote in his צוואה: - "I am so confused when I remember that I did so many bad things in my life, but one thing that I put my hope in is ישראל אני – I know I am a Yid - that is the great מעלה. I never gave up the fact that I am a Yid."

Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages

A man once came to the **Baba Sali** and asked for a Brachah to have a child. At that moment, the Baba Sali was about to put on his Talis for Davening. He called ten people over to him, so they could answer Amein to his Brachah that he was about to say on putting on his Talis. He said the Brachah with all of the deep Kavanos, and the people gathered all answered Amein.

The Baba Sali told this man, "Your wife will give birth to a baby boy in one year. Exactly a year later, on that very day, his wife indeed gave birth to a baby boy!"

V'Chol Maaminim -A Brachah Out Loud Is a Perfect Brachah

האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי (לב א)

The Rebbe Harav Yechiel Yehoshua of Biala said: One who wants his tefillos to be heard Above should make sure to make brachos aloud – **ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי** – because only this way will the listeners be able to complete the brachah with amen.

32:9 כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ

The Shomer Emunim (Pischu Shearim, Chapter 15) writes: By answering amen a rope is formed, which is used to tie up the prosecutors and libellers of Am Yisrael. That is why they seek to prevent Klal Yisrael from answering amen; they want to cut off this rope, as it says "מוסרותימו אֵת נַנתקה - "whose acronym is amen.

When Am Yisrael overcome these efforts and are careful to answer amen, they are guaranteed that they will overcome and prevail over those that seek to harm them.

This coming Shabbat in Parshat Ha'azinu which we will read on Shabbat Shuva, the Torah will declares

כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ – *"for the portion of the Lord is his people, Jacob is the measure of his inheritance"*.



The word 'measure' in Hebrew is **חבל** which literally means a rope and that's because in ancient times the rope was used for measuring purposes. There was a standardized length of a rope, so if for example, you were to say the circumference of my field is 2000 ropes, people would understand exactly what you meant.

There is, however, a far deeper message in these words. The Jewish people here are being compared by the Almighty to a rope. You see, a rope is made up of quite a number of different cords which are twisted together to produce the rope. Each strand by itself is weak and can be broken very easily, but once they are fused together within the rope it's simply unbreakable.

The Almighty wants us to know that if we are factionalized to the extent that we have so many splinter groups within our people, we will end up being a very weak nation. The way forward for the Jewish people must be to have a rope styled existence, and this is a key sentiment that we are expressing now **לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם ויעשו כולם אגודה אחת "*may the Jewish people – produce one single bonded entity in order to perform Your will with a full heart.*"**

We come together over these High Holy Days like one person with one heart to express the importance of the united Jewish people. Similarly, this is a message which will be conveyed through the key practice of the festival of Sukkot. We take the **ד' מינים**, four very

different kinds, and you can only make the brachah over them if they are bound together as one in our hands, symbolizing the unity of the Jewish people.

The past year 5780 has been a painful one for many reasons, one of which sadly has been the totally unacceptable level of friction within Jewish circles. Such disunity has made us weak. Let's guarantee that the new year, 5781, will be for all of us the ***'year of the rope'***.

For the coming year, I want to give you a Bracha for a year that is sweet and good. May it be a year full of health and success spiritually, physically, psychologically, and emotionally. May you have success in all your endeavours and enjoy a year rich in sweet growth.

Let's try to be the best we can, by joining all of us together as a rope, by praying with all our hearts, for the recovery of all the sick from this crazy pandemic, as well as praying for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev ZT"L would say: "When I see a man of many sins, I think, 'How I envy him! When he will do teshuva and convert his sins, he will have many more merits than I do!"

R' Avrohom Linkener ZT"L would say: "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years!"

R' Yosef Braver ZT"L would say: "When one makes a fist, all of his fingers appear to be of equal length. When the fingers are extended, it is obvious that some are longer than others. So too, with charity. Don't view all charities with a closed fist. Some causes are deserving of more tzedakah than others!"

רְאוּ עַתָּה כִּי אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא וְאֵין אֱלֹקים עִמָּדִי אֲנִי אָמִית וַאֲחַיֶּה מָחַצְתִּי וַאֲנִי אֶרְפָּא וְאֵין מִיָּדִי מַצִּיל:32:39

Chacham Rabbeinu Chayim Yosef Dovid Azulai zt"l (Chida in Nachal Kedumim) says, it is interesting to note that in this posuk, the word "Ani" is mentioned four times, an allusion to what the Gemara (Megillah 29a) says, that Hashem is always with the Jewish people, and that even when they go into galus , the Divine Presence is there together with them. Since the exiles of the Jewish people are associated with the four monarchies: Edom (Rome), Madai (Persia), Bavel (Babylon) and Yavan (Greece), the word "Ani," which is a reference to the Shechinah, is written four times."

Why Rav Sofer Cried in Shul

Rav Shimon Sofer, zt"l, was the Rav in a town in Hungary. Once, the Hungarian emperor planned a visit to the town, and Rav Sofer wanted to see him so that he could say the Brachah on seeing a king.

In order to prepare himself, he wrote the Brachah on a piece of paper so he would be able to say it properly, which is the Halachah, since it is a Brachah that is not said often, and many are not familiar with it. When the time came and the emperor had arrived, Rav Sofer approached him and took out his paper with the Brachah on it, and he began to say the Brachah. However, he was so nervous that he dropped the paper, and he said the Brachah by heart instead of reading it.

That night in Shul by Maariv, Rav Sofer began to cry. People approached him to see if he was alright and asked why he was crying. Rav Sofer said, "I am crying because at Maariv tonight, I didn't drop my Siddur!" He explained, "When I was standing before a human king, I was so nervous that I dropped the paper I was holding. Why didn't I drop my Siddur when I was standing and speaking to Hashem, the King of kings? Why wasn't I so nervous and scared before the

Ribono Shel Olam that I was able to hold on to my Siddur without it slipping from my hands? Shouldn't I tremble before Hashem the way I tremble before a person? How could I not cry?!" (Torah U'Tefilah)



The Innkeeper and The Angel of Death

The Midrash (quoted in Orchos Yosher, Gemilus Chasadim) tells the following story: There was a talmid chacham who was travelling for business. An innkeeper saw him, and said, "Rebbe, if you want, I can travel with you."

As they were walking, they met up with a blind pauper, sitting near the city. The talmid chacham quickly took out a coin and gave it to him, and he told the innkeeper to do the same. The innkeeper said, "I won't give him anything, because I don't know him as you do. It was good that you gave him since you know him, but I won't give anything."

The talmid chacham replied, "If you don't want to give, that's your choice." They walked further and met up with the malach hamaves. The malach hamaves said, "I am the malach hameves" and they became very afraid. The malach hamaves said to the talmid chacham, "You gave tzedakah…therefore your life will be spared, and you will live another fifty years." The malach hamaves then said to the innkeeper, "But for you, your final day has arrived."

The innkeeper replied, "We travelled together. Is it right that he should return home and that I should die?" "Yes. He deserves to live since he gave tzedakah." "Let me give tzedakah now!" The malach hamaves replied, "Fool, if one didn't prepare provisions on land, what will he have on the sea?

Similarly, if someone didn't prepare in his lifetime, it is too late to prepare when he's dead. What happened happened, now your time to die has come." The innkeeper said, "Before you take me, allow me to praise Hashem for all the kindness He has done for me."

The malach hamaves replied, "Since you want to praise Hashem, years have been added to your life." From this story we learn the benefit of praising Hashem. It can add years onto one's life. Praising Hashem is greater than tzedakah. We see that because the innkeeper wanted to give tzedakah, but at that point, it wouldn't help him. But praising Hashem saved him. (Torah Wellsprings)

The Old Yid's Tallis



An old Yid was niftar in Uzbekistan, and before his demise, he asked his son to transfer his body to Eretz Yisrael, when the opportunity arises. The son moved to Eretz Yisrael, but as is the nature of people to procrastinate, he kept pushing off bringing his father to Eretz Yisrael.

When the son was 80 years old, he realized that if he doesn't do his mission now, he never will. So, he hired Reb Mendel Ekstein (who has experience in transporting graves) to bring his father's remains to Eretz Yisrael. Reb Mendel Ekstein travelled to Uzbekistan, opened the grave, and he almost fainted when he saw that the tallis covering the body had remained fresh, after all these years. The tallis is usually first to disintegrate, but miraculously this tallis remained intact. Reb Mendel never saw anything like this before; he was afraid to continue. But he was hired to do this mission, and it was the niftar's final request, so he took the tallis off to see the body. The skeleton was as he'd expect it to be – totally decomposed. The tachrichim were totally disintegrated, too, just the tallis remained intact.

In Eretz Yisrael, the custom is to bury people without a tallis. A rav advised Reb Mendel that because of the unusual circumstance, the niftar should be buried with this miraculous tallis. Who was this man? Was he a tzaddik nistar?

Reb Mendel asked the 80-year-old son whether he can explain why this wonder occurred. He replied, "The tallis? That's easy to explain. On the day my father began wearing a tallis, which was the day after his chasunah, he made a kabbalah that he would never speak while wearing it. He kept this kabbalah his entire life." Apparently, in this merit, the tallis remained intact." We learn from this story the specialness of a good kabbalah. (Torah Wellsprings)

A Blast from The Past

It is written **אני אמית ואחיה**; I put to death and I bring life. This seems to be in the wrong order as it should first say life and then death as that is the cycle of life?

One answer is that this hints to the idea of reincarnation. This idea is shown in other places also such as **דור הלך ודור בא** a generation goes and a generation comes, and **מה שהיה הוא שיהיה**...; whatever has been is what will be….

There were Tzadikim who remembered their previous Gilgulim. **The Noam Elimelech** (1717-1787) once said, "Not only do I remember **מעמד הר סיני** but I remember who was standing next to me."

The Yismach Moshe (1759-1841) recalled how he remained neutral in the Machlokes between Korach and Moshe. When his grandson- the **Yetev Lev**- expressed his astonishment, he told him that if he was there, he would have sided with Korach.

R' Chaim Vital writes that his Rebbe- the **Arizal**- specified his previous Gilgulim. In one of his Gilgulim, he remarked that he was a Gilgul of **סורינו ר' יהושע** who was a wealthy man and Baal Tzedaka. He also arose early and stayed late in the Beis Knesses and Beis

Midrash. **ר' יהושע סורינו** was a Gilgul of **ר' שאול טרישטי** who was a Mohel.

There is a **מצבה** in the city of Vienna that is in the shape of a fish (it is there even today). On it, it is written, 'here is buried the fish that screamed **שמע ישראל**. What is the story behind this?



In the ledger of the Chevra Kadisha of Vienna it tells what happened. There was a Jew in Vienna that bought a fatty fish for Shabbos. When he brought the fish to his house and took a knife to cut it, the fish screamed **שמע ישראל...אחד**. The Jew was confused and astounded at this occurrence as he never saw or heard of such a thing. He immediately wrapped up the fish in a cloth and brought it to R' Sheftel, the son of the Shela- who was the Av Beis Din- whom he told the story to.

The Av Beis Din told him to bury the fish in a cemetery and erect a **מצבה** inscribing it with ***'here is buried the fish that screamed שמע ישראל.'*** This fish is buried near R' Sheftel in the cemetery in Vienna.

The Gemara relates a story of a pious man who withheld himself from desecrating Shabbos. A large tree, called a **צלף**, then grew which gave him livelihood. **The Arizal** informs us that this person was Gilgul of **צלפחד**, who was the **מקשש עצים**; man who gathered wood on Shabbos, desecrating it. So this Chassid performed the rectification. A hint is found in the name **צלפחד** as it spells **צלף חד**; one **צלף** tree, that which the Chassid grew.

The Chida writes he saw in the Sefer **חיי יהודה** where the author wrote about himself that he originally didn't believe in the concept of Gilgulim. That changed when a child born in his neighbourhood got very sick within a month of his birth. When the child was 6 months old, he died. While the child was dying, he was called. He instructed that Pesukim and words of Torah be spoken as was the custom in Italy. He went and saw the child as his health deteriorated and then read some **מזמורים**. The child then opened his eyes and said **שמע ישראל...ה' אחד** and died by the word **אחד**. From that day on he believed in Gilgulim as he saw a 6-month-old child- when a child can't talk- who was always sick say like an adult **שמע** in a loud voice!

After one of the supporters of the Volozhiner yeshiva died, **R' Chaim Volozhiner** would learn Mishnayos in his memory. One day R' Chaim Volozhiner was learning a difficult Mishna that he was unable to understand. From his exertion, he got tired and fell asleep. While asleep, the deceased appeared to him in a dream, explaining to him the Mishna, as if he was an expert in that Mishna—although he was ignorant in Torah throughout his life.

When R' Chaim Volozhiner awoke, he exclaimed, "I knew that one who supports Torah receives Gan Eden. But I didn't know that it would happen so quickly".

Global Kabolo Initiative

'אִם־תָּשִׁיב מִשַּׁבָּת רַגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קָדְשִׁי If you restrain your foot because of the Shabbos, from performing your affairs on My holy day…'

Der Heiliger Ruzhiner posits an incredible explanation of these words: - "If a Yid takes on a kaboloh upon himself during Shabbos Shuvah, The Riboino Shel Olam will execute your desire/request on Yom Kippur!"

Rabbi Yossi Goldberg - Hide and seek

כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ 32:9 ***For Hashem's portion is His people***

The Meforshim explain that this Possuk refers to our special status of being the chosen people of Hashem. **Rav Chaim Valozhoner** was once learning a certain piece of the Tanna D'vei Eliyohu that writes as follows, "One of the Middos of Hashem is that He is a **שמח בחלקו** ***happy with His portion***.

Rav Chaim found this very hard to understand and asked, "We are mortal beings and are limited in what we can have and so we need the Midda of **שמח בחלקו**. Meaning that we should be happy even if our portion is not whole and complete." "But Hashem is the Ruler of the whole universe - He has everything without a limit and lacks nothing! So how can it be true to say that He is happy with His portion, which sounds like His portion is incomplete?"

He asked the **Vilna Gaon** who answered him, "What is the portion of Hashem to which we are referring to over here?" **כי חלק ה' עמו** the portion of Hashem is His people, the Yidden. Hashem is **שמח בחלקו** - happy with his portion, meaning that He is happy with us even if we are not perfect. Because we are His beloved portion, and He is happy even if it is incomplete."

As we move out of our "Yom Kippor mode", this is an inspiring way to go forward. Of course we will make mistakes and are not perfect. But we will always remain Hashem's special portion and Hashem will always be lovingly happy over us. This is not just one-way though. Just like when a child discovers that he is adopted, he naturally wants to seek his biological parents. So too once we discover that we are the portion of Hashem, we must seek Him out and forge a close bond.

Rav Yackov Galinsky tells a story that happened to **Rav Boruch Mimezbush**. One day he heard a child crying outside so he rushed out to see if he could help him. When he was outside, he could hear

the crying but he could not see a child anywhere. "Where are you, my child?" he called out. "Here!" the child sobbed, "up here!" Rav Boruch looked up and saw the child sitting high up on a tree. "Why are you up there?" he asked the child. Still sobbing, the child replied, "I was playing with my friends a game of hide and seek. After being caught so many times I decided to hide somewhere where they will not find me easily. So I climbed up this tree." "But as I was waiting for them to look for me, a different friend came along with a ball. They promptly forgot about our game of hide and seek and went off to play ball." The child was crying profusely now, "I hid so well and yet no one came to find me!"

Much to the child's surprise, Rav Boruch too burst into tears, "Aye ya yey!" he sobbed, "Isn't this exactly what Hashem says?" "I hid Myself in the world and yet people seem more interested in playing ball than finding Me; no one comes to find Me!!" May we be Zoche to seek Hashem and to find Him.

Jewish Education Program Queens [JEP] - If Hashem is Just, Why is Life So Unfair?

הַצּוּר תָּמִים פָּעֳלוֹ כִּי כָל־דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט "The Rock, [Hashem], perfect is His work, for all his paths are justice…" (Devarim 32:4)

The Chofetz Chaim zt"l was bothered by the following question: The pasuk declares that Hashem is just. Yet, sometimes we see "injustice" such as a righteous person lacking life's basic needs like food and clothing. The Chofetz Chaim asked, "Isn't Hashem also capable of providing the tzadik's needs without him needing to beg for assistance?"

The Chofetz Chaim answered this question with a parable:

The only child of a very wealthy man fell deathly ill. No doctor could heal him. An expert doctor was brought in from afar and was successful. The doctor told the father that to prevent a relapse,

the son must never eat fatty meat. Once, when no one was looking, the son ate some fatty meat and became deathly ill. Only with much effort was the expert doctor successful in saving this child's life, again. Sometime later the father hosted a party at which he kicked his son out of the dining room. The guests were in shock at the actions of this "cruel" father. Only the father knew that this was an act of love to prevent the death of his beloved son.

Hashem is like the father in this parable. Sometimes Hashem must "remove" a tzadik from the "dining room" **for his own benefit**, even though bystanders can't understand the reason.

Everything that Hashem does is for our ultimate good even though we don't always understand it.



During the Holocaust, there was a brother and sister whose family had perished. The sister was caught by the Nazis and was brought to Gestapo headquarters. The brother couldn't bear to lose his beloved sister and acted without thinking. He walked into Gestapo headquarters and demanded his sister's return. The Nazi on duty looked at him in disbelief. He was ready to shoot him on the spot when he had a strange thought. "Jew", he said, "When you grow hair on the palm of your hand, I will let you take your sister". The Jew opened his hand and to the Nazi's shock, there <u>was</u> hair on his palm. With a terrified scream, the Nazi shouted," Jewish devil! Take your sister and leave, quickly!" The brother and sister ran into the forest and survived the war.

What happened here? A few years earlier, the brother was in an accident in which his hand had gotten caught in a piece of machinery.

During surgery, the doctors grafted a piece of skin from his leg onto his palm. The grafted piece of skin grew some hair on it, which was a very unusual occurrence. I am sure, at that time, the brother wasn't very happy about the accident or his grotesque hand. It was only years later, when this "accident" proved to be the means of his sister's survival, that the brother could appreciate the past "accident".

Hashem loves us so much and all that he does is for our ultimate benefit!

L'Maaseh… A Tale to Remember

The *Chofetz Chaim* used to give a *mussar* discourse every Shabbos night between *Kaballas Shabbos* and *Maariv*. Twenty to twenty-five boys would gather at his house for the talk. At one of these occasions, the *Chofetz Chaim* told the boys that he had a secret which he wished to reveal to them, but he was unable to divulge it at that time. Instead, he requested that they return at three o'clock in the morning, and he would reveal the secret to them then.

The news that the *Chofetz Chaim* was revealing a special secret at three in the morning spread quickly through the *yeshivah* and the town of Radin like wildfire. When three o'clock arrived, the house of the *Chofetz Chaim* and the adjoining courtyard were packed with people. Everyone thought that the *Chofetz Chaim* was about to reveal when *Moshiach* was going to arrive!

The *Chofetz Chaim* began to address the crowd, and surprisingly, he began reciting the *brachah* which each person recites every morning, translating each word in Yiddish as he recited them. "*Elokai, the neshamah which you gave me is pure, You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me, and You preserve it within me, and You will eventually take it from me and return it within me in the Time to Come.*" The *Chofetz Chaim* then repeated, "*And You will return it to*

me! It doesn't say that *'You will return a neshamah to me'*, but *'You will return* ***it*** *to me'*. The same *neshamah* which is taken from a person at the end of his life is the very same one that is returned to him in the future! It is returned in the same condition that it was taken from him! A pure *neshamah* will be returned pure! A stained *neshamah* will be returned stained! A torn *neshamah* will be returned torn!"

The *Chofetz Chaim* cried out, "Everybody is awaiting *Techiyas HaMeisim*. We have to remember that the same *neshamah* that we have in this world will be the one returned to us! Woe to us! How great is our shame! Everybody will be standing by *Techiyas HaMeisim*— Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Aharon *HaKohein*, the *Avos*, all the *Tanaim* and *Amoraim*. Everyone will return to life with pure *neshamos*, and I will be there with my stained *neshamah*! It will be returned to me, it will be returned to me!" The *Chofetz Chaim* cried out again and again.

"The time to do *teshuvah*," the *Chofetz Chaim* taught, "Is now— while we still *have* the time!"



R' Chayim Yosef Dovid Azulai *zt"l* (Chida, Kisei Rachamim) would say: כִּי שֵׁם ה' אֶקְרָא הָבוּ גֹדֶל לֵאלֹקינוּ –(32:3) There are 7 words corresponding to the 7 times we lain the *Torah*: Monday, Thursday, *Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, Chol Hamoed, Yom Tov* and *Yom Kippur*.

There are 25 letters in this *posuk*, corresponding to the 25 *Aliyos* throughout the year: 3 - weekday and *Shabbos Mincha*, 4 - *Rosh Chodesh* and *Chol Hamoed*, 5 - *Yom Tov*, 6 - *Yom Kippur*, 7 - *Shabbos* morning.

When we call out *Hashem's* Name this is a reference to reading from the *Torah*.



Jewish Education Program Queens [JEP] - I Did Not Realize Until Now! שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹקיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בַּעֲוֹנֶךָ

"Return O Israel to Hashem your G-D for you have fallen because of your sin". Haftorah for Shabbos Shuva (from Parshas Vayelech) (Hoshea 14:2)



Rav Saadia Gaon zt"l was the pre-eminent Jewish leader in the 900's. Once he was a guest at the home of a fellow Jew who did not recognize him. The Jew welcomed his guest warmly and treated him with the utmost respect. He treated him in a fine fashion, the same way he would treat any fellow Jew. The next day, when the host found out that his guest was none other than the great Rav Saadia Gaon, he felt terrible. He quickly ran to find the great sage. When he found Rav Saadia Gaon, the host begged his forgiveness. He apologized saying, had he known who his guest was, he would have treated him with more respect. Rav Saadia Gaon was surprised. He responded that the host welcomed him with open arms and <u>did</u> treat him very respectfully. The host responded that it was true that he treated Rav Saadia Gaon with respect. However, **had he known who he was, he would have treated him with <u>even more</u> respect**.

Rav Saadia Gaon learned a lifelong lesson from the words of his host. His host had felt the need to apologize for not having given him the proper respect the day before, based on his new knowledge today, of who his guest was. Rav Saadia Gaon felt that he should feel the same way, regarding his relationship with Hashem. He felt that he currently had more of an appreciation of Hashem than he did the day before. Taking the lead from his host, he felt that he had to apologize to Hashem for not have shown Hashem greater respect the day before, based on his his new-found understanding of

Hashem. From that day forward, Rav Saadia Gaon repented every single day for not having shown Hashem the proper respect the day before. (based on a dvar Torah quoted by **Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Beyfuss** in his sefer Yalkut Lekach Tov)

Based on Rav Saadia Gaon's actions, we can understand the answer to a glaring question. On Yom Kippur, we spend an entire day, close to Hashem. We abstain from physical pleasures such as eating, drinking, washing ourselves, …. We are almost like angels who have no physical needs. We spend almost the entire time praying to Hashem enumerating our many sins and begging Hashem for forgiveness. If we are sincere in our pleading, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur we feel a sense of accomplishment. We feel that we exerted all our efforts to cleanse ourselves from our sins. Immediately following the Yom Kippur prayers, we pray the weekday evening prayer. In the Shmone Esray we say to Hashem, "Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned". If we just spent our entire day cleansing ourselves of our sins, why are we asking for forgiveness for our sins? What sins do we have now? Based on Rav Saadia Gaon's actions, we can understand the answer to our question. We spent an entire day begging Hashem for forgiveness and enumerating our many sins. We declared Hashem's greatness and loving kindness. We felt ourselves coming ever closer to Hashem. Now we realize just how terrible our past sins really were. Based on this new understanding, now we plead to Hashem, please forgive us for our prior sins.

The closer we get to Hashem, the more we realize how much we owe Him.

"The entire song of Ha'azinu contains within it all that will happen to the Jewish people until the coming of Mashiach." -Vilna Gaon.

The Torah Any Times Newsletter

Rabbi Simantov Yanetz - Nourishing Effects

Something that we generally do every day or so is recite Birkat HaMazon after consuming a meal with bread. As opposed to most other blessings which are rabbinically mandated, Birkat HaMazon is unique in that it is of Biblical origin and thus carries with it greater stringencies and requirements. Yet something less known is a fascinating comment and insight shared by **Rav Yehudah Ashkenazi**, also known as the **Be'er Heitev**, one of the primary commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch.

In the laws of Birkat HaMazon (Orach Chaim 185:1), he writes: "Why is the letter pei-sofit (final pei) missing from the entire text of Birkat HaMazon? It is to allude to the fact that whoever recites Birchat HaMazon with proper concentration, neither Divine anger ('af ' in Hebrew and cognate to the letter pei/fei) nor fury will be meted out against him. In addition, his source of food and income will be readily available in plenty and with honour all the days of his life." As clearly indicated and guaranteed by the Be'er Heitev, the simple act of thanking Hashem by reciting Birkat HaMazon after a meal ensures tremendous blessing and prosperity. Hashem rewards such an individual measure for measure, in return for his dedicated and meticulous recital of this ever-important after-blessing.

The reverberating impact such a committed action can have is in no way minor and small. It carries immense weight and has the potential of affecting us in ways we may never have considered. Let me share with you a true story.

Years ago, a simple and sincere Jew had the practice of reciting Birkat HaMazon with meticulous attention and concentration. It wasn't long before his unusually intense way of reciting Birkat HaMazon became widely recognized, and the rabbi of his shul realized that there may be a story behind his scrupulous conduct.

Approaching his congregant, the rabbi politely and curiously asked what motivated him to be so careful with the way he bentched. "Rabbi," the man replied, "let me tell you. When I was twelve years old, I learned in a cheder (elementary school) in Poland.

One day, **Rav Meir Shapiro** came to visit our class and asked, 'Does anyone know why the letter pei sofit is missing from Birkat HaMazon?' Of course, none of us knew the answer. But then Rav Shapiro told us the explanation of the Be'er Heitev. I was so impressed by what I heard and learned, that from then on, I committed to always reciting Birkat HaMazon with my utmost focus.

"Years later, I found myself standing in line before the Nazis, waiting to be directed either to the left or right, to death or to life. I shook in my place, dreading when it would come my turn to discover my fate. At that moment, I began whispering, 'G-d, I now need You to repay me for my commitment to always reciting Birkat HaMazon with concentration. I need you to fulfil the promising words of the Be'er Heitev…' "As I neared the front of the line, I realized what I was up against.

The Nazi guards would certainly ask me my occupation and inquire what I could do to assist their war efforts. But, as a young yeshiva student, I had little experience in anything particular. I had no idea what to say. "Just then, a man from behind tapped me on the shoulder. 'Young boy,' he whispered in my ear, 'tell them that you are a chef and I am your helper, and both of us will be saved…' I did just that. Without further questioning, the Nazi guards pointed me towards the working line along with my new friend.

A few hours later, we were told that we would be needed as cooks in the kitchen in Auschwitz. "And so," concluded the man to the rabbi, "not only did I survive the war, but I had plenty of food available throughout it all. Following the war, I moved to America, and ever since then, thank G-d, I have lived with a steady and comfortable income for myself and my family.

I attribute it all to those words of the Be'er Heitev that I learned that day from Rav Meir Shapiro. It is in reward for my commitment to reciting Birkat HaMazon so carefully my whole life that I am here alive and thriving. "And that is why I still, to this very day, say each and every word of Birkat HaMazon with such care and concentration. It kept me alive years ago and keeps me alive to this very day."

While the incredible words of the Be'er Heitev should inspire us to accept upon ourselves such high standards of focus when bentching, the lesson to be learned applies across the board, in all areas of Yiddishkeit. The ripple effect of a genuine commitment to Torah and mitzvos is immeasurable. It connects us to Hashem in an especially close and intimate way and showers us with untold blessing. And just sometimes, it holds the power to do no less than save our lives.

Rabbi Eliezer Abish -The Trojan Horse

In the well-known tale from the Trojan War, the Greeks used the Trojan Horse as subterfuge to enter the city of Troy. After ten unsuccessful years of laying siege against Troy, the Greeks built an enormous wooden horse, and hid a band of men inside. As this was done, the Greeks boarded their ships and pretended to sail away, prompting the Trojans to pull the horse into their city as a victory trophy. But, in fact, the Greeks had in no way given up. At night, the Greek force snuck out from inside the horse and opened the gate for the rest of their army, which had sailed back in the stealth of night. The Greek army entered the city and devastated it, thereby ending the war.

Today, the term "Trojan Horse" has broadened applications. It is used to reference any ruse or strategy which fools one into mistakenly allowing an enemy into a protected stronghold or mainstay. Technologically speaking, a computer program which maliciously tricks one into using it is called a "Trojan Horse." But in the computing world at large, the Trojan Horse also signifies the

creation of a backdoor, a legitimately hidden or separate program installed into the larger operating system which allows its creator or manufacturer to bypass normal authentication and gain exclusive access to the program's core functioning. This allows the program's developers to always have a way to resolve viruses or other malfunctions which arise.



Our Sages (Nedarim 39b) teach that seven things were created before the world was brought into existence, one of them being teshuva, repentance. Teshuva, in this sense, serves as a sort of backdoor. Hashem, knowing man's inherent frailties, embedded into the spiritual makeup of the world the concept of teshuva, for otherwise man would continually spiral downwards and be unable to mend his ways. Without the capability to undo past sins and mistakes, there would be no redeeming virtue to man and he would dismally sink amidst his heap of errors. Teshuva is the Trojan Horse, whereby Hashem grants us secret, exclusive access to the control centre of our lives and enables us to hit the delete key and reprogram ourselves. When we stare teshuva in the face, though, it often intimidates us. We often feel as if we are so covered in sin and have little merit to outweigh it in any which way. But, as we may have heard time and again and it will forever ring so true, all Hashem asks from us is to create a little opening to return to Him, and from there, He will create a much wider opening and compassionately help us along (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2).

In October of 1973, as the Yom Kippur war broke out, **Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau**, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, wished to improve the sorrowful

state of those who were wounded and suffering and be there for his people in a time of need. Looking into where he could go and whom he could assist, he was told, during the incipient days of war, that the best place for him to go would be the hospital where he could lend care and comfort to those injured and hanging onto life by a mere breath.

Following these instructions, Rabbi Lau headed to a local hospital, which turned out to be a burn unit caring for soldiers wounded during combat. Numerous soldiers had unfortunately already found their way there and whatever could be done to alleviate the severity of the burn and provide recovery was done. Rabbi Lau made his way around the rooms, his eyes and ears open and painfully attuned to the suffering of fellow Jews. Finally, Rabbi Meir Lau entered one particular room and noticed two doctors, a nurse and a lady surrounding a soldier lying flat on his back. The soldier was motionless, yet he was screaming and yelling uncontrollably. It was clear that he was in extreme pain and completely burned. Approaching one of the doctors, Rabbi Lau softly asked what had happened that this particular soldier was in such intense discomfort. "He is burned from head to toe," explained the doctor. "There is nothing we can do for him. We keep on giving him more and more morphine, but it doesn't appear to be helping. We told him that if he will fall asleep, he won't feel the pain of his burns anymore, but he keeps on crying out in agony."

Rabbi Lau looked down at the soldier, and tried whispering a few comforting words, but the soldier's shouting abated not one bit. With nothing more to do for this soldier, Rabbi Lau left the room and headed out to the hallway. Now outside the room, Rabbi Lau could not stop thinking about the soldier's distress. His heart went out to him, as screams could be heard even in the hallway. Rabbi Lau continuously paced back and forth and back and forth, his heart beating heavily and palms sweaty, concerned about the health and welfare of the soldier. Just ten minutes later, the screaming

suddenly stopped, and Rabbi Lau stopped in his tracks. No more screaming must have meant something catastrophic. That was it. The soldier had succumbed to his wounds. Tears formed in the eyes of Rabbi Lau.

Slowly heading back towards the room, Rabbi Lau opened the door and saw what appeared to be the soldier peacefully asleep and his mother calmly sitting at his side. Shocked and confused, Rabbi Lau approached the mother and asked what had happened. From one second to the next, the soldier went from uncontrollable screaming to serene sleeping. "Rabbi Lau," began the mother, "my son was burned from top to bottom. His skin was raw everywhere. But the whole time that he was screaming, I kept hoping and looking for one tiny place that remained unburned. Finally, I found right under the back of his knee a small area of just maybe three inches of skin that wasn't burned. I started caressing it and gently whispering in his ear, 'It's okay, Mommy's here, Mommy's here…' Before long, my son stopped crying and fell asleep."

Years later, when Rabbi Lau would recount this story, he would point to a major truism of life which he witnessed at that time. "Who was the one to comfort the soldier? Who was the one to quiet him down and make him forget his pain? His mother. It wasn't the doctor or the nurse or his friend. It was his mother, whose whole goal in life was to care after her son and love him. Someone like that, who really, really cares, will never give up and will search and search until a spot is found to caress and comfort."

The same is true of our relationship with Hashem. The love He has for us is immeasurable and can in no way be qualified or quantified. And so, even if we are covered with burns of sin from head to toe, Hashem will look and look all around to find that one miniscule spot which is pure and pristine. That one small thought of teshuva and change of heart will find immense favour in the eyes of Hashem and be the tiny opening that will be embraced and caressed. That one

little effort the size of a needle will be the backdoor which ushers us inside through the gates of Heaven and enables us to be reunited with our Father.



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"מחצתי ואני ארפא ואין מידי מציל" *"I wounded and I heal, and there is no rescuer from My hand."* (32:39)

It should have said the reverse, "There is no rescuer from My hand; I wound and I heal"?

An ill *chassid* who many doctors were unable to help, desperately visited his Rebbe for a blessing and advice. He was told, "Consult the professor in the town of Anipoli. He will cure you." The ailing *chassid* spared no effort or money and made the arduous trip. Upon arrival he was disappointed to learn that there was no professor, no doctor, and not even a medical attendant in the tiny hamlet of Anipoli. Dumbfounded, he returned to his Rebbe and told him that in Anipoli there were no medical experts.

"Then tell me," asked the Rebbe, "What do the people of Anipoli do when someone, G-d forbid, is sick?"

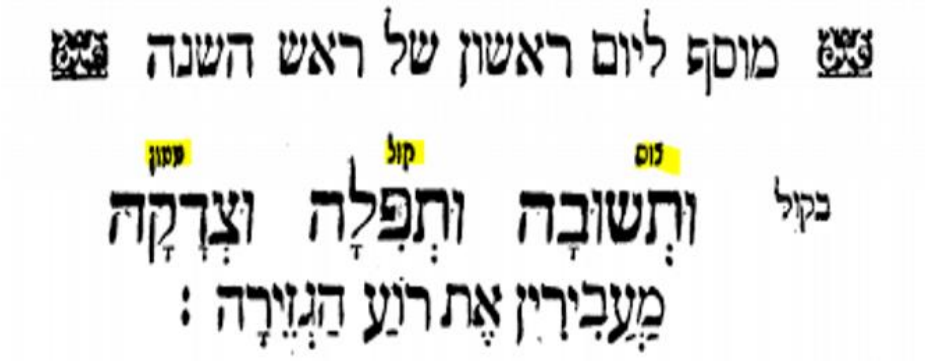
"What do they do?" said the *chassid*, "I suppose they have no other option but to trust in Hashem and ask Him to send the healing from Heaven."

"He is the One," exclaimed the Rebbe. "That is the professor of Anipoli that I referred you to. Put your faith in Hashem and He who helps the people of Anipoli will surely help you too."

Hashem is saying, "*Machatzti*" — "I wounded" — "*ve'ani erpeh*" — "and I heal," [whenthe person realizes that] "*ve'ein miyadi matzil*" — "there is no rescuer from My hand" — i.e. he honestly believes that it is not the doctors who bring healing, but Hashem.



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לו חכמו ישכילו זאת יבינו לאחריתם ***"Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would understand what their end would be."*** **(32:29)** The word "*zot*" — "this" — is superfluous?

In the prayers on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* we proclaim, **וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וּצְדָקָה מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה**— "Repentance, prayer, and charity avert the severity of the decree."

In all *machzorim* above these words are printed in small letters, "*kol, tzom, mamon*" (**קול, צום, ממון**) — "Voice (of prayer), fasting, money (for charity)." The merit of the Jewish people is determined by how they excel in these three things, and the total numerical value of the three is four hundred and eight, which is also the numerical value of the word "*zot*" (**זאת**).

This *pasuk*, which is read usually during the High Holiday season, is hinting that "Were they wise they would comprehend '*zot*' — the achievements that are derived through — '*kol, tzom,* and *mamon*' — 'voice, fast, and money' " — and "*yavinu*" — they would understand that it plays an important role — "*le'acharitam*" — for their future, i.e., through it they will merit to be inscribed in the Book of Life with all the best, materially and spiritually.

Hashem challenges the Jewish people, "*Ubechanuni na bezot*" — "Test Me, if you will, with '*zot*' — 'this' " (Malachi 3:10), i.e. perform the three things which add up to "*zot*" — four hundred and eight — and "[See] if I do not open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out upon you blessings without end."

Unfortunately, there are people who do not realize or refuse to recognize what can be accomplished through these three things. King David says of such people, "*Ukesil lo yavin et zot*" — "A fool cannot understand '*zot*' — 'this' " (Psalms 92:7), i.e. the importance of '*kol, tzom* and *mamon*' which have the same numerical value (408) as the word '*zot.*' (**מסלתון – בית יעקב ר' יעקב הכהן ז"ל טראב ראב"ד ביירות**)

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***"כי לא דבר רק הוא מכם" "For it is not an empty thing for you [lit. from you]."* (32:47)**

It should have just said "for it is not an empty thing." The word "*mikem*" — "for you" — is superfluous?

Moshe was telling the people, "If you find an emptiness, i.e. unsatisfying quality, in Torah — the failure stems '*mikem*' — 'from you.' Obviously your effort and diligence is insufficient.

(ירושלמי פאה פ"א ה"א)

Alternatively, the *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 9b) says, "One who repeats his chapter one hundred times is not to be compared with one who repeats it one hundred and one times." When it was customary to review one's studies one hundred times, one hundred and one times would accomplish much more. For doing more than normal, the success experienced is not just proportional to the additional times, but far greater (see *Tanya*, ch. 15).

The word "*mikem*" — "from you" — has the numerical value of one hundred. The *pasuk* is teaching us that should you find Torah unsatisfying, the reason is "*mikem*" — the fault lies in you — you are only studying it 100 times, i.e. not exceeding your normal routine. **(פנינים יקרים בשם נתיבות עולם)**

Rabbi Yehoshua Alt - Elephants and Monkeys



The Gemara says that if one sees an elephant or monkey, he recites the bracha of **משנה הבריות**, diversifies creatures. In fact, to be able to say the bracha of **משנה הבריות,** diversifies creatures, some great people went to the zoo in order to recite it on an elephant and monkey.

The Melachas Shlomo explains that we say it on elephants and monkeys since the **דור המבול** was punished by being turned into elephants and monkeys. That is, the monkey is similar to man and elephants understand the language of humans.

The Minchas Elazar (1868-1937) recited this during his stay in Berlin. **The Steipler** (1899-1985) took his children to the zoo in Ramat Gan to one of the gardens that had monkeys, where he recited the bracha of **משנה הבריות**.

Here are some other accounts of great people visiting animals.

1) **The Chida** (1724-1806) describes strange and scary animals he saw in London where they also had animals from America. In his sefer Maagal Tov, the Chida tells of his visit to a taxidermy exhibit in Holland featuring a vast array of animals and insects.

2) **The Sefer Ohaiv Shalom** relates that when **R' Shalom Kaminka** travelled to Vienna to seek out doctors, he also visited the zoo.

3) **The Divrei Chaim** (1793-1876) while he was in Vienna visited the zoo of the palace.

4) **R' Tzvi Hirsch Shapira** (1850-1913), known as the Darkei Teshuva, went with his disciples to see strange animals.

5) **The Leket Yosher** testifies about his rebbe—the **Terumas Hadeshen** (1390-1460)—that he once took a walk on Shabbos particularly to see the lions, when a pair of lions were brought to the city, because he had never seen a lion before.

Parshah Thoughts Ideas and Reflections *Rabbi Aron Moshe Jacobsohn*



Towards the beginning of this week's *parshah* (32:11), Hashem is compared to an eagle: *As an eagle awakens her nest, hovers over her young, spreads out her wings, takes them and carries them on her pinions.*

Rashi points out the difference between eagles and other birds with regard to how they transport their young. All birds carry their young in their claws to protect them from other birds. Eagles don't have to fear other birds taking their young since they fly at a higher altitude than all other birds. Yet, they must be afraid of a hunter's arrows flying towards their young. By placing their young birds on their backs, they are in effect saying, "let the arrows pierce me and not my kin." This is how it is with Hashem's protection of us.

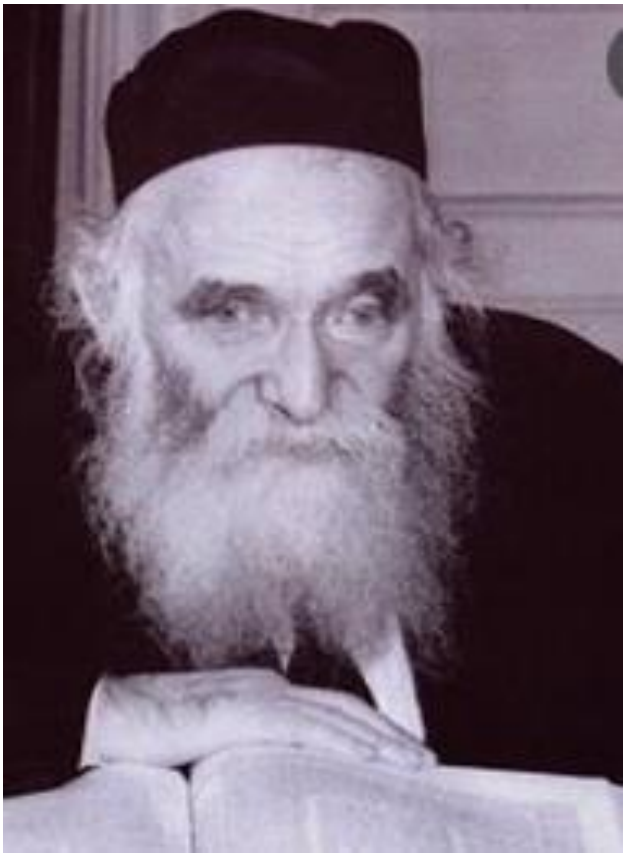
Another, beautiful point to glean from this is that the young birds must take the first step by climbing onto their mother's back. It is this trust that the young have that enable it to be protected.

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS HA'AZINU

A Most Heroic Fiancée by Daniel Keren







Rabbi Dovid Ribiat recently told the story of **Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, zt"l,** 1870-1953) who shortly after he became engaged to Baila Hinda, the daughter of the prominent **Rav Shraga Feivel Frank** discovered that he had a serious health issue and his doctors didn't think that he would live another year.

Rabbi Meltzer told his young fiancée that it wasn't fair for him to hold her to the engagement under such conditions.

But Baila Hinda was so impressed by the spiritual purity of her chasan that she told her parents that she didn't want to break the

engagement even it meant that she would only be worthy to be married to Rabbi Meltzer for just a year. Her parents were not so sure that this was a wise decision by their daughter whom they loved very much. And finally, it was agreed that the question of whether or not to continue the engagement should be brought to the gadol hador – **the Chofetz Chaim** (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, zt"l, 1838-1933).

The Chofetz Chaim responded that some people are healthy and other people have arichas yomim hinting that Rabbi Meltzer might never again be very healthy but would be destined to have a long life. As a result of that response Baila Hinda decided not to break the engagement and indeed they married, and he merited to live to an old age of 83. He became a distinguished Marbitz Torah and Rosh Yeshiva.

Among their children was a daughter Rivka Chana Perel who married **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, zt"l** (1891-1962) and together they were the progenitors of the Kotler dynasty that continues to guide the world-famous Beth Medrash Govoha Yeshiva in Lakewood to this day.

Besamei HaTorah …Beneath the Surface - *R' Shmuel Winzelberg*

יערף כמטר לקחי, תזל כטל אמרתי (לב:ב)

May my teaching drip like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew. (32:2)

The *Tzaddik*, Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Pshischa explains that the words of the Torah are like the rain that falls down to earth. Just like the rain does not immediately reveal its influence on things that grow from the ground; only after some time does one see the influence of blessing of the rain that it has benefited the earth. So too is the effect of the words of the Torah on those that hear them; at the time that students hear the words of Torah they do not

appreciate the influence of these thoughts, it is only after some time that those who learn Torah appreciate the blessing of the words that they had previously heard. (*Parperaos LaTorah*)

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld- *Rosh Hayeshiva Yeshivas Beis Dovid*



This week, Parshas Haazinu, the Torah tells us towards the end of the parsha in perek **וַיְדַבֵּר ה׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם - לב:מח הַזֶּה לֵאמֹר** The Riboino Shel Olam is telling Moishe Rabeinu how he is going to leave this world. To go up onto the mountain and eventually die there.

Rashi points out, that the words that we just mentioned, **בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה** - "***that very same day***", mean, mid-day. Furthermore, he mentions the three occasions in the Torah where this particular phrase is written.

The first one is when Noach was ready to enter into the Teivah and it would be in the middle of the day when he entered. There would be no sneaking in.

The next occurrence is when Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim and the Egyptians were going to kill them. Hashem brought about this miracle in the middle of the day for the world to see.

Finally, it is brought in this week's sedra in regard to the death of Moishe Rabeinu. All of Klal Yisrael said that they are not going to let Moishe Rabeinu die. But Hashem said that it is going to occur in the middle of the day.

This is an ***incredible*** thing, because with regard to Moishe Rabeinu dying, how could they have prevented this? The Riboino Shel Olam

decides who lives and who dies and when. How is it possible to do something to prevent Moishe dying?

The answer is very simple,- **"Tefilla."** Klal Yisrael could have davened in all three cases brought by Rashi. But in this week's sedra in particular, they could have davened for Moishe Rabeinu to not die. However, it required a miracle on The Riboino Shel Olam's part, to ensure that Moishe Rabeinu would die in spite of the Yidden's tefillos. – ***That is the strength of tefilla!***

The כח of tefilla is so incredible. It can stop anything.

At the levaya of **Reb Moishe Feinstein Ztl**, somebody said, that Reb Moishe had been ill so many times, but recovered each time. Reb Moishe himself said that the reason was because of all the organised tefillas throughout Klal Yisrael that were said on his behalf. However, the last illness was so sudden, that there was no time to arrange communal tefilla groups, and that is how he died. – Tefilla can save anything.

On Rosh Hashana and when it came to Tekiyas Shofar, they were waiting for **The Heilige Berditchever Rav Ztl** to blow shofar. He waited and waited for an extended period of time. The people did not understand what the delay was all about. After an hour, the Berditchever said, "Ok, now we can begin".

After davening, they ask him what the delay was for. What was happening in shamayim that you don't want to reveal to us?

He replied, " An am Haaretz- a simple Jew who had never davened in his life walked into shul and he sees everybody dressed in their Shabbos clothes and kittles. All of them are davening from their machzorim with serious and deep intentions. He turns round and said, dear G-d, I don't know how to daven. I don't know how to learn. I don't know any of this. But I can see that today is a holy day. The only thing that I know is the Alep Beis. So that is what I am going

to say, and that is going to be my prayer. And he starts saying, Aleph, Beis, Gimmel, Daled….. "



Said the Berditchever, "In shamayim, the malachim were scrambling to put together his pure tefilla of the Aleph Beis into the perfect tefilla. Something beautiful and worthwhile. ***That is the koach of tefilla".***

We are holding close to the Yamim Noraim. This week's parsha is a hakdamah to Yom Hakipurim. A day that we will be standing in shul all day with so much tefilla.

Tefilla means so much to Klal Yisral. The koach of tefilla is gevaldige. It means so much to us. We are begging for our lives, that we should have a good year. All the gezairas should be mevatel and go away. Klal Yisrael should look favourable in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Everybody should have parnasso. Everybody should have health. Everybody should have nachas. Everybody should have **כל מילה דטובה.**

Through our kol kol Yaakov – the koach of Tefilla, may Hashem bestow upon us a **גמר חתימה טובה and a gut g'bentched yar.**

הַאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וַאֲדַבֵּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־פִי

The Baal HaTurim remarks that this Pasuk begins with the letter **ה** and ends with the letter **י** - for Moshe included the name of HaShem at the beginning of the song.



לחץ – STRESS

"The word for stress is לחץ. The letter ה׳ represents Hashem's name. When we remember Hashem, we place the letter ה׳ into the word לחץ and it becomes הצלחה– success.

We go from stressed to blessed the moment we remember that Hashem is in charge"

More Than You Love Yourself – R' David Ozeri



What do you love more than anything else?

You love yourself more than anything else. I will prove it to you.

Imagine somebody in your family gets married. They call you up and say come round, we got the wedding pictures. Come and look at the album. You go round, they show the album to you, you turn one page, and then another page. All of a sudden you stop! – you look, you turn it this way and that way. What are you looking at? – yourself!

Ladies, what are you going to say when you see it? – 'Och I look awful.'

Why do you do that? Because you want the other person to say. "No, you look beautiful."

Why? Because you love yourself.

Men, has anyone ever come over to you and said that somebody told them that you are the greatest guy in the world. What's your reaction?

'What did you say? Say it again'.

What's the matter, you didn't hear it the first time? All of a sudden you went deaf?

You just want to hear it again. Why?

Because you love yourself.

Hashem loves you much more than you love yourself! It's impossible to comprehend just how much Hashem loves you!

The Meaning of Life

"When I was 5 years old, my mom always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up.

I wrote down 'Happy.'

They told me I didn't understand the assignment and I told them they didn't understand life!"

R' Yisroel Salanter ZT"L would say:

"Chassidim think they have already acquired a Rebbe; Misnagdim think they don't need a Rebbe. Both are mistaken!"

The Way of Emunah – Rabbi Meir Isamar Rosenbaum

The Four Days Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos - The Light of Dveikus During these Days

We currently are in the middle of a period of holy and awesome days – the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos.

It is well-known that the **Chasam Sofer zy"a** composed a number of incredible piyyutim (which are published under the name "Shiras Moshe).



Sefer Tiyul B'Pardes (Chelek 2, Maareches 4) relates that **Rav Shimon Sofer zt"l**, Rov of Krakow, once asked his father, the Chasam Sofer, when he had the time to write these piyyutim. He learned Torah every moment of the day and didn't have a spare second. Where did he find the time for this?

The Chasam Sofer answered, ***"During the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, I was so immersed in 'dveikus' that I was unable to learn. In that time, I composed songs and piyyutim of love and longing for Hashem!"***

"The song of Ha'azinu teaches that Jewish history is not random. Behind every rise and fall stands the guiding hand of Divine providence." ~ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

You are Unique – R' Meir Simcha Sperling

כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ – Everyone of us are needed in this world. The fact that you are alive, shows that Hashem needs you in this world. You bring a certain light into this world that nobody else has.



You, I'm talking to you right now even if you feel bad, even if you're not doing so well right now, you've got something that nobody else can do. Everybody has different fingerprints because everybody has a job that's different. so we need you.

It doesn't necessarily eyes mean you're famous. That's not what it really means. In Hashem's book, everything that you do counts, and the talents that you have, nobody else has. You are different to everybody else. Only you have your fingerprints, only you have your face. Everyone in this world is different.

So just like an orchestra we need every single piece. If there is one piece missing the conductor will know. If there is one letter missing from the sefer Torah it is possul.

It doesn't matter if we are short or tall, clever or not so smart, it makes no difference. If you can or can't do something, if you are wealthy or not. You don't have to be the best.

Every single Yid is needed. That means we need to appreciate each other. Then we can all come together like a **חֶבֶל** - like a rope. You can make a kiddush Hashem in your own unique way.





Parshas Haazinu always falls out right after Yomim Noroim and right before Succos. There is a message here. After we have spent so much time working upon ourselves, improving ourselves, now we want to know – Is it real, is it lasting? Or was it just a temporary spiritual high?

The Torah tells us: 'Yes, it is very important that when we are on a spiritual high, we must work on ourselves, to improve ourselves and to become better people. But we have to remember of course that when we revert to regular life, and we no longer have the Selichos, Rosh Hashanah, Aseres Y'mei Teshuva and Yom Kippur above us. It is all behind us, but we have to remain with it. We must retain all the resolutions that we made.

Many boys ask me a question. "Is it really worth it working on ourselves, to make resolutions, when we know that we are just going to revert to what we were doing previously?" And I answer with the following mashul:

A young child got a huge Lego set as a present. He builds a huge tower, until weeks later, he completes his tower and is so excited to climb onto his tower that he built. As he climbs up and makes his way to the top of the tower, he spreads out his arms, and says, "look at me, I am at the top of the tower."

And then, it suddenly wobbles, and he falls off the tower. He falls onto the floor and starts to cry, "Tatty,tatty."

His father comes running in and says, "what happened?"



"My tower fell. My tower fell."

"No, my dear son, your tower is still there, it is just you that fell off the tower."

Yes, sometimes we fall. We are human beings. But we have to remember that the tower that we built over the Yomim Noroim and Yomim Toivim is still there.

Have a beautiful and incredible Shabbos Kodesh!

The Words of Jews with No Sins

The Kozheglover Gaon zt"l (Sefer Eretz Tzvi) describes the greatness of the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos as follows:

It appears to me that learning Torah between Yom Kippur and Sukkos is more valuable than all other days of the years because Chazal (Shabbos 119B) praise the "breath of the mouth" of young children who possess no sins and study Torah.

Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, every Jew possesses no sins. In fact, we are even better than young children because they also do not possess mitzvos.

We have the mitzvos that we did, plus we have no sins. Therefore, our Torah during these days is very valuable.

"The Torah is compared to rain because no field can survive without rain, and no Jewish soul can survive without Torah." ~ Chafetz Chaim.

Why Give in Multiples of 18 (Chai)? - Rabbi Yehuda Shurpin



Unpacking the Gematria of 18

Many Jews typically give charity (and gifts) in multiples of 18 (e.g. 18, 36, 54, 72 etc.). On a simple level, this is because the numeric value of the Hebrew word חי (*chai*), which means "life," is 18. We are thus symbolically blessing both the recipient and the giver with good, long lives.

Who Started It?

It isn't clear when or where this custom originated, but one classic example dates back to the 1700s when, on multiple occasions, **the Baal Shem Tov** instructed people to donate in multiples of 18, using the term *chai*.

An earlier source for donating 18 coins is found in the Code of Jewish Law (and quoted in Tanya): one who transgresses a sin which would have required an animal offering during the Holy Temple era, should donate 18 *peshitim* (coins) to charity.

In this case, there is no significance to the number 18 beyond the fact that 18 *peshitim* was how much a run-of-the-mill sheep would have cost back then. Nonetheless, some look to it as precedent for giving in multiples of 18, since nothing in our lives is truly happenstance.

The Significance of 18

The Talmud and Midrash list many things that are specifically in the amount of 18 or *chai*:

Our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov are mentioned together in the Torah 18 times.

There are 18 passages in which Hashem communicates with Moshe and Aaron as equals.

Hashem's name appears 18 times in the Shema.

There are 18 "commands" in the Torah regarding the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

Hashem's name appears 18 times in Psalm 29.

There are 18 vertebrae in a person's spine.

In fact, these are the reason the Sages instituted that the daily Amidah should consist of 18 blessings.

Rabbi Yehuda Lowe, the Maharal of Prague, further explains that this number is associated with the Divine attribute of mercy. The additional (19th) blessing, in which we ask G-d to judge our enemies, is not included in the 18, which are all about mercy, blessing and life.

Additional Significance

The mystics point out that 18 is also the numeric value of *chessed* (kindness), *osher* (wealth) and *kofer* (atonement), when one uses the system of *mispar katan*, in which all zeroes are removed.

Osher	עושר	Wealth	7+6+3+2=18
Kofer	כופר	Atonement	2+6+8+2=18
Chesed	חסד	Kindness	8+6+4=18

This reflects the three primary motivations for giving charity: to merit Divine kindness, achieve atonement for a misdeed, or as the Talmud tells us, to merit an abundance of livelihood.

Just Give!

At times, the Rebbe would advise giving in various other increments, depending on the circumstances. Overall, the main thing is to give as much as you can, providing as much assistance to others as you are able. For charity, no matter the amount, has the ability to save us from danger, and in its merit, we will usher in the Ultimate Redemption, may it happen imminently.

Rabbi Shlomo Landau – Precious Tears



On 16th Av תש״ל - Aug 18th 1970 a terrible tragedy occurred in the USA. A young mother with 7 little children passed away. The oldest child was just 13, and the youngest was just a year old. The husband and the 7 orphans were left all alone. It was just before the time that incredible organisations had been set up to assist families such as this one in times of need.

For the last year and a half, the mother had been in and out of the hospital for treatment, and the children had been shuttled back and forth to uncles or aunts to look after them.

When they came back home from the funeral, they realised that it would not be practical for all the little ones to stay at home for the shivah. It would be too much for everybody.

The father said to his 4-year-old Yankele, "You're going to stay at Uncle Moshe's house for a few days, just like you've done before. You'll be well looked after there, and you will have a great time."

He said, "Ok, but not until mammy says goodnight to me! Once mammy says goodnight to me, I'm ok with going to the Uncle and Aunts."

He tried to fob him off by saying that ok, she'll call you later. But Yankele wouldn't have it, and realised that something was different, and he repeated louder – "No, I'm not going anywhere until mammy says goodnight to me."



The father shrugged his shoulders, and then the most horrific and heartbreaking thing happened… Little Yankele started running from one room to another in search of his mother! He opened cupboards, looked under beds, behind furniture and curtains – crying, "Mammy, where are you? Mammy, I want to say goodnight to you. Mammy, I want to get a goodnight kiss – Where are you?!"

He searches the whole house and is crying, "Mammy, mammy Where are you?!"

[The family later said, "If you thought that a funeral in these circumstances was heartrending, then it was 100 times worse to see and hear this little 4-year-old go through this traumatic experience.]

At some point, the father couldn't take it anymore, and he picked his son up. Yankele was screaming and flailing his arms in all directions, and he took him outside to the car to his waiting Uncle and Aunt.

When the father came back into the house, the rest of his children were all standing there – crying their eyes out. It was just all too much for them. 11-year-old Yocheved turns to her father and says, "Tatty, I don't understand something – If those cries weren't enough to go to the *Kisei Hakavod* and bring mammy back with *Techiyas Hameisim*, then what cries will be enough?"

The father got very serious, and he said, "Listen, I don't understand why those cries weren't enough, but I am sure that they shook the

foundations of shamayim. But you should know something – 'No tears ever go to waste'. If for some reason Hashem decided not to bring mammy back, those tears are definitely valuable, and they are doing something for Klal Yisrael.

She heard and remembered this message as the family sat shivah.

Many many years passed, and little Yankele had now grown up into a chasidishe bochur who started looking for a shidduch at the age of 18. But unfortunately, he is not successful, nothing seems to come together and years pass.

Finally, when he was considered an older bochur, he goes on an amazing shidduch. The girl is 18 years old from a special chosheva family and has wonderful middos etc. Everything works out well, and they get engaged. In **תשמ"ט** the couple get married, and everything is perfect.

A few months into the marriage, Yankele comes home from Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael one afternoon and says to his wife, "I just want to let you know that tonight, I'm not going to be home for supper, and I will also be late home in the morning, as it is my mother's yartzeit, and we will be going to the Beis Olam. I am getting together with a few of my brothers and sisters for the yartzeit. So, I just want to let you know that I'm not going to be around."

He notices that when he says this to her, she gets a little bit sad. He says to her, "Is everything ok?"

She replies, "Well, tonight and tomorrow is my birthday, and I was hoping that we would celebrate it together!"

"Oh, I never *chapped*, I completely forgot that my mother's yartzeit falls on your birthday! Don't worry we'll figure something out. I'll go to the Beis Olam, and then we'll do something together."

Later that night, he calls his sister and tells her of the fact that his wife's birthday falls on their mothers yartzeit. His sister pauses for a few seconds, and says, "Would you do me a favour, and ask your

wife to see her birth certificate, and have a look to see exactly what time she was born."

He asks his wife to quickly get her birth certificate, and he reads the time of her birth to his sister – there is an audible gasp on the other end of the line… "Yankele, you have no idea, and I'll never forget it – that when we came home from the *Leviyah*, you were running around the house looking for mammy crying and screaming 'mammy, mammy I want you, I need you!' – That was exactly the same time as your wife was born in Eretz Yisrael!

Those tears like Tatty said, weren't for nought. Those tears were being stored in Hashem's precious storehouse for such time as they were needed to bring about your shidduch. It was necessary for you to be an older bochur for everything to come together for you to marry your intended younger wife! Hashem worked it all out. You were 4 years old when she was born."

Rabbi Paysach Krohn - Leaves on the Tree



Many years ago, a ten-year-old boy living in Gateshead, England, was walking with his schoolteacher during autumn. The foliage was gorgeous, as a bundle of red, orange and green leaves coloured the scene. As they strolled along together, they noticed that a couple of leaves rested on a park bench. The Rebbe picked up the leaf and then turned to his student.

"This leaf thinks it's free. It thinks that it can fly wherever it wants. But it doesn't realize that in two days, it's going to wither and die. And why? Because it's no longer connected to the source. It's only

those leaves which are still connected to the tree which can still blossom and flourish. They are connected to the source.

"My child," continued the *melamed*, "I want to teach you something that you will remember for the rest of your life. You are going to meet all different kinds of Jews as you get older. Some of those Jews will say, 'We're free! We can eat whatever we want, we can go wherever we want, we can watch whatever we want!' But they are not really free, because shortly will begin their spiritual demise because they are no longer connected to the source, and the source is Torah.

"This is what the Torah means when it is referred to as, "Eitz chaim hi la'machazikim ba— A Tree of Life for all those who hold onto it." Those who hold onto Torah can have the most beautiful, blossoming and flourishing life. But those who turn away from and feel they're free, that is the beginning of the end.

This little boy told me he has lived his life based on this credo. You will recognize the name: **Rav Matisyahu Salomon shlita**, the Mashgiach of the great Lakewood Yeshiva. He has lived with that which the melamed taught him when he was ten years old. Torah is a Tree of Life for all those who hold onto it.

Fascinating INSIGHTS

Eggs and Cholent

Even though the Yerushalmi tells us that it is prohibited to mourn on Shabbos, the mourning over Moshe Rabeinu is different like the gemara says that the mourning for Moshe was especially intense. This is showcased in certain foods we eat on Shabbos. The custom of eating eggs, which is a mourner's food, on Shabbos is because Moshe passed away on this holy day. This custom is also cited in Shyarei Knesses Hagedola who writes that it is even better to eat the eggs by the third meal of Shabbos, when Moshe passed away.

R' Rafael Meizlish writes that the reason we eat *kitniyos*, beans (referring to the beans of cholent) on Shabbos (which is a mourner's food) is due to mourning for Moshe who passed away on Shabbos.

Tosafos cites Rav Sar Shalom Gaon that the reason we say *tzidkascha* ("Your righteousness") on Shabbos at Mincha is because that is when Moshe passed away. The Bach adds that the Zohar informs us that Yosef and Dovid Hamelech also passed away on Shabbos at Mincha time. As a result, we say [pesukim that begin with the word] *tzidkascha* three times.



כִּי ה' אֶקְרָא הָבוּ גֹדֶל לֵאלֹקינוּ *When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d. (32:3)*

The mention of Hashem's Name should evoke feelings of awe, as well as pride. The mere fact that we merit that He counts us as His children, representing Him in the world as His nation, should generate joy and excitement. His Name should resonate throughout our very being, to the point that we want to shout out His Name and declare our allegiance to Him. We must give honour to His Name and all that it represents.

The Torah, which is Hashem's blueprint for our lives, must be an integral part of our life's endeavour. When we study Torah, the joy should be palpable. Knowledge, without joy and enthusiasm in learning, is like a *guf b'li neshamah*, a body without a soul.

Horav Aharon Walkin zl Rav of Pinsk and author of *Bais Aharon*, once visited a Jewish community not far from his home. Having such a distinguished *Rav* visit the community meant much to them.

They asked him to visit the local *yeshivah*, which had broken with the standard of Torah learning in the area and introduced general studies into their daily program. This was long before it became acceptable and even a government-mandated requisite.

They asked that he test the students for their knowledge of *Talmud*. The *Rav* acquiesced and tested the highest class and afterwards rendered his opinion concerning the students: "They know and understand the material; however, this is not considered *limud HaTorah*. They do not live the *sugyos*, topics, which they learn. *Talmud* is just another subject to them. In our *yeshivah* (circles), when one studies *Meseches Bava Metzia* and reads the *Gemorah's* statement, *Leima masnissin d'lo k'Ben Naness*, 'We must say that our *Mishnah* does not coincide with the opinion of *Ben Naness*,' they become visibly upset. Why should the *Mishnah* not agree with *Ben Naness*?

Everything they learn is important to them. I did not make this observation of your students. They learn – they know, but without life and without joy."

A discussion ensued between a group of students in the presence of ***Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl***, concerning the definition of a *masmid*, diligent student. They measured it in the number of hours spent learning.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* listened and added his own thoughts on the matter: "*Hasmadah* is not determined by how many hours one learns without interruption, rather, it is measured by what a person is prepared to do in order to close his *Gemorah*." - It is not how long one studies, but how much one values his learning.

Gedolei Yisrael throughout the generations have lived by the maxim of *Havu godel leiElokeinu;* "Everything that they did was focused on glorifying Hashem." ***Horav Chaim Ezra Barzel, zl***, was a patient in the hospital for an extended period. During his stay, his good friend, ***Horav Sholom Shwadron, zl***, was also a patient. These two sages

had grown up together, their friendship harkening back to their youth. Both sages were battling serious illnesses.

One look into *Rav* Sholom's eyes showed that he was in great emotional pain. When *Rav* Chaim Ezra took a look at *Rav* Sholom, he said, "*Rebbe* Sholom, listen to me." Despite the fact that his voice was low and weak, due to age and illness, the fire and passion that accompanied it were palpable.



"*Rebbe* Sholom, a king has many soldiers. Some fight with tanks, others fight in the sky, yet others fight on the sea and infantry men fight on land. They have paratroopers and special forces. All combine to provide security for their monarch.

True, we are aged and no longer in the physical condition in which we once were. We are unable to establish and teach students as we once did. But, *Rebbe* Sholom, the king has one group of soldiers who do not go into the fray of battle. They remain in the palace and comfort the king with song. - My friend, we can still sing for the King! We can recite *Tehillim* in His honour and praise Him with all our hearts! Come, let us go together and recite *Tehillim* to praise Hashem!"

Rav Sholom's eyes emitted warm tears. He understood that, despite frailty and weakness – they were still soldiers! This is how one fulfils, *Havei godel leiElokeinu*.

We live to glorify His Name with whatever we have, with whatever ability and capacity. After all, that is what soldiers do.

"The Torah is compared to dew because dew descends constantly and quietly, even when a person is unaware of it." ~ Sfas Emes

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau Noda B'yehuda (1713-1790)

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau was the chief Rabbi of Prague. He wrote many seforim. One of them became so popular that people started calling him by its name, Noda B'yehuda. The Noda B'yehuda was an important community figure. When he was a young man, a horrible machlokes, broke out between Rav Yaakov Emden and Rav Yonason Eybeshutz. Most of the Jews in Europe became involved. Some people approached Rav Landau and he was able to settle the machlokes. After that, he became famous throughout Europe.

When the Noda B'yehuda was Rav in Prague, a war broke out between many countries in Europe. For many years the fighting around Prague was very bad. Farms and buildings were destroyed and many people lost their lives.

Through Hashem's kindness and mercy, most of the Jewish community was spared harm. In fact, many Jews started showing off their wealth. They dressed in very fancy clothes. They built large houses and they made large simchas such as Bar/Bas Mitzvahs and weddings. They would invite many people and hold parties well into the night. All of the food that they did not eat they would dump in the street.

There were some poor Jews and many poor non-Jews who hated these wealthy Jews. The people were so jealous that they were getting ready to hurt the Jews.

The Noda B'yehuda knew that he had to take some action. He made rules to help the community remain modest and avoid trouble with the local citizens. He said that people are not allowed to wear very fancy clothes in the streets. When they make a Bar/Bas Mitzvah, they can only invite a small number of people. They can only hire four musicians to play music. These rulers were meant for the rich people. The rich people became very angry with the Noda B'yehuda. They said that they were not going to pay for him to be the Rabbi in Prague. The Noda B'yehuda remained strong.

In the end, everyone realized how wise the Noda B'yehuda was and agreed to cooperate with him. The Noda B'yehuda knew that for the good of the people, he had to teach them about being tznius. Tznius means more than covering our bodies. It also means not showing off and making other people jealous.

Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik (1903-1993)



Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik was known as "The Rav" (the rabbi) to many Jews because he was the teacher of so many rabbis in America. Rabbi Soloveitchik lived in Boston where he was the rabbi of a large shul in New York and where he was the Rosh Yeshiva of a big yeshiva.

Even though the Rav spent most of his days teaching yeshiva students who were adults, the Rav always had enough time to learn Chumash with little children. He loved it when little children would teach him about the parsha.

One Friday, when he was talking at a yeshiva in Boston, he saw a little child crying in the hall. He asked the child what was wrong, and the child said that it was Friday and he had not yet learned about the parsha. The Rav immediately took the child into his office and taught him the whole parsha so the child could tell his parents all about the Parsha when he got home.

The Rav used to say that it was very important for children to learn Parsha.

'Ha'azinu is the song of Jewish history.' ~ Vilna Gaon

Rav Aryeh Levin (1885-1969)

Rabbi Aryeh Levin is known to all as a "Tzaddik in our time." There wasn't a Jewish person R' Aryeh Levin didn't want to help. During the time of the British Mandate, many Jews were taken as prisoners in Israel. - R' Aryeh Levin took it upon himself to visit the Jewish prisoners each and every Shabbos. He would bring back messages to their families of their wellbeing.



One snowy Shabbos in Yerushalayim, there wasn't a single person walking through the streets. Only the footsteps of R' Aryeh Levin could be found in the snow.

As R' Aryeh Levin trudged through the storm, he met another man. R' Aryeh Levin told him he had many messages for the families of the Jewish prisoners and asked him if he would mind helping take a few of those messages. R' Aryeh Levin was very concerned that the families would be worried if they did not get their messages before Shabbos.

Even in a gigantic storm, R' Aryeh thought of his fellow people. The man agreed to take the messages to the families.

R' Aryeh Levin was a gadol who taught us to love each and every Jew and try our best to do chessed for other people at all times.

"Moshe was 'close to heaven' and therefore said 'Ha'azinu' to the heavens. Every Jew, especially during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, has the ability to become closer to heaven than he imagined." ~ Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Chazon Bonai

Hershel was a simple *Yied* living in **ירושלים** in the early 1900s. Hershel worked in a quarry. One day a huge boulder came crashing down onto his foot. He was rushed to the newly built Sha'arei Tzedek hospital where Dr Moshe Wallach stabilised him. Dr Wallach then had to inform Hershel that he would need to amputate his leg. However, if he would travel to Vienna, the doctors there could perform a series of operations to save his leg. They wrote to the hospital who agreed to perform the surgery for the astronomical cost of 10,000 crowns!

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld זצ"ל raised the money for the operation and sent Hershel to Vienna. The Austrian surgeon did some tests on Hershel's leg and informed him that he would in fact need three surgeries at the cost of 30,000 crowns!

Hershel didn't have a penny to his name and couldn't even afford to travel back to **ירושלים**, so faced with no choice, he took another job in a quarry in Vienna despite his excruciating pain.

One day, as he was extracting rocks and yelping in agony, a motorcade passed by, and an esteemed gentleman full of medals on his chest stepped out and noticed Hershel's cries of anguish. He asked Hershel what the issue was, and Hershel explained his sorry situation. The man penned a short note, gave it to Hershel, and said, "Give this to the hospital, they will do the operation for free".

Hershel thought he was being mocked but he went to the hospital to try his luck anyway. The hospital took one look at the paper and rushed him to the fanciest suite where the operation was performed by the royal surgeons!

Hershel returned to **ירושלים** and went to see Rav Yosef Chaim where he recounted the strange story. Rav Yosef Chaim smiled and said, "Don't you realise who that person was?!

It was none other than Emperor Franz-Joseph!"

Hershel paled and started moaning in grief! Rav Yosef Chaim asked him what the matter was, surely, he should be over the moon!?

Hershel explained, "***Had I realised I was standing in front of the Emperor, I would have asked him for so much more!***"

During the days of **עשרת ימי תשובה** , we are standing in the King's palace and He wants to hear what it is that we need. Let us not waste the tremendous opportunity or trivialise this auspicious moment. Ask **ה'** for the things that are really important to you, whether in **רוחניות** or **גשמיות**.

Fascinating INSIGHTS

Grateful and Greatness



We are called **יהודי** , from the term **הודאה** , to be grateful for all we have.(Sefas Emes) Indeed, this is the attitude we begin our day with Modeh Ani, thanking Hashem. As someone once put it, "***We thank before we think***" (referring to Modeh Ani as we say this immediately when we awake).

We should constantly ask ourselves, "What am I grateful for now?" We always have what to be grateful for at any given moment. Our health, food, beautiful weather, just being alive… is not something to be taken for granted. There is a saying, "***It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful***."

It was known that **R' Moshe Feinstein** did not want an air conditioner. He explained the reason: "*What happens if it breaks? Then I can't learn because I became accustomed to it.*"

People may complain about the expense of a car along with its concomitants (the price of gas, insurance, maintenance, etc.). Think about how it used to be until recent history. They never had a car. If you were lucky, you had a horse. The horse needed to eat and sleep. Sometimes the horse was obdurate and obstinate, and wouldn't want to move. Sometimes the horse got sick and died. Nowadays you just fill up your comfortable, smooth and beautiful car and pay some money for its maintenance! There is an expression, "***The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our own blessings***."

R' Simcha Wasserman would recall his reaction when he saw his host change into Shabbos clothes, when he stayed in Mezerich for Shabbos. "I couldn't believe my eyes. Before going to shul the man went to his closest, took out a Shabbos suit and changed. I couldn't imagine that a man could have two suits. I came from Russia, a communist country. There we had nothing, there was no fabric. I had a suit made from flour sacks. And he had a suit to change into!"

The son of **R' Yaakov Kamenetsky** once related that his family was so poor when he was growing up that his suit for his bar mitzvah was his father's old suit. For the honor of the bar mitzvah his father inverted the suit.

R' Ovadia Yosef said that nowadays even when things are tight, everyone is wealthy compared to the way he lived when he was a child. He wrote, "I never had a suit. My father bought my Shabbos clothing secondhand. I had a long jacket that probably had been worn by twenty people before me!

At that time, the bus company Mekasher provided transportation from Beis Yisrael to the Old City for a half-grush (currency). I

didn't want to waste the coin, so I walked — rain or snow. All the coins that I saved funded my wedding!

When we were young, we took dry desiccated bread and water to school every day, often with a tomato, which we rubbed into the bread. That's all we took for an entire school day, to hold us over until dinnertime.

If someone was eating bread with an egg, we thought he was a millionaire. I once brought cream, which they sold in a small container, and that day was a holiday. For dessert, we were often given a teaspoon of coffee grains with sugar."

A smart man was wont to say, "***I'm thankful for what I have and grateful for what I don't have***."

The story is told of someone who asked a soldier who tragically lost both of his legs in battle, "How are you so positive without your legs"?

His reply: "How are you so negative with yours?"

Many times it's the ones that are happy in the good times that are also happy in the negative times. Let's ask ourselves - how are we when life is smooth and we are not going through rough times. Do we constantly complain?

Here is one recommendation that we should practice: keep a gratitude journal and at the end of each day write what you are grateful for from that day.

Let us conclude with the following saying: "***A grateful life is a great full life***."



"Treat every person you meet as if they were the Mashiach in disguise." ~ Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.



From our Sages

צוּר יְלָדְךָ תֶּשִׁי וַתִּשְׁכַּח קל מְחֹלְלֶךָ *'Of the Rock that bore you were you unmindful; and you forgot the G-d Who bore you.'* (32:18)

When Hashem created man, He gave him the gift of being "unmindful" - the ability to forget and allow time to heal the wounds which would befall him in this world.

But, Hashem claims, what did you do with this gift? You misused it and forgot about Me! (**Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk**)

הוּא וְהוֹשֵׁעַ בִּן נוּן *'...He, and Hoshea the son of Nun'* (32:44)

Why was Joshua referred to here by his original name, Hoshea?

To inform us that although he was being given a position of greatness as the successor of Moshe, he did not become egotistical or overbearing. He remained the same as always. (**Rashi**)

וַיֹּאמֶר אַסְתִּירָה פָנַי מֵהֶם אֶרְאֶה מָה אַחֲרִיתָם *'And He said, I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be.'* (32:20)

Hashem assures us: "Even though I will hide My face and subject the Jewish people to the laws of nature, it will only be temporary. For even in their exile, I am mindful of their 'end,' and will always protect their eternity." (**Shem Mishmuel**)

Noach Yafeh Lechovitcher (Tishrei 7)

Rav Noach of Lechovitch taught that the Ba'al Shem Tov came down to this world to replace depression, sadness and frivolous cheer by implanting the roots of sincere humility and true simcha into the hearts of Bnei Yisrael.

The Kaparos Ceremony



What Is Kaparot?

Since late Talmudic times, it has been a widespread Jewish custom to perform *kaparot* in preparation for Yom Kippur.

Kaparos literally means "atonements," just as *Yom Kippur* means "the Day of Atonement." *Kaparot* consists of carefully passing a chicken over one's head three times while reciting the appropriate text. The chicken is then slaughtered in a humane fashion in accordance with the laws of kashrut. The chicken itself is discreetly donated to a charitable cause, such as a yeshiva or orphanage, where it is eaten just as any other chicken. Alternatively, the chicken is sold and its value donated.

We ask of G-d that if we were destined to be the recipients of harsh decrees in the new year, may they be transferred to this chicken in the merit of this mitzvah of charity.

If a chicken is unavailable, one may use any kosher fowl other than doves or pigeons which were offered as sacrifices in the Holy Temple. Some use a live kosher fish; others perform the entire rite with money, and then give the money—at least the value of a chicken—to charity.

It is important to keep in mind that the chicken is not an offering. Neither does performance of the ceremony alone atone for one's sins. However, the ceremony does shake one up a little.

This is especially true today, when we rarely come face-to-face with the slaughter of animals to fill our tables. Holding a chicken and then seeing it slaughtered, contemplating that "there but for the grace

of G-d go I," can have a profound effect on one's attitude going into the day of Yom Kippur.

It also provides a valuable perspective on our position of privilege in G-d's world. Animals lived and died in order for us to live. It behooves us to live altruistically, honestly, devoutly and wisely, as only humans can.

When to Do Kaparot

In most Jewish communities, *kaparot* is organized at a designated location, with the proceeds going to charity. Live chickens are available for purchase, a *shochet* (an expert kosher slaughterer) is present, and the chickens are donated to a charitable organization.

Kaparot can be done any time during the Ten Days of Repentance (i.e. between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), but the ideal time is during the pre-dawn hours on the day preceding Yom Kippur, for a "thread of Divine kindness" prevails during those hours.

How Many Chickens?

A male takes a rooster; a female uses a hen. Ideally every individual should use their own chicken.

If, however, this is cost prohibitive, one fowl can be used for several individuals. So an entire family can do *kaparot* with two chickens—one rooster for all the males and one hen for all the females. In this event, they should do the *kaparot* together, not one after the other, for one cannot do *kaparot* on the same chicken twice.

A pregnant woman should perform *kaparot* with three chickens—two hens and a rooster. One hen for herself, and the other hen and rooster for the unborn child. If this is too expensive, one hen and one rooster will suffice.

How to Do Kaparot

Hold the chicken from below with both hands. If you are not adept at holding a chicken, it is best to ask someone else to do this.

Improperly holding the chicken may be painful to the chicken and may also render it no longer kosher by causing it serious harm.

Say the first paragraph ("Children of man who sit in darkness…").

When reciting the beginning of the second paragraph, pass the chicken over your head in circular motions three times—once when saying, "This is my exchange," again when saying "This is my substitute," and again when saying, "This is my expiation."

Repeat the entire process another two times. (Passing the chicken over your head a total of nine times.)

Bring the chicken to the *shochet* (kosher slaughterer), who slaughters the bird.

Here's your chance to fulfill a relatively rare biblical mitzvah—that of covering the blood of a slaughtered bird. Take a handful of earth (usually made available in the area) and recite the following blessing before covering the blood:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidishanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu al kisui hadam be-afar.

(Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning covering the blood with earth.).

It is customary in many communities to tip the *shochet* for his service.

Even the smallest of children are traditionally brought to *kaparot*, and one of the parents passes the chicken over the child's head, while saying, "This is your exchange, this is your substitute, this is your expiation…"

If you are using fish or money for *kaparot*, just follow the same procedure (obviously without the kosher slaughterer), modifying the words of the text as appropriate.

Origin of Kaparot



The custom of performing kaparot with a chicken dates back to late Talmudic times. The earliest extant record specifically discussing the use of a chicken is a responsum from Rav Sheshna Gaon who lived in the early Geonic (post-Talmudic) period (approx. 660 C.E.). Rav Sheshna takes it for granted that his reader knows about the custom, a clear indication that it was widespread at the time. Some commentaries point to passages in the Talmud itself that allude to this custom.

Why a Chicken?

Several reasons have been suggested for the choice of a chicken to perform the *kaparot* rite:

1. In Aramaic, a rooster is known as a *gever*. In Hebrew, a *gever* is a man. Thus, we take a *gever* to atone for a *gever*.

2. A chicken is a commonly found fowl and relatively inexpensive.

3. It is not a species that was eligible to be offered as a sacrifice in the Holy Temple. This precludes the possibility that someone might erroneously conclude that the *kaparot* is an offering.

It is customary to use a white chicken, to recall the verse (Isaiah 1:18), "*If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow*." In any event, one should not use a black chicken, as black is the colour that represents divine severity and discipline. Nor should one use an obviously blemished chicken.

The Detractors

There have been some rabbis who criticized the custom of *kaparot*. Their primary concern was that *kaparot* may be a violation of *darchei ha-Emori*, the prohibition of following pagan practices. Perhaps the most well-known of the detractors was Rabbi Yosef Karo, compiler of the Code of Jewish Law.

Despite their concerns, we find that the majority of Jewish communities—even among the Sephardim, who normally would follow the rulings of Rabbi Yosef Karo —retained the custom.

The reasons for this is that, as Rabbi Moshe Isserles notes, the custom of *kaparot* with a chicken is in fact an ancient time-hallowed Jewish tradition. Furthermore, many rabbis explain that the concern was not about the *kaparot* ritual itself but limited to certain components of it—either that people went out of their way to obtain white chickens, or that they would throw the innards on the roofs.

Additionally, Rabbi David ibn Zimra (Radbaz) points out that their objection was also only when the proceeds and/or chickens were not given to charity.

Kaparot and Kindness to Animals

It is of utmost importance to treat the chickens humanely, and not to, G-d forbid, cause them any pain or discomfort. Jewish law very clearly forbids causing any unnecessary pain to any of G-d's creations. An unkind act like that would certainly be amplified on this day, the eve of the day when we beseech G-d for—perhaps undeserved—kindness and mercy.

The Code of Jewish Law suggests that we take the innards and liver of the *kaparot* chickens and place them in an area where birds can feed off them. "It is proper to show mercy to the creatures on this day, so that in Heaven they should have mercy upon us [too]."

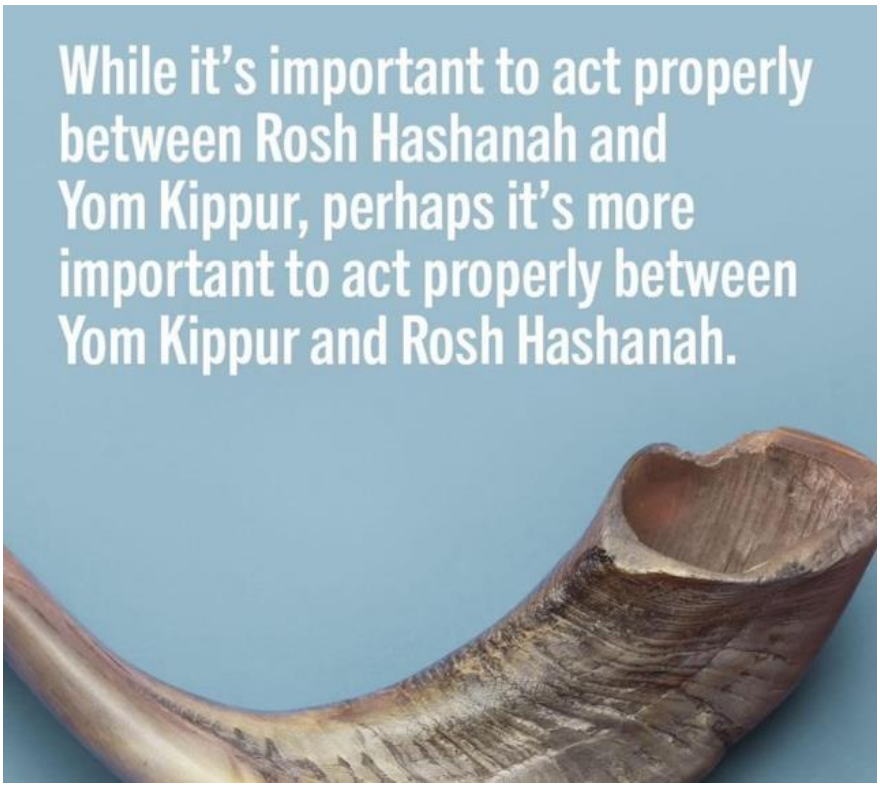
L'Maaseh

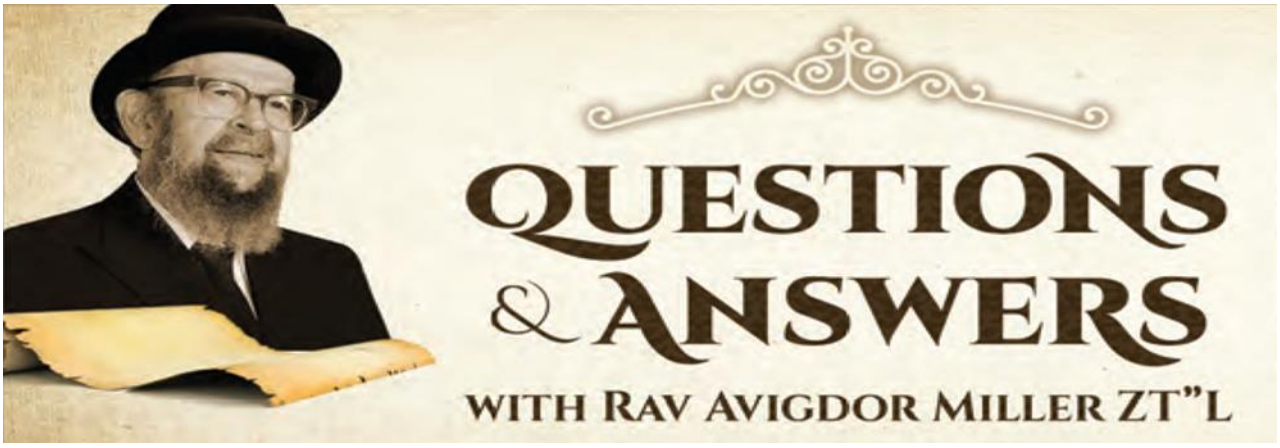


In prewar Europe, the custom in many cities was that the rav of the city was the only one entitled to sell a certain basic commodity such as yeast. In this way, together with a small salary, the rav was able to support himself.

Before his marriage, **R' Moshe Feinstein zt"l** served as the rav of a small town, and this was the arrangement made. Fixed hours were established when people could come and buy the yeast they needed.

Instead of serving the 'customers' however, R' Moshe put the goods on the table and sat in the corner learning, allowing the customers to come and help themselves, leaving payment on the table, as R' Moshe realized that the sefer before him was much more valuable merchandise.







What should be the first thing one should correct before Yom Kippur?

To be facetious, I'll say the first thing is to correct yourself. But of course you'll ask, "But in myself, what's the first thing?"

The very first thing you must do is to make sure that all the wrongs that you committed against your fellow man are righted. Other things could perhaps be rectified during Yom Kippur – for many things you can do teshuva on Yom Kippur – but if somebody has an outstanding complaint against you, then you have to realize nothing is going to help until you get forgiveness from that person. **אין יום כיפור מכפר עד שירצה את חבירו**. That's why it's so important to learn to say, "Forgive me." And don't wait for Yom Kippur.

The *am ha'aretz* doesn't do that. The *am ha'aretz* insults people and never thinks to beg forgiveness. The *talmid chochom* on the other hand is always careful with people, but if he *does* step on somebody's feet, he is quick to admit the error and ask forgiveness. So, it should be a habit constantly to be asking people to forgive you.

Now, really it's a small matter to get forgiveness because most people are willing to yield once they see you are contrite, but you have to ask for it. Even calling up on the telephone is worthwhile; and it should be done to as many people as possible with whom you had

dealings with if there's the slightest suspicion that you wronged them in any way. That's the number one requirement before Yom Kippur.

The Eyes Have It by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair



In the early 19th century in Lithuania, Reb Chaim Mi Verlogen once raised a large sum of money to rescue a Jew who was being held to ransom in a neighboring city. The only way to get to this town was through a forest notorious for its bandits. They had barely entered the forest when the bandits surrounded Reb Chaim and his talmidim. There was no escape.

Reb Chaim handed all the money to the bandit chief.

"You will now be put to death," said the chief. Reb Chaim said,

"Before you kill us, I ask for a final request."

"What do you want?" asked the bandit chief.

"I ask for a few minutes for contemplation."

Reb Chaim sat on the ground, seemingly lost in prayer. Finally, Reb Chaim said, "I am ready."

The bandit chief raised his axe to kill Reb Chaim. Then he looked down into Reb Chaim's eyes, threw down the axe and the money and shouted, "Let's get out of here." The other bandits fled.

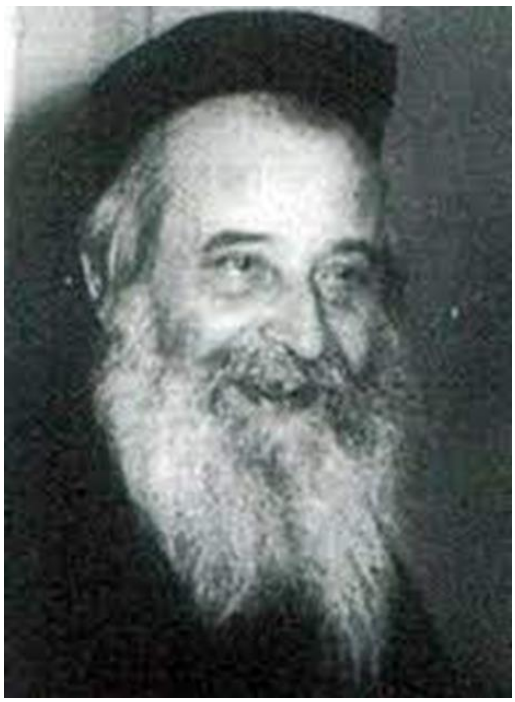
The talmidim cried out. "A miracle!"

Reb Chaim said, "That was no miracle. When I knew that I was going to die, I thought to myself, the greatest deveikut, the greatest

closeness that a person can have with his soul in this world is in the moments just before the soul departs the body. I didn't want my final moments in this world to be filled with hakpada, with resentment.

"And so, I asked for time to try to judge the bandit favorably. Much as I tried, resentment overcame me, time and time again, until I thought to myself, this bandit was once an innocent young boy. He was probably poor and hungry. Probably, one day he stole an apple or a cake and someone caught him, and he got locked him up with a bunch of criminals, and when he got out, he turned to a life of crime and one day he killed someone. A young, innocent boy eventually became a killer.

"Then I felt I could leave the world without resentment. When he looked into my eyes, he saw that I understood him. That was probably the first time anyone looked at him like that since he was a boy. When we judge people favorably, we can actually change who they are. (*Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine.)*



Rav Yechezkel Sarna compared speech with song. When singing, every note has to be exactly right to have the proper effect. When speaking to someone, even when you need to correct him, your tone of voice has to be pleasant to be accepted.

A wrong note will have a negative effect on the quality of the song; the wrong tone of voice will prevent your message from being heard.

The Ben Ish Chai (*The yahrzeit of R' Yosef Chaim ben R' Eliyahu zt"l is on 13 Elul (1899). May his merit protect us.)* - The Weekly Vort



◣It was truly a great kindness of Hashem that on "the rivers of Babylon" He planted a great luminary – R' Yosef Chaim of Baghdad – who illuminated his generation with the light of Torah. That light spread from Baghdad to North Africa and beyond – to the entire Diaspora – and continues to guide us until today, over 120 years after his passing. Renowned by the name of his famous work, the *Ben Ish Chai*, R' Yosef Chaim never even held the position of "Chacham Bashi" (Chief Rabbi) or Rosh Mesivta. But his words transformed generations of Sephardim into G-d-fearing and more observant Jews. Since the time of the Chidah, no Sephardic Torah Sage was more renowned, more accepted, more respected, and more beloved than the Ben Ish Chai.

Until today, his over 60 published *seforim* form the basis of *halacha, mussar, kabbalah* and *drush* for Sephardic Jews throughout the world. His halachic responsa were followed and studied by the great Torah minds of Ashkenazic Jewry in Poland and Lithuania. His *seforim Ben Ish Chai* were to the Sephardim what the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Chayei Adam or Mishna Berurah were to the Ashkenazim. Over a century after his passing, he is still very much alive and a part of world Jewry today. *Od Yosef Chai!*

◣R' Yosef Chaim was the third holy link in a chain of great Torah leaders in Baghdad. His father, R' Eliyahu, and his grandfather, R' Moshe Chaim, were outstanding *Ge'onim*, deciders of *halacha*, and holy *tzaddikim*. Like his predecessors, R' Yosef Chaim was a born leader. On the 13th of Av, R' Eliyahu was blessed with the birth of

his son, R' Yosef Chaim. His brilliance and piety were already apparent when he was but a young child. When he was seven years old, Yosef Chaim once fell into a deep pit. He was in grave danger of losing his life. Only by a sheer miracle was he saved. With his deeply ingrained fear of Heaven, and a maturity that belied his young age, Yosef Chaim vowed at that moment to devote his life to learning Torah and worshipping Hashem.

◣He was educated in the "kutab" (Sephardic cheder), where his teacher was R' Dovid ben Meir, his mother's brother. (This uncle later moved to Yerushalayim where he established the famed Shoshanim L'Dovid Yeshivah). Later, R' Yosef Chaim joined the "Beis Medrash Beis Zalkah" where the elite Torah scholars of Baghdad studied. Even among this group, R' Yosef Chaim excelled in his diligence, his sharp and quick grasp, and his remarkable memory. In "Beis Zalkah," R' Yosef Chaim learned from the great R' Abdullah Somech and soon became his leading disciple. When he would return to this home at night, R' Yosef Chaim would hide in his father's *seforim* room and secretly review what he had learned during the day. His unquenchable thirst for Torah made him oblivious to the passing hours, to his hunger pangs, and to his lack of sleep.

◣One day, when R' Yosef Chaim was 14 years old, he happened to notice a letter containing a halachic query on the table. It was sent by *talmidei chachomim* in Yerushalayim to R' Eliyahu, R' Yosef Chaim's father, inquiring about a matter related to *esrogim*. R' Eliyahu was busy looking up sources in order to compose an answer.

Young Yosef Chaim thought a moment about the halachic question and immediately sat down to write a detailed answer, citing the opinions of the great *Poskim*. R' Yosef Chaim sent his reply to Yerushalayim without his father's knowledge.

Two days after they received R' Yosef Chaim's reply, the scholars in Yerushalayim received R' Eliyahu's reply. They wrote to R' Eliyahu,

"Your son's halachic response preceded yours. His father should rejoice in him and his mother should be happy with the son she bore!"

◣When he turned 18, R' Yosef Chaim married the daughter of R' Yehuda Somech. As a married man, he increased his already brim-full Torah study schedule and ascended ever higher in his purity. Even at that young age, R' Yosef Chaim was already replying to people's halachic questions and exchanging *Sheilos* and *Teshuvos* with the Torah giants of his generation. He became renowned throughout Yerushalayim, Turkey and Greece as a new bright star who would illuminate the Torah world.

When R' Yosef Chaim was 22 years old, he corresponded extensively with the elder Torah leader of Izmir, Turkey – R' Chaim Palaggi. R' Chaim began one of his responses to R' Yosef Chaim with the most laudatory praises that could describe a Torah scholar, predicting a glorious future for him as a Torah leader.

◣R' Yosef Chaim was only 25 years old when his father, R' Eliyahu, passed away. Young as he was, the Jews of Baghdad accepted R' Yosef Chaim as their Rav. They followed and adhered to his halachic guidelines with a complete and simple faith. His word was the absolute law.

R' Yosef Chaim's student, R' Ben Zion Chazzan, wrote, "If the Jews in the time before the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdosh* had listened to the warnings of the prophets as the Jews of Baghdad listen to R' Yosef Chaim in our time, the *Beis HaMikdosh* would not have been destroyed and the Jews would not have been exiled."

◣Like his father and grandfather before him, R' Yosef Chaim would deliver a long *drasha* in shul every Shabbos. The shul was always packed beyond capacity, with people coming well in advance to assure a place for themselves. His impassioned *drashos* mesmerized all of his listeners. His pleasant voice carried forcefully throughout his long *drashos*, and his strength did not wane even when he grew old.

The elders from Baghdad continued to speak for decades after R' Yosef Chaim's passing of his remarkable ability to reach people's hearts with the words that emanated from deep within his heart.

Every Shabbos afternoon, R' Yosef Chaim would give a *drasha* on the week's *parshah* for over three hours. He would link the Midrash with practical *halacha* and conclude with encouraging words relating to the final redemption.

Mincha would follow his *drasha*, after which the entire congregation would escort him home for the third Shabbos meal. It was a glorious procession! R' Yosef Chaim's princely appearance and regal bearing lent a majestic air to the entire gathering. In the words of a congregant from that period, "Every person who listened to the *drasha* and then escorted R' Yosef Chaim home, felt as if Moshiach would appear at any moment!"



◣R' Yosef Chaim was considered the primary "Chacham" (Rav) in Baghdad. Though he never held any official position, R' Yosef Chaim set the standards for Sephardic Jewry in *halacha*, *tefillah* and *minhagim*. He enacted *takanos*; he composed *tefillos* and supplications, revising the *siddur* with numerous additions and changes. Everything he initiated and composed has been accepted by Sephardic Jewry until today.

◣R' Yosef Chaim composed over 200 *piyuttim* and *pizmonim*. Some of these *piyuttim* were published in *siddurim* and *machzorim*, and were

widely recited and sung by Sephardim in *shul* and at *se'udos mitzvah*. He wrote *piyuttim* for almost every occasion – for weekdays, Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, kiddush levanah, all yomim tovim, bar mitzvah, on the final *geulah*, on Eretz Yisroel, on *mussar* thoughts, on parts of the Tanach and Gemara.

In 1875, a published order of *piyuttim* for *hakafos* on Simchas Torah gained fame in Livorno, Italy. The author's name did not appear, however, at the beginning there were *pesukim* printed with the beginning and ending letters spelling out the names of R' Yosef Chaim, his father and grandfather. Until today, Iraqi Jews sing R' Yosef Chaim's *piyuttim* on Simchas Torah.

◣As great as he was in Torah scholarship, so too was his elevated purity. For six consecutive years, R' Yosef Chaim fasted by day, tasting a minimal amount at night. He fasted each year on the yahrzeits of his mother and father. His mother's yahrzeit fell on 7 Av; he thus fasted for at least 4 days out of 10 days – on Erev Rosh Chodesh Av (Yom Kippur Kattan), on 5 Av (yahrzeit of the Arizal HaKadosh), on 7 Av (his mother's yahrzeit), and on Tisha B'Av.

He kept up these fasts until his final days, without thought or consideration for his advanced age, his frailty, or the unbearably hot weather in Iraq during the month of Av. (Oros Mi'Mizrach)

◣R' Yosef Chaim was scrupulous that anything he consumed be done in complete purity. He refrained from eating certain foods for which he had any slight doubts about its *kashrus*.

He had a *mikveh* dug in his home so that he could immerse himself at any time. He attained such high levels of holiness and purity that he merited Eliyahu HaNavi coming to him every Motzei Shabbos to teach him Torah.

On that very holy night, R' Yosef Chaim would seclude himself, not allowing any person entry. Once some of the elite *talmidei chachomim* in *Beis Medrash Beis Zalka* tried to ascertain whether

Eliyahu HaNavi indeed visited R' Yosef Chaim. They asked R' Yehoshua Sharhabani, the "lion" of the scholars, to approach R' Yosef Chaim unannounced on Motzei Shabbos, so that he may actually see Eliyahu HaNavi during the visit. When R' Yehoshua reached the bottom of the stairs which led to R' Yosef Chaim's room and quickly started to ascend, R' Yosef Chaim suddenly, and uncharacteristically, emerged from his room and descended to meet R' Yehoshua. He said to him, "R' Yehoshua, in the *Beis Medrash* they are struggling to understand a certain *sugyah* – correct? Go and tell them that this is the explanation…" He then sent him on his way, remaining in seclusion, undisturbed.



◣His home was always open to all in need – not only to those with halachic inquires but to all whose hearts were heavy with problems or worries.

The greatest Torah Sages found their way to his door. He dealt with individual halachic questions and those that affected the entire community. All the small and large problems of all types of Jews found their way to his doorstep. All left with their shoulders relieved of their heavy burdens.

People came to ask advice about their finances and businesses. People came to confess their sins and seek a means of penance. People came for solutions to difficult *svaros* in *Gemarah*. The *Dayanim* of the city came to seek approval for their halachic decisions.

With utmost patience and concern, R' Yosef Chaim tended to the needs of each of his numerous visitors. His visitors would greet and

take leave of R' Yosef Chaim with the utmost reverence and respect. They would bow, kiss his hands, feeling the very presence of the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) in his hallowed room.

◣R' Yosef Chaim would arise to *daven* each morning *k'vasikin*, pouring his heart out emotionally before his Creator. After *davening*, still adorned in *tallis* and *tefillin*, he would deliver a *shiur* in *halacha* and *aggadah*. Thereafter, he would deliver a *shiur* in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* and *Yoreh De'ah*. Every four years he would celebrate a *siyum* on his own study of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and invite all the *talmidei chachomim* of the city to participate.

◣His depth and breadth of Torah knowledge astounded even the most formidable of scholars. He was thoroughly familiar with the *seforim* of all the great *Poskim – Rishonim* and *Achronim*, *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*. The works of the Chasam Sofer, the Divrei Chaim and the Sho'el U'Maishiv were embedded in his mind as in a cemented pit.

His primary Rebbi, the great R' Abdullah Somech, never issued a halachic decision before having it approved by R' Yosef Chaim. The head of the Dayanim in Baghdad, R' Yechezkel Moshe HaLevi, would say, "If R' Yosef Chaim would tell me that right is left and that left is right, I would not question his words. I would accept his words as I would from Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai."

◣Once, a very difficult halachic question arose in Baghdad, which affected the entire community. The *talmidei chachomim* came to R' Yosef Chaim for a solution to the very perplexing problem. He told the people that he would study the matter that night and give them his answer in the morning.

R' Yosef Chaim spent the entire night trying to find a way to permit the halachic matter. When the *talmidei chachomim* of Baghdad came to him in the morning for his decision, R' Yosef Chaim showed them the **200 *seforim*** in which he had searched for a way to find the halachic matter permissible!



◣R' Yosef Chaim was considered of the greatest *mekuballim* in his generation. His knowledge of the hidden Torah was renowned. He was familiar with all the works of the Arizal HaKadosh, R' Chaim Vital and R' Shalom Sharabi.

The foremost *mekubal* in Yerushalayim, R' Chaim Shaul HaKohein Dwek, testified that R' Yosef Chaim's every word was based upon the secrets of the Arizal's Torah. R' Yosef Chaim studied *kabbalah* with his dear friend, the great R' Eliyahu Mani, who served for many years as the Chief Rav of Chevron.

◣His incoming mail included letters from Singapore, Bombay, Iran, Calcutta, Kurdistan, Yerushalayim, Vilna, Tzfas, and beyond. All turned to R' Yosef Chaim with their halachic questions. His became the central address to which most halachic questions were directed. The questions posed to him encompassed every aspect of Jewish life

– financial, marital, prohibitions and permitted actions, clarification of *sugyos* in *Gemara*, and matters of *kabbalah*.

◣He was able to answer every simple and difficult question – on any topic – with ease. His brilliance and genius encompassed medicine, astronomy, physics, mathematics and much more. If one studies R' Yosef Chaim's halachic replies, printed in *Rav Pe'alim*, one can glimpse at the wide range of issues with which he so brilliantly dealt, yet so simply and concisely explained.

His responses cite tens of *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, and display his extensive familiarity with all the *seforim* written by the Ashkenazic Torah giants.

◣ *Rav Pe'alim* was but one of at least 36 *seforim* which R' Yosef Chaim published during his lifetime, many more of which were published posthumously. Most of his *seforim* were named with names of equivalent numerical value (*Gematriah*) to "Benayahu ben Yehoyadah." For it was revealed to R' Yosef Chaim from Heaven that he was an incarnation of this great *tzaddik* and Torah Sage, who lived in the time of Dovid and Shlomo Ha'Melech.

◣R' Yosef Chaim's most famous *sefer*, *Ben Ish Chai*, the name by which he was called, was written to be learned and understood by all types of Jews – simple and learned, beginners and advanced scholars. He also wrote a *sefer* of *halachos* for women in Arabic, which was the commonly spoken language at that time.

◣R' Yosef Chaim asked that his identity be concealed in his famous work *Torah Lishmah*. When the second volume of his *Rav Pe'alim* was published in 1893, R' Avrohom Addes of Yerushalayim noticed that the *sefer* referenced matters from the *Torah Lishmah*, written by a certain "Yechezkel Kachuli." R' Avrohom told his close disciple, R' Ben Zion Chazzan (also a close disciple of R' Yosef Chaim), "R' Yosef Chaim is the author of *Torah Lishmah*. The name Yechezkel is numerically equivalent to Yosef, and Kachuli is equivalent to Chaim." R' Avrohom would not rest until he sat down to write a letter to R'

Yosef Chaim, which included various halachic questions. His last question was, "Who is the author of *Torah Lishmah*?"

R' Yosef Chaim answered all of R' Avrohom's questions, except the last one…..



◣R' Yosef Chaim set aside a special room for seclusion where, day and night, he studied all aspects of Torah – Shas, halacha, aggadah, kabbalah. He worked tirelessly at his own spiritual perfection, aiming to purify and elevate his body to be attuned to his soul in the service of Hashem. He rose every midnight to recite the *tikkun chatzos*.

◣When R' Yosef Chaim saw a Torah scholar coming to visit, he would rejoice as if he had chanced upon a valuable treasure. R' Yosef Chaim would come towards the scholar, greet him pleasantly, listen to his every word, and later escort him out to the courtyard. R' Yosef Chaim was especially gracious to the young Torah students.

One man recalled how when he was 20 years old, R' Yosef Chaim would arise to greet him and sit him next to his own chair, treating him like a cherished son. This young man was not even a scholar – just a simple Torah student – yet R' Yosef Chaim honoured him as befits an elite scholar.

◣Once, the river in Baghdad overflowed, flooding people's properties. However, the water stood like towering walls around the property owned by R' Yosef Chaim, stopping short of overflowing. It was a natural wonder, a miracle.

◣In 1876, an enlightened Jew from Vienna, Yakov O., came to Baghdad to introduce reforms in Torah observance. R' Yosef Chaim opposed and fought him with all his might. This Jew, Yakov, sent letters to the Jewish newspaper, defaming and mocking R' Yosef Chaim. When the letters were printed, the Torah sages of Baghdad – with R' Abdullah Somech at their head – put Yakov in *cherem*.

Over 27 sages wrote a sharp letter to the Jewish newspaper, upholding the honour of R' Yosef Chaim. The sages effectively barred Yakov from having any influence or participating in Jewish communal life in Baghdad. Even when Yakov wrote rebuttal letters to the newspaper, they refused to print it.

Just after he was put into *cherem*, Yakov O. received a telegram informing him of his mother's death. The sages of Baghdad saw in this the Finger of Hashem punishing him for publicly shaming the holy and pious R' Yosef Chaim.

Not one Jew would agree to pray in a *minyan* at Yakov's home during his week of *shiva*. He was thus forced to go to the *Beis Din*, confess his sin, and publicly ask forgiveness from R' Yosef Chaim.

◣As for R' Yosef Chaim, he was not the sort to demand that people ask his forgiveness, for he was so humble that he never felt slighted in the first place! He never responded to insults.

Once, R' Yosef Chaim's nephew came to his uncle on Erev Shabbos and found him crying. He asked what was troubling him. R' Yosef Chaim replied, "An hour ago, a man came to see me. This man's job is to clean the garbage from the courtyards. My family offered him a taste from our Shabbos foods. The man declined for he said that he was careful not to derive benefit from what belongs to others. What shall I say – I envy that man. That simple man is greater than I am, for our Sages say, *'Greater is the one who derives benefit solely from his own handiwork than from one who fears Heaven.'* That is why I am crying…"



◣His love for Eretz Yisroel was deep and boundless. R' Yosef Chaim would honour and pray for those who dwelled in the Holy City and send them funds. He was particular to have his *seforim* published in Yerushalayim in order to provide income for the printing shops.

He personally brought a large stone from the Holy Land to be placed at the entrance of the main shul (which had soil from Eretz Yisroel on its floor) where he gave his *drashos*. Under the influence and with the encouragement of R' Yosef Chaim, the great philanthropist, R' Yosef Avrohom Shalom, established the Yeshivah Porat Yosef in Yerushalayim.

From this great Torah institution came forth the greatest Sephardic Torah sages, leaders and scholars who illuminate the Torah world until today.

◣In 1869, R' Yosef Chaim travelled to Yerushalayim. Throughout the long and arduous caravan trip, R' Yosef Chaim conducted himself with utmost purity, never ceasing his rigorous Torah-study schedule.

Before leaving on the journey, R' Yosef Chaim had come to an agreement with the Arab caravan leader that he would rest on Shabbos. The Arab broke his promise, trying to frighten the travellers by describing how bandits would attack them if they stopped to rest for even one night in the middle of the desert.

Ignoring the Arab, R' Yosef Chaim pitched his tent and prepared to spend Shabbos in midst of the barren desert. The Arab left them alone and went to hide in a crevice of one of the rocks, far away from the pitched tent. He thus thought to save himself from bandits who would surely attack these Jewish travellers who were inviting trouble!

The Arab was astounded when he saw a group of bandits approach R' Yosef Chaim's tent, intent on attacking and robbing him. Yet when they saw him immersed in studying his holy *sefer*, his face shining with a Heavenly light like an angel, they fled in fright. The Arab quickly ran to R' Yosef Chaim and begged his forgiveness.

◣In Eretz Yisroel, R' Yosef Chaim visited all of the holy sites, praying extensively at the graves of *tzaddikim*, *tannaim* and *amoraim*. He also made sure to visit the grave of Benayahu ben Yehoyadah, of whom R' Yosef Chaim was an incarnation, as revealed to him by Heaven.

He paid a hefty sum to an Arab in order to gain entry to the Me'aras Ha'Machpeilah.

R' Yosef Chaim shared secrets of *kabbalah* with the great *mekubalim* of Yerushalayim, especially with R' Yedidyah Abulafyah. The Sephardic sages of Yerushalayim tried to convince him to accept the position of Rishon L'Tzion, but for reasons known only to him, he declined.

◣In the winter of 1898, R' Yosef Chaim travelled from Baghdad to the grave of Yechezkel HaNavi, situated a few hours outside of Baghdad. He stayed there for a few weeks, during which time he wrote his *sefer* "Mar'os Yechezkel."

More than a year later, in Elul (1899), he again travelled to Yechezkel HaNavi's gravesite; however, he never reached it. When he was but 3 hours away from the site, he became very ill and passed away.

His holy body was transported back to Baghdad by military escort. His funeral was the largest seen in Baghdad. Even *chassanim* and *kallos* left their weddings to escort their beloved leader on his final journey. Arabs also participated in the funeral, as R' Yosef Chaim was holy to all.

◣All of the Jews of Baghdad mourned for their leader throughout the week of *shiva*. Stores were closed and eulogies were delivered every day. They accepted upon themselves the custom of praying at R' Yosef Chaim's grave every Friday; the Arabs living near the cemetery were overwhelmed by the large crowds that streamed to his grave.

One of the Arabs tried to vandalize the gravestone. He was, however, immediately punished by Heaven with a strange and sudden death. Thereafter, the Arabs were awed by the holy site and began lighting candles at his grave, treating the place with utmost respect.

Soon after the sudden death of the Arab, a Jewish child lost his ability to speak. Realizing what a holy place R' Yosef Chaim's grave was, the child's parents brought him there and prayed, stating that they would not leave until the child would be able to speak again. And so it was.

◣The bitter news of R' Yosef Chaim's passing spread swiftly throughout the world. The Ridvaz, Rav of Tzfas, who was then visiting in London, delivered a public *hesped*, saying, "The Torah has donned sackcloth for the holy ark which was taken away. Whoever learns his *seforim* feels the Spirit of Hashem within him." The Rishon L'Tzion in Yerushalayim, R' Yakov Shaul Elyashar (the Yissah Brachah) stated that R' Yosef Chaim left no equal in the world.

◣ R' Yosef Chaim's influence on his congregation was strongly felt even years after his death, as the average working Jew in Baghdad spent four hours of his day at work, and the rest of the time studying Torah. His spirit and inspiration are conspicuous in hundreds of ways, far beyond the borders of Iraq – in *Battei*

Medrash, yeshivos, at Shabbos tables, in shuls… His *seforim* are followed and studied assiduously, well beyond Sephardic communities. Several *yeshivos* and *chadorim* in Yerushalayim bear his name, and all Sephardic *yeshivos* follow his ways. Indeed – *Od Yosef Chai!* (Oros Mi'Mizrach, The Torah Personality)



כִּי לֹא־דָבָר רֵק הוּא מִכֶּם כִּי־הוּא חַיֵּיכֶם וּבַדָּבָר הַזֶּה תַּאֲרִיכוּ יָמִים עַל־הָאֲדָמָה "For it is not a futile thing for you, for it is your life; and by this matter will you live long on the land …." (32:47)

Rabbi Yaakov Neimann zt"l (Darchei Mussar) says that by nature, if one's efforts don't produce successes, he does not feel satisfaction with what he did. Therefore, there are students who become discouraged in their Torah learning because they forget part or all of what they had learned. They may feel that it is pointless to learn Torah since they don't remember it.

Rabbi Neimann zt"l says that this feeling, although understandable, **is a big mistake**! The mitzvah is to learn Torah, just for the sake of learning Torah. The purpose of learning is NOT to retain the knowledge. Rather, learning Torah for its own sake, without ulterior motives, helps one merit many spiritual and physical rewards (Pirkei Avos 6:1). The effort of toiling in Torah is what purifies and sanctifies a person, enabling him to achieve all the rewards that are mentioned in **Pirkei Avos**. (Yalkut Lekech Tov by Yaakov Yisroel Beifus)

Rashi (Devarim 32:47) says, "It is not for nothing that you are to occupy yourselves laboriously with it [Torah] because much reward depends on it, for it is your life."

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin zt"l says (Ruach Chaim) that the very existence of the world is dependent on Torah learning. If there would be an absence of Torah learning for even a moment, Creation would revert, back to nothingness. **One studying Torah, for its own sake, may likely be the ONE who sustains the world at any given moment** (Pirkei Avos Treasury by Rabbi Moshe Lieber).

Rabbi Neimann zt"l continues and says that the effort, the toil in Torah, is what is primary, more so than remembering one's learning. Moreover, as a result of his sincere learning, Hashem will reward him with the ability to remember his learning.

The world exists only because, somewhere, Torah is being learned every second of the day. Never stop learning Torah, even if you don't see the fruit of your labors. Even if you don't retain what you learned, the merit of your Torah learning itself, is unimaginable!

A benefit of trusting in Hashem is that your wealth does not stand in the way of your faith, because you do not rely on your money. Rather, you consider your wealth money that has been placed in your care to use for specific objectives and charitable purposes.

[If you look at it this way], even if you remain wealthy, you will not become arrogant. You won't boast of your kindness when giving charity, since you are only doing what you were ordered to do. You won't expect thanks or praise for your kindness, instead you will thank Hashem for giving you the opportunity to do good deeds for others. (Chovos Halevovos – Shaar HaBitachon)

"When a person reflects upon the kindnesses that Hashem has bestowed upon him, he will be ashamed to rebel against Him." ~ Rabbeinu Yonah.

The Weekly Vort

■ **הצור תמים פעלו כי כל דרכיו משפט – *'The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His ways are just.'*** (32:4)

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 50a) derives from this *pasuk* that one who claims that Hashem ignores our sins and waives punishment will waive his own life. However, among people, it is virtuous not to respond to mistreatment, so why can't we think of Hashem in such terms? And the Torah itself speaks of Hashem as forgiving and merciful.

D'var Avraham explains: One who presents his friend with a gift does not view it without value; on the contrary, precisely because it is meaningful does it express his affection for the recipient. When Hashem forgives sins, it is not because they are insignificant to His eyes; He views them as a severe offense but nevertheless forgives.

To "waive," however, implies that one regards the sin as not worthy of notice. One who claims that Hashem ignores sins because they are trivial to Him, opens the door to anarchy. If sins do not matter, then everyone has license to sin. (The Torah Treasury)

■ **יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחִי תִּזַּל כַּטַּל אִמְרָתִי כִּשְׂעִירִם עֲלֵי־דֶשֶׁא וְכִרְבִיבִים עֲלֵי־עֵשֶׂב *"My lesson shall drop like rain, my speech shall flow down like dew, like a rainstorm on the herb, like a shower on grass."*** (32:2)

People find rain disagreeable, but dew pleasant. "Herb" is a general term encompassing many species of plant life, whereas "grass" refers to an individual blade of grass.

Moshe Rabeinu says that at times he reproves like "a rainstorm on the herb," meaning that when reproving a multitude, one can speak harshly, for one is not singling out an individual. "But my words are like a shower on the grass" – when chiding an individual, one must speak gently. (**Chasam Sofer) (Torah Treasures**)

■ **הצור תמים פעלו כי כל דרכיו משפט** – ***'The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His ways are just.'*** (32:4)

R' Shimon of Yaroslav lived to a ripe old age. His disciples asked him the secret of his longevity, and he said, "I always lovingly accepted my lot in life, for I know that whatever Hashem does is good. When a person has complaints, Hashem takes him from this world and brings him to the World of Truth where he will see that life is good and Hashem is just. Since I never complain, Hashem does not have to show me that He is just…" (**The Torah Treasury**)

■ **על אשר מעלתם בי... על אשר לא קדשתם אותי...** – ***Because you were unfaithful to Me... because you did not sanctify Me...*** (32:51)

This *pasuk* can be better understood in light of the **Vilna Gaon's** interpretation of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (3:1), "Consider before Whom you will give a *Din Ve'Cheshbon*, judgement and reckoning."

Din, judgement, refers to the actual sins; *Cheshbon*, reckoning, alludes to *mitzvos* that you could have fulfilled during the time you committed the sins. (**Torah Treasures**)

למודי משה - R' Moshe Harris - Hester Ponim

וַיֹּאמֶר אַסְתִּירָה פָנַי מֵהֶם אֶרְאֶה מָּה אַחֲרִיתָם ***"And He said, 'I will hide My face from them. I will see what their end will be'"*** **(32:20).**

Contrary to popular belief, *hester ponim* does not mean that Hashem removes His Providence, abandoning us to the mercies of others. G-d forbid to entertain such an idea, since Hashem promised that He will never remove His kindness from us. When He is in pain, we are in pain. However, based on our deeds and situation the ways of Providence may change so that instead of a revealed Divine providence Hashem puts in place a concealed Providence in which His love for us is less obvious.

Rav Shmuel Bornstein of Sochotchov compares Hashem's conduct with the Jews to a father teaching his son to walk on his own. The father hides from the son in order to get him to run after him and take steps on his own, without any assistance. He watches his son's steps from a distance, and as soon as he senses that his son is going to fall, he immediately runs to him to support him.

Similarly, Hashem says that He will hide His face from us, so that we will have to look after ourselves without Divine assistance as it were, but Hashem will "see what their end will be": He watches us in order to straighten our ways and guide our actions. (**R' Moshe Sternbuch**)

מעשה אבות .... סימן לבנים

ויאמר אסתירה פני מהם אראה מה אחריתם כי דור תהפכת המה בנים לא אמן בם ... (לב-כ)

In 2020, the world was mentally, medically and psychologically unprepared for a global epidemic, let alone a pandemic. The same was true in Vilna in the mid-19th century. One of *Klal Yisroel's* greatest leaders, **R' Yisroel Salanter *zt"l***, stepped up and took action.

As the revered founder of the *Mussar* movement, he was also known for his unique response to a global health pandemic - the worldwide cholera outbreak that claimed untold lives across multiple continents, between 1846 and 1860.

R' Yisroel was relatively young - only 38 years old - when the epidemic struck Vilna, the heart of Jewish Lithuania, in the summer of 5609 (1848). Rabbi Dov Katz relates in his book "The Mussar Movement" that R' Yisroel focused all his energies on saving lives during this epidemic. He involved himself in relief efforts and actively enlisted his *talmidim* to go out and care for the ill and infirm. He even rented a building to serve as a 1,500-bed hospital and raised funds to care for the sick and dying.

Halacha permits the violation of all but three sins in order to save a life, and R' Yisroel actively encouraged people to do so if they needed - especially the *dinim* of *Shabbos* and keeping kosher. His son later reported that the only time he ever saw his father angry was when another rabbi challenged the public violation of *Shabbos* by some of his *talmidim*.

When a certain elderly *Rav* in Vilna fell ill to cholera. R' Yisroel's students spared no effort to save his life, including chopping wood and boiling water for him on *Shabbos*. After a while, the *Rav* got better, whereupon he came to R' Yisroel and informed him that the *yeshivah bochurim* were excessive in their violation of the *Shabbos* laws.

R' Yisroel did something no one had ever seen him do. He became outraged. "You're going to tell me what is permitted and what is forbidden? I have taken on myself to ask 60 to 70 young people to work with the ill continually, and I promised their parents that I would keep them healthy. Indeed they are all healthy - not one has taken ill! Are you prepared to do this?"

The *Rav* apologized profusely. According to his son, R' Yisroel was forced to react so strongly for he could not afford to let the message get out that these young men ought not risk their patients' health by easing up on the *Shabbos* violations, which, if they did, would also mean not risking their own health; and the entire project could collapse in a tragic loss of life.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident of this period occurred on *Yom Kippur* of 1848. R' Yisroel Salanter felt that fasting on *Yom Kippur* would put lives in danger and that it would be a huge *Chilul Hashem* if Jews died observing the fast.

Though he held no official role in the Vilna rabbinate, on the eve of *Yom Kippur* he placed proclamations in all the *Batei Midrashim* and synagogues telling people not to fast, to shorten the *davening*, take walks, and help each other in all ways possible.

This was itself a radical move, but R' Yisroel still worried it was not enough and people would not follow his instruction. So on the morning of *Yom Kippur*, R' Yisroel walked to the front of the main synagogue in Vilna, flanked by two of his esteemed *talmidim*, with wine and cake, made *kiddush* and ate in front of everyone.

The people were in shock, with one member publicly challenging him as to why he was issuing edicts in Vilna instead of the official rabbinate. But R' Yisroel was not cowed. He urged everyone to make *kiddush* and eat and he remained in place until everyone in the synagogue had eaten. According to some accounts he then proceeded to other synagogues in town to encourage everyone to eat.

When called to task by the *Vilna Beis Din* for not consulting with them before he issued his ruling, he felt no need to defend himself, and as a result, he no longer felt welcome in Vilna and was forced to leave a short while later. But R' Yisroel was happy with what he had done. Lives had been saved, he believed, and there was no reason for regret.

In a letter he wrote some years later, during another wave of the cholera epidemic, he reiterated his stance on all these points. "Now that this disease is abroad in the land, this is the teaching for man, and the way of common sense: not to fear it at all. One must heed the instructions of the physicians, in light of whose words we shall walk, even by the *Torah*, and to establish the life of this world for good and for betterment. For experience has taught us that in days past, when the disease spread greatly, that whoever took upon himself the burden of the doctor's orders ... was free of the signs of the disease." (*Ohr Yisrael*, letter #22)

"The greatest tragedy is not suffering; it is forgetting Who is directing every event." ~ Rav Yerucham Levovitz.

L'Maaseh

A story is told about the holy **Rav Zalman of Vilna, zt"l**. One person approached another on Erev Yom Kippur to ask for forgiveness. However, he refused to forgive the fellow, and quoted the Halachah that one is not obligated to forgive someone who spoke Lashon Hara about him.

Rav Zalman, who was a young boy at the time that this occurred, turned to the person who had refused to forgive. He said, "Chazal teach us that Yerushalayim was destroyed only because they decided their Halachos based on the strict law of the Torah.

This seems very strange. Yechezkel HaNavi lists many serious Aveiros that were being committed at the time. How can the destruction of Yerushalayim be attributed simply to not acting Lifnim Mishuras Ha'din, and going beyond the letter of the law!?"

He answered, "Perhaps, it can be explained in this way. True, many serious Aveiros were being committed. However, as long as we weren't holding others accountable to the letter of the law, Hashem didn't hold us to the letter of the law either. Once we refused to treat others with leniency, and we stopped overlooking things, Hashem was no longer willing to treat us in that way either. - That strict Din that Hashem held Bnei Yisroel to, now directly led to the destruction of Yerushalayim."

The man thought about these words, and he was greatly affected. Zalman's brilliant and insightful words, that were filled with genuine caring, had found their mark. The man immediately rushed back to his friend and forgave him for what he had done to him!

"A person often imagines that his achievements are the product of his own strength; Ha'azinu reminds us that all success is a gift entrusted to us from Above." ~ Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler

Yom Kippur Gems

Rav Pinchas Shefer writes a story he heard about amazing Hashgacha Pratis, Divine Providence. A father related: Our oldest son, Moishy, is a fine boy. For whatever reason though, he was having difficulty with Shidduchim, and he wasn't finding his Zivug.

The years passed, and his younger siblings were nearing the age to also start dating. I asked my Rebbi, and he said not to wait, but to hear about Shidduchim for the next children already. As uncomfortable as it was, we went ahead. Indeed, my daughter got engaged, but the Simchah was mixed with the pain of Moishy still searching for his Shidduch.

It was at the beginning of Chodesh Teves, when one day, my thirteen-year-old son burst into the house after school, ran to his room, and slammed the door. We could hear him crying, and our hearts broke, imagining what may have happened to him, because he did not want to talk just yet.

After about a half an hour, he calmed down and came out of his room, and I asked him what happened. He told me that one boy in his class takes advantage of his slight handicap and makes fun of him all the time. That day it was the absolute worst, and my son couldn't take it anymore.

I empathized and commiserated with him, but then I had an idea. I told him that the boy who made fun of him needs a lot of Rachmanus, mercy from Hashem, because he is holding at a very low level and has a long way to go. I explained that this boy is really the one who is handicapped! I said, "We have to Daven for him. He's so pathetic, he can't even be nice to you. I'm sure he feels awful about it, and he's racking up Aveiros all the time. Here's a chance to do a Chesed for another Yid, and be Mochel him. Lety's forgive him!"

My son looked at me with disbelief. How could he just forgive this boy for all the torture he did to him?

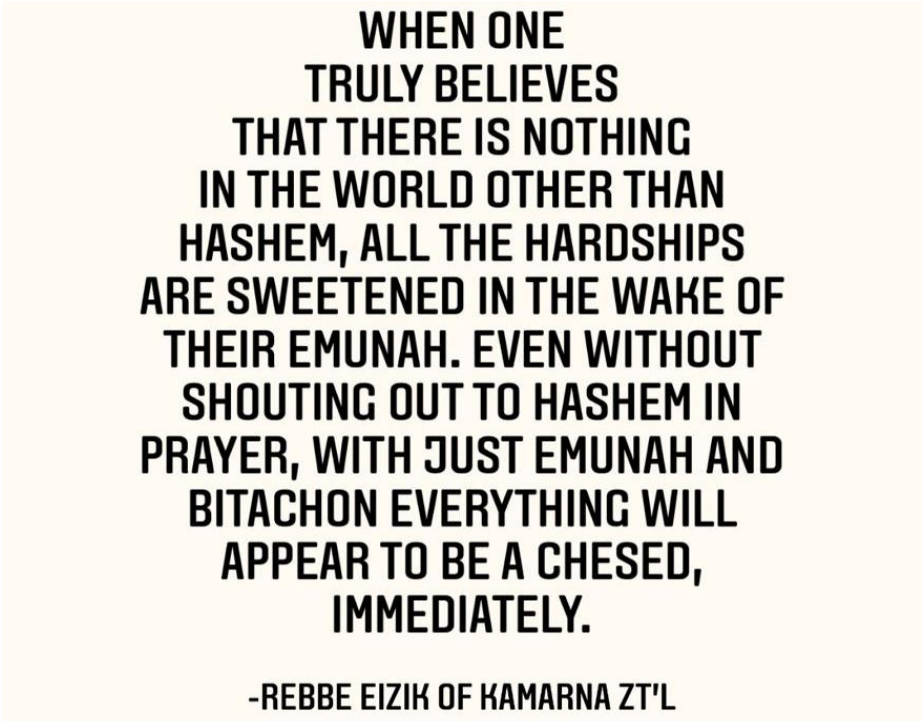
I kept talking, gently explaining that the biggest thing a person could do is to rise above the situation and deal with it maturely. - Finally, my special son braced himself, and said he's Mochel this other boy!

Then I had another inspiration. I said to him, "You have an unbelievable Ko'ach right now, a very special power to give a Brachah, because of the incredible thing you just did. Could you please give a Bracha that Moishy should find his Shidduch?"

He closed his eyes and spoke with complete seriousness, "I give Moishy a Brachah that he should become a Chosson within a month. And then Raizy should become a Kallah, and they should both have children within a year of their weddings!"

I said Amein with a lot of Kavanah, and soon enough, we saw his Brahcos come true, exactly as he said them! Now, a year later, both Moishy and Raizy are proud parents!

The Gemara describes the greatness of those who are embarrassed and don't embarrass back, and those hear their disgrace and don't respond. - Here was an excellent example!



There is a famous **Beis Halevi** by the maaseh of Yosef and his brothers that when Yosef told his brothers that he was Yosef and asked "Ha'oid Avi chai?", the medrash says that the brothers were embarrassed because of it and weren't able to stand up to his tochacha.

The Beis Halevi explains that the reason they weren't able to stand up to his tochacha was because Yosef showed them that what they said contradicted their actions as they had petitioned Yosef not to take Binyamin because the immense pain it would cause their father might cause him to die. Yosef was pointing out to them that when they sold him, they obviously weren't worried about this, so their claim wasn't really valid.

This is pshat in the medrash that says on this point "Woe to us on the Yom Hadin, if Yosef's brothers weren't able to stand up to their younger brother, how will we be able to stand up to the Ribono Shel Olam?"

In a similar vein, **Rav Pam Zt"l**, in his sefer Ateres Avraham on the Moadim, says that a very prevalent aveirah that requires teshuvah on Rosh Hashonoh and Yom Kippur is talking during davening. The Shulchan Aruch (124:7) describes the severity of this aveirah in unusually harsh terms. It says that if one talks during davening "he is a sinner and his sin is too great to bear," paraphrasing the words Kayin used after he had committed the first murder in the history of the world when he killed his brother Hevel.

Some people justify their behaviour by saying that the length of the davening, especially on Shabbos and yom tov makes it very difficult. People feel helpless to resist the urge to talk and believe that nothing can be done about it.

The fallacy of this misconception is exposed on Rosh Hashonoh. The Shulchan Aruch (592:3) says that it's forbidden to speak from the recitation of the brochos on the shofar until after the conclusion of all the tekios. This covers the entire lengthy mussaf, which often

takes a few hours to complete. The vast majority of people have no problem complying with this halachah so why do they find it nearly impossible to restrain themselves from speaking during davening all year long?

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (4:3) says "Do not be scornful of any person… for there is no person without his hour." - **The Alter of Novardok** would paraphrase this idea by saying that every person has his "hour" of achievements when he attains greatness in his avodas Hashem. While this "hour" earns him great zechusim, it will be held against him on his Yom Hadin in the Olam HaEmes. At that time, he will be asked the painful question "If you were able to achieve this level of greatness once, why couldn't you do it other times as well?"

Mussaf on Rosh Hashonoh is that special "hour" which invalidates the many excuses people have for their inability to be silent during davening. They will have no response to the charge "If you found it impossible not to talk during davening, how were you able to control yourself for such a long period of time on Rosh Hashonoh?" - Obviously, people tend to be more careful in their performance of mitzvos on Rosh Hashonoh. Nevertheless, the relative ease whereby people refrain from talking during mussaf proves that, with a little effort, it *can* be done all year long.

One can add that maybe this is meant in the piyut that some say before Kedushah of Shacharis on first day Rosh Hashonoh, that says **ומעשיו יוכיחו אותו בדין**, that a person's accomplishments can also, chas v'shalom, be a kitrug (accusation) against him.

So let us commit ourselves to eradicating this machlah which afflicts our shuls and strive to return the sanctity of tefillah to its proper place. This will serve as an immense zechus for Klal Yisrael in the very difficult times in which we find ourselves.

Torah Gems

וידבר את כל דברי השירה הזאת באזני העם הוא והושע בן נון וגו' (לב-מד)

The Sifri tells us that Moshe called his Talmid "Hoshea Bin Nun", so that he should not become arrogant but remain humble as he previously was.

R' Yehoshua Heschel of Crakow ZT"L also gives a brilliant explanation: According to Chazal the letter Yud was taken from our matriarch Sorah's name, when she was still called Sarai, and given to Yehoshua. Sorah was 89 years old at that time and for the next 38 years she was called by her new name, until she died at the age of 127.

Remarkably, from the time Moshe Rabbeinu gave the new name "Yehoshua" to his faithful disciple, until the crowning of Yehoshua as the leader before Moshe's passing, was also a total of 38 years (Moshe added the Yud in the second year after Bnai Yisroel left Egypt and he died in the 40th year). At the end of the 38 years, Moshe Rabbeinu resumed calling his Talmid by his original name "Hoshea" Bin Nun, which equaled the same amount of time that the Yud was removed from "Sorah" Imeinu.

Torah Gems

האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי וגו' (לב-א)

The question is asked: Why is the Shiras Ha'azinu - the song we read in this week's Parsha with 43 posukim, longer than all of the other songs that we read in the Torah?

The **אז ישיר**- the "Song of the Yam", that speaks of the miracle of Krias Yam Suf and the drowning of the Egyptians, contains only 18 posukim, whereas the "Song of the well", the song that Bnei Yisroel sang in the desert, by the well of water, has just 4 posukim?

The famous **Bais Halevi, R' Yosef Dov Ber Soloveitchik ZT"L**, answers that there is a well-known saying, "The Rebbi by himself knows a lot, the Rebbi with his Talmidim also know quite a bit, but the disciples alone know just a little."

According to this saying, we see that Moshe Rabbeinu, who sang Ha'azinu alone, knew a great deal, thus the song is so long. The "Song of the Yam" was sung together by Moshe and Bnei Yisroel, and this song, as well, contained quite a bit, though not as much as Ha'azinu. However, the "Song of the well" was sung by the Jews alone, as the Torah explicitly states, and since the Talmidim are singing without their Rebbi, it is very small.

Heavenly Reckoning

"In those days paralysis was extremely prevalent, and many people fell victim to it with no relief in sight. I remember how the ***Chofetz Chaim*** would relate to this when speaking to us: `Where does the disease of paralysis originate?' he would ask rhetorically. `Why has this disease spread to almost epidemic proportions during the last few years?

If we would examine it we would observe that this is indeed a very strange affliction: A person has a mouth, a palate, lips, a throat, everything, but he cannot utter one word from his mouth!

What happened? Paralysis! A person has legs, knees, feet, everything, but to walk? Not even one step. What happened? What does *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* want from us?

" `Every human being has an account, an allowance of sorts. For example, a person might be allotted a million steps in his lifetime. After he has used up those million steps, there are no more! Finished! And from then on the person can still have feet and all the rest -- but to walk? Not one more step. His allowance is depleted. Moreover, this person must know that each and every footstep is

written down. Every step is reckoned. Guard your steps. Don't go to places of wrongdoing. Don't waste what you were given.

" `A person has a mouth. *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* gave a person a certain number of words in his lifetime. As soon as he has used up all his words -- finished! He can have all the organs of speech but not one word will he be able to pronounce. Keep this in mind and guard your speech! Know that every word is written down; each word is subtracted from your allowance. Don't waste them!

" `The same goes for the eyes, the hands and all the other organs of the body.'

"This was the *Chofetz Chaim's* explanation to us regarding paralysis. And he said everything with such conviction and vitality; you could see that he felt the truth of his words with all his senses, and you could not remain indifferent.

Precious Moments With Rav Chaim - Artscroll

Kohen of Mezuzos or Kohen of Challah?

"My grandfather never remembers people's names," says his grandson Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky. "But if they've written a sefer, he calls them by the name of their sefer."

"He calls the man named Cohen who wrote a sefer about mezuzos 'Cohen of mezuzos.' - Then, some years later, 'Cohen of mezuzos' wrote a sefer on challah.

When I tell Saba that 'Cohen of mezuzos' came, he corrects me, 'It's "Cohen of challah."'"

Only matters related to Torah stay in his head. Writing another sefer was enough to change a person's name.

Instead of Sleeping or Instead of Learning?

One of Rav Elyashiv's grandsons comes to ask him a pressing question. When he gets there, Rav Elyashiv is asleep. His grandson goes away and comes back later. This time, Rav Elyashiv is learning.

When Rav Elyashiv hears the question, he asks, "Why didn't you come to ask me earlier?"

"The Zeideh was sleeping," his grandson answers.

"You don't want to bother me while I sleep, but you don't mind bothering me while I'm learning?"

Family member told this story to Rav Chaim and asked, "What should his grandson have done? Wake him or bother him while he learns?" "There is no difference between one and the other," he replied.

Who's Winning?

It's World War II. The world is in terror. It is a time of murder and loss, and Jewish blood being spilled like water. The Jews in Eretz Yisrael hear what's happening. They worry about the Jews of Europe who are being killed.

One day, the Steipler Gaon asks his son Rav Chaim, who is then thirteen years old, to go to his uncle's house and find out what's happening in the news.

When Rav Chaim comes home, his father asks, "What did you hear?"

"I heard that the Germans are fighting the Russians, and one of them is winning."

"Who's winning?"

"I don't know."

"I see that you're only good for learning Torah," says his father.



The Napa Valley Reserve

Nine litres of wine. Not a single bottle. 12 bottles inside one enormous piece of glass.

The Napa Valley Reserve 2009. A Bottle like that runs around $2,000. Go look it up. It's what a man buys once in his lifetime and will hold onto for years, waiting for the **שמחה** that deserves it.

And that **שמחה** finally came. It was a **שבת שבע ברכות**, and the **בעל שמחה** went all out. He carried the bottle into the kitchen himself, and he set it down to wait for the **סעודה**. Rabbi Sruly Bornstein, who gives an enormously popular **דף היומי שיעור** in Lakewood, he was there that **שבת**, and he told over the story.

And he said that before the **סעודה**, one of the people on the staff walked into the kitchen. He was a Jewish fellow. He saw the bottle, and he did what a man on the job does with a bottle. He opened it.

And the **משגיח** saw the whole thing. Now, he recognized the man, because earlier that **שבת**, he had seen him outside with a cigarette. And to the **משגיח**'s understanding, once this man had handled the wine after the cigarette, the wine could not be used. According to **הלכה**, it's **יין נסך**.

He did not ask a **שאלה**, he did not call a **רב**, he did not go looking for the **בעל שמחה** first. He picked up 9 litres of 2010 Napa Valley Reserve, and he poured every last drop of it down the drain. $2,000 into a kitchen sink in under a minute. Wow.

And then he walked out to tell the **בעל שמחה** what he had just done. The **בעל שמחה** listened to the whole story. This bottle that he had been saving for years was now gone before one guest had even tasted a drop. But he did not raise his voice, and he did not ask who is going to pay for it. Instead, he said two words: "It's fine." And then he got up, and he went to find the worker himself. Not to make

sure he understood what he had cost him. No, he found him and spoke quietly with warmth, and he told him the following:

"I want you to know the wine that was poured out was worth a lot of money. And you should know something else. You did nothing wrong. You were doing your job, and I have no complaints against you, none at all. But I want to ask you for one favor. Please remember this moment, because one day somebody is going to cause you a loss while he is trying to do the right thing, and when that day comes, treat him the way I'm treating you."

That was the whole conversation. It took less than a minute. And the **בעל שמחה** went back in, and he made the **סעודה** without his wine.

A year or two later, that same worker met him again, and this is what he told him. He said, "I have to tell you what your reaction did to me.

That cigarette that I smoked right before I opened your bottle of wine was the last cigarette I ever lit up on a **שבת**. I have not been **מחלל שבת** from that day until today, because the way you spoke to me changed my life."

Nine Litres down a drain and a **ייד** returned for the rest of his life.

The **בעל שמחה** lost a bottle of wine that **שבת**, true. But he gained a Yid's Shabboses for the rest of his life. And it cost him one minute of dignity.

R' Aharon of Karlin ZT'L would say:

'Although the Torah does not list being depressed as sinful, there is nothing so conducive to committing the grossest sins as depression. Once an individual loses his bearings, anything can happen.'



Closed for Shabbos



In July 2019, Avi, an experienced barber from New York, moved with his family to Boca Raton, Florida. As soon as they settled in, he began looking for work.

Avi had years of experience and was confident in his skills. But as he contacted barbershops throughout the area, he kept running into the same problem. Saturday was one of the busiest days of the week. Shop after shop told him essentially the same thing: They were only interested in hiring him if he was willing to work on Saturday. For Avi, an observant Jew, that was simply not an option.

At one of the last shops he approached, the owner told him frankly: "If you're going to stick to your Sabbath commitment, you don't have much hope. In Florida, everyone gets haircuts on Saturday, and the barbershops are closed on Sunday. That's just how it works."

It certainly did not sound promising. But just thirty minutes later, Avi called another shop, Oasis Barbershop. He spoke to Oscar, the owner, who invited him to come down for an interview. Oscar ran the shop by himself. When Avi arrived, he told Oscar about his experience and demonstrated his skills. Oscar was impressed.

There was only one thing Avi still had to tell him. "I don't work on Saturday," he explained. "I observe the Jewish Sabbath."

Avi waited for Oscar to respond as all the others had. But it never came. Oscar acknowledged that Saturday was one of his busiest days, but Avi's refusal to work that day did not bother him. He was happy to hire Avi for the rest of the week.

For Avi, the job could hardly have worked out better. The pay was good, the arrangement suited him perfectly, and the shop was even seven or eight minutes closer to his home than most of the other places he had approached.

But several weeks later, Avi began noticing something that deeply disturbed him. Oscar's barbershop operated primarily by appointment, and Avi noticed that a significant number of the customers booking appointments on Saturdays were Jewish. Some were Jews with little connection to Yiddishkeit; others were intermarried. There were even Jewish customers who would come for haircuts on Rosh Hashanah or before heading to shul on Yom Kippur.

Avi could not get it out of his mind. Finally, he approached Oscar with an idea.

"Would you consider opening the shop on Sunday?" he asked. "You can continue working Saturdays, and I'll work Sundays. At least the Jewish customers who want a weekend appointment will have another option. Maybe instead of coming on Shabbos, they'll come to me on Sunday."

Oscar thought about it. "Let's give it a try."

They opened on Sunday. Within three weeks, Oscar approached Avi with an astonishing observation.

"You know what's happening?" he said. "My Jewish customers who used to come to me on Saturdays are coming to you on Sundays instead."

These were not simply occasional customers. Many had been coming to Oscar for years. They trusted him and had developed close relationships with him. Yet now, many were changing their appointments from Saturday to Sunday.

Oscar was deeply moved by what he was witnessing. He had read parts of the Bible and knew enough about Judaism to understand the significance of Shabbos. Soon, when a Jewish customer would try to schedule an appointment for Saturday, Oscar himself began challenging him.

"Isn't keeping the Sabbath one of your Ten Commandments?" he would ask.

The customers would laugh. "What happened to you, Oscar? Avi made you religious?"

"No," Oscar would respond. "This isn't about Avi making me religious. It's in your Bible. You're the Chosen People. This is what you're supposed to do!"

Slowly but surely, something remarkable happened. One Jewish customer after another stopped coming on Shabbos and began scheduling appointments for Sunday instead.

Then Oscar decided to take it one step further. If Sunday was working so well, why remain open on Saturday at all? - He closed the shop on Saturdays. - But Oscar was not finished. Seeing the impact his decision was having, he told Avi that he had made another decision: The barbershop would close on the Jewish holidays as well.

"If Jewish customers come here because they don't know any better," Oscar explained, "I don't want my shop to be the reason they do something they shouldn't be doing."

The transformation was complete. The very barbershop that had once been filled with Jewish customers on Shabbos was now closed every Shabbos and Yom Tov and open on Sundays instead.

And there was one final surprise.

Oscar later reflected that after he made his barbershop "Shomer Shabbos," business had actually increased by approximately thirty percent. Some of the increase could certainly be explained by the fact that few competing barbershops were open on Sundays. But Oscar saw something more. He was convinced that the *bracha* came because his business was now helping Jews keep Shabbos rather than enabling them to violate it.

Today, the sign at Oscar's barbershop proudly announces its unusual schedule: **Closed Saturdays and Jewish Holidays. Open Sundays.**

Avi had moved to Florida worried that keeping Shabbos might cost him his livelihood. Instead, his commitment to Shabbos did far more than protect his own observance. It changed an entire barbershop.

Just Like Mine

One day in the 1800s, a widow stepped into the study of **R' Aviezri Zelig Auerbach**, the rav of Halberstadt, Germany. He picked up his head from his sefarim and nodded. "Please," he said, gesturing to the chair across from his desk.

Though she'd buried her husband some time ago, there was a burden this woman hadn't been able to shake since the levayah. "I didn't have the money," the widow now admitted. "I couldn't afford a nice matzeivah, tombstone. Not even a proper one. Just a simple stone… a cheap one. Ever since then, I haven't slept. I feel like I failed him."

She stared down at her hands, twisting a corner of her kerchief. She couldn't even look the rav in the eye. But he didn't correct her or rush to comfort. He just listened. Then he stood up, walked across the room, and opened a drawer. Inside was his official stationery, embossed with his name and title: Rabbi of Halbertadt.

He sat back down, took a pen, and began to write. It wasn't a letter of support. It wasn't a berachah. It was his will.

In it, the rav instructed his children: no marble matzeivah, no granite, no polished stone. When his time came, he wanted a simple matzeivah, made from the same inexpensive stone this widow had used for her husband.

He finished writing, signed his name, and handed it to the widow to read over. "This," he said, "is my tzavaah, my final instructions. Your husband's matzeivah won't be alone. Mine will be just the same."

The woman was dumbfounded. She blinked once, twice, and then nodded. No speeches, no lectures. Just one unassuming act of empathy, and the pain she carried for years… melted away.

When R' Auerbach passed away, his children followed his will to the letter. They placed a simple matzeivah at his kever — nothing fancy, just a modest stone. It stood there for years, weathered by the rain and wind, until eventually, the letters began to fade. The stone itself started to crumble.

By then, his great-grandson had grown up. When he saw the state of the kever, he decided it was time. Time to replace the stone. To honor the rav. Before he could do anything, however, the phone rang. It was the mayor of Halberstadt. A German. Not Jewish. But he'd heard the story. He'd heard what R' Auerbach had done for that widow, how he had written his own will just to ease her burden, how he had lifted her from shame with a single act of kindness.

The mayor was so moved, so taken by the nobility of it all, that he offered to pay for the new matzeivah — on behalf of the city. He even invited the rav's great-grandson to come to Halberstadt for a formal dedication. The city would honor the memory of a rav who had honored one woman's pain.

Thus, decades after that one meeting in a small study, the story came full circle. That's what chessed looks like: a heart so full of

compassion that it can see another person's pain… and noiselessly, humbly, step into it. The matzeivah may have been simple. But the lesson is unforgettable.

Medrash U'Maaseh - Rabbi Fyvel Shuster



Welcome back to **מדרש ומעשה**, sharing a story for this week's upcoming **פרשה, פרשת האזינו**, and also for the **ראש השנה** that precedes it.

In his **חומש רש"י שיעור** the past week, the **טאלנא רבי** shared something with us that he saw in a biography of **רב אהרן לייב שטיינמן זצ"ל**.

He said that **רב שטיינמן** told over that once he was sitting in the home of the **חזון איש**, and a **תלמיד חכם** from **בני ברק** came in and he was very upset about something. He told the **חזון איש** that they recently opened across from his house a dormitory and school for girls who were orphaned Holocaust survivors, and they were right across the street from him.

And on **שבת**, he said, they were singing **זמירות**, those girls, and they opened the windows. It was hot in **בני ברק**. So he tried standing outside and calling to them to close the windows, but they didn't hear him, and what should he do?

The response of the **חזון איש** was to light up and say, "They're singing? They're singing! That's the most wonderful news that I've heard! How can I ever thank you for bringing me such joy with the fact that you told me that those girls are singing **זמירות**!"

That's a very important lesson as to how we view song in **עם ישראל**.

האזינו, the week's **פרשה**, is defined by the **תורה** as a **שירה, השירה הזאת**, a song.

Now when we look at it, it is a song that has many difficult things in it as well. It talks about tragedies that can befall **עם ישראל** in their

future history, things that we did see happen to us. It talks about the ups and downs of the struggles of the Jewish people, but to us, that is **שירה**. That is song.

Song for us is not just something we do flippantly for escapism. Song is a way in which we internalize for ourselves, remind ourselves of our past, present, and future, in which we rejoice in the identity that we have, including with all the responsibilities that brings upon us.

On **ראש השנה**, many communities sing a lot in **דאוונען**. Now again, it's true the **גמרא** says that we don't say **הלל** on **ראש השנה** because **ספרי חיים ומתים** are open, so how can a person say **שירה**? But **הלל** is a particular type of **שירה** which is said when we're saved from something, and on **ראש השנה** we're in the middle of the case.

But nonetheless, with many of the **פיוטים** that we sing, we sing, and oftentimes very joyously. This is the song of a soldier. Some of the most moving videos that have come out of this war, which should hopefully be over as soon as possible with everyone remaining safe, were of soldiers singing different songs throughout the year of battle: singing **מעוז צור** on **חנוכה**, singing **לכה דודי** before **שבת**, singing **הלל** on **פסח** or on **ראש חודש**. They obviously weren't disconnected from what's happening, just taking a break to have fun.

That singing is something that strengthened them, that was part of their battle, and part of reminding them of who and what and why they're fighting for.

That's the way we have to sing on **ראש השנה**, and on **סוכות**, and even as we sing and dance on **שמחת תורה**, because it's not just frivolous. That's one of the ways in which we strengthen ourselves and even fight the battle, and overcome that which we have to, to bring **עם ישראל** and the whole world to its designated purpose. Wishing everyone a **גוט שבת**, but first a **כתיבה וחתימה טובה**, a good, sweet, safe year to everyone. **כל טוב**.

The Greatness of The Merit of Studying Torah on Shabbos

It is brought in the sefer **Lev Eliyahu** (vol. 1, p. 86) that he heard from the **Chofetz Chaim** that since Shabbos is equal in weight to the entire Torah, therefore every mitzvah that one performs on Shabbos is equivalent to [all] 613 mitzvos.

And according to **the Gra** — who held that every letter of words of Torah contains a mitzvah — it follows that when one learns on Shabbos, every letter is equivalent to 613 mitzvos of Torah study. Accordingly, when a person learns on Shabbos, there is no end to the multitude of mitzvos that accrue to his credit.

Furthermore, the **Ben Ish Chai** (Year 2, Parashas Shemos, in the introduction) wrote in the name of the Kabbalists that Torah study on Shabbos is a thousand times greater than Torah study on a weekday!

The Song of Ha,azinu - R' Yehoshua Frankenhuis



פרשת האזינו is so full of timely lessons for the time which we're in, **עשרת ימי תשובה**, and of course the upcoming amazing **יום טוב** of **יום כיפור**. If we take a look in this **פרשה**, we see there's the **קללות**, the curses for if **כלל ישראל**, **השם ירחם**, don't keep the **תורה**. And the **תורה**, interestingly enough, refers to these **קללות** as **שירה**, a song.

It's called **שירת האזינו**, and this is very strange.

קללות, curses may be necessary, may be a critical part of **שכר ועונש**, but is that a song? Is that something we want to sing about, we want to praise about?

Explains **רב פינקוס** the most amazing thing. He gives a **משל**. Imagine you've got a man, a poor man, he's got no money, he can't even pay for bread to put on the table, his children are starving, and he's walking down the river.

And as he's walking down with his broken shoes, he steps into a sharp stone, and he screams out in pain, and he looks down, and he's just stepped on a precious stone. He rushes to hospital, they bandage him up, and then he goes price inquiring about the value of the stone he stepped on. And before long, he realizes it's the most precious stone worth many millions of dollars, and all his financial worries are gone. He can pay off all his loans, all his debts, and he can marry off all his kids in the most respectful way, his children, his grandchildren, **ברוך השם**, he's sorted.

When he's going to be telling over to his friends and when he's going to be talking about that moment when he stepped on that diamond, he's going to be speaking about it only with great excitement. Even the moment of pain is going to be discussed with the greatest excitement and song. Why? Because that pain, that minute amount of pain is what brought him the most tremendous amount of pleasure.

Says **רב פינקוס**, that's exactly what the **קללות** are all about.

We see them as something painful, but it's no different to stepping on that hard diamond. Yes, it's painful, but what does it do? It brings us closer to **השם**. It reminds us that **הקדוש ברוך הוא** is waiting for us to come back. It's the call of **עורו ישנים משנתכם**.

כלל ישראל are holding in a difficult time. We're surrounded by so many enemies who want to kill us, want to destroy us, and **השם ירחם**, yes, there is so much bloodshed and there is so much difficulty in so many areas in **כלל ישראל**. But we have to remember: What are all these difficulties and challenges there for? They're there for one reason: It's **השם** calling us, "Come back!

עורו ישנים משנתכם! Wake up, do **תשובה**!" And when we realize that, and we utilize the difficulties and the challenges **השם** gives us to come closer to Him, then it's a **שירת האזינו**, then it's something so special, something we're so grateful for, and even something we can sing to **השם** about.

Torah Wellsprings ~ R' Elimelech Biderman



Rabbi Meir Shapiro, **זצ"ל**, once related that there was a town in Poland where the Rav and his Rebbetzin distributed **צדקה**. The Rebbetzin would give a grosh—a small coin worth one piastre.

Once, a young man came with a request for assistance. He was sent to the Rav, who gave him a zloty. A zloty was worth one hundred grosh, or one hundred piastres.

There was a schnorrer who would come to the Rebbetzin every night, and she would give him a grosh. One night, he managed to get in to the Rav. The Rav happened not to have any small coins, so he gave him a zloty—one hundred grosh.

The next morning, the man approached the Rav and said, "Rabbi, you know, I have a great need. Perhaps the Rav could give me another zloty?"

The Rav replied, "You know, you really don't understand. You come to the Rebbetzin every night, and she gives you a grosh. You have never asked her for another one. I gave you a zloty, which is worth one hundred grosh, and you are asking for another one?"

The man answered, "Rabbi, please leave me alone about schnorring, because I know how to schnorer better than the Rav!"

"What do you mean?" asked the Rav.

He explained, "With the Rebbetzin, if I ask again, I have to work for another grosh. But with the Rav, I can earn another zloty. Here, it is worth investing the effort!"

Rabbi Moshe Shapiro would apply this story to the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah:

"You know, this is where it pays to invest. Every **תפילה** is worth zlotys! Every **תפילה** is worth zlotys! It amounts to billions.

"All year long, I ask, **על צרותינו ועל חובותינו, הרחמים ירחמו**—'For our troubles and our debts, may the Merciful One have mercy.' I ask this throughout the year. But now, this is where it pays to invest!"



Universal Values Living Kiddush Hashem from the Inside Out by Rabbi Shraga Freedman

A number of years ago, Yeshivas Torah Vodaath had a Sefer Torah written and dedicated in honor of **R' Pam**. To publicize the hachnasas Sefer Torah, the yeshivah printed posters to be displayed around the neighborhood. Naturally, the advertisements featured a beautiful picture of R' Pam.

One of these posters was placed on East Seventh Street in the Kensington neighborhood of Brooklyn, where R' Pam himself lived. However, Rebbetzin Pam was not happy about it. East Seventh Street was a quiet residential block, not a bustling avenue with

stores and businesses. She felt the poster disrupted the serene character of the street and worried that it might annoy the neighbours. Determined to address the issue, the rebbetzin decided to remove the poster herself. But when she went out the next morning, it was already gone.



Soon after, the rebbetzin met her Italian neighbour and took the opportunity to apologize for the "misdeed." She wanted to assure her neighbour that she, too, was uncomfortable with the poster being there.

The Italian neighbour smiled and replied, "Do you know who took it down? - I did!"

Surprised, the rebbetzin listened as her neighbour explained, "We've lived next door to you for so many years, and we've always been inspired by Rabbi Pam's greatness and pleasantness. We've always wanted to have a picture of him in our home. When we saw the poster, we couldn't resist! We took it down, and now it's hanging in our house!" ("A Life's Ladder" by R' Zev Smith)

It's important to recognize that when we exude pleasantness and kindness in our daily interactions, it's not just about being polite, following etiquette, or "being a mentch." It's an expression of G-dliness.

R' Yisroel Salanter ZT'L would say:

'It is worthwhile to learn Mussar an entire lifetime, even if it only accomplishes avoiding speaking Lashon Horah once!'

UKforTORAH@gmail
Authentic Hashkofa from Gedolei Yisroel

The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva - Rav Yehuda Zev Segal

A few weeks before the petira of the Rosh Yeshiva, askonim from Antwerp organized a protest against the actions of the State of Israel outside the UN headquarters in Belgium. The Rosh Yeshiva himself added his signature to the kol korei which called on people to attend the protest.

One of the rabbonim in Antwerp who personally attended the protest discovered that powerful members of his shul, who did not have a strong background in Torah hashkofos, strongly disapproved of his participation in a public event against the State of Israel, and were planning on making a "committee meeting" to discuss ways of taking action against him.

One of the members of the committee was personally a strong admirer of the Rosh Yeshiva, and therefore the Antwerp askonim arranged for someone to visit the Rosh Yeshiva and ask him to speak to this committee member and request from him to use his influence to protect the rav from repercussions.

When the Rosh Yeshiva heard of the issue, he immediately called up as requested and explained to the committee member the impropriety of harming a rav's position for taking a stand against the actions of the State of Israel against Yiddishkeit.

Uncharacteristically, the Rosh Yeshiva added a sharply worded comment: "We daven, **כִּי תַעֲבִיר מֶמְשֶׁלֶת זָדוֹן מִן הָאָרֶץ**, *when the "kingdom of evil" will be swept away from the world.*

What is this *kingdom of evil*? Until not long ago, this referred to – the Soviet Union, and the Zionist State of Israel. Now that the Soviet Union has collapsed – this refers only to the Zionists!"

As the Rosh Yeshiva was careful to say *pesukim* only from inside, he actually opened up his Rosh Hashona *machzor* to read out these words as he said them.

There is a fascinating sequel to this episode. Before the Rosh Yeshiva was *niftar*, only a short time later, he expressed his desire that he wished to have buried with him a list of all his descendants at the time, which he had already prepared. However, it was not clear where this list was to be found.

At this point, the Yid who had visited the Rosh Yeshiva and witnessed his conversation with the committee member in Antwerp remembered that he had noticed a list inside the Rosh Hashona *machzor* when the Rosh Yeshiva read out from it "**כִּי תַעֲבִיר מֶמְשֶׁלֶת זָדוֹן מִן הָאָרֶץ**".

He hastened to inform the family, and indeed the list was found in time for before the *levaya*.

Story of the Week Compiled by Aaron Leitner

Eighteen Kreplach

Sometimes, two stories converge in a complementary way. Despite variations, they share the basic plot, and their themes resonate in harmony.

The hero of the story? A bag of kreplach. According to one recollection, 18 of them.

Let us go back 56 years, to early Elul 5730. On September 6, 1970, only a few weeks before Rosh Hashanah, Palestinian terrorists hijacked several international airliners and forced three of them to land at Dawson's Field, a remote airstrip in the Jordanian desert.

Among the hostages was Rav Yitzchok Hutner, zt"l, the revered Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Rabbi Chaim Berlin. For nearly three weeks,

the Torah world waited, worried and davened for his, and the other hostages', safe return.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky, (a grandson of HaRav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt"l) recalls his memories of that period. "I had just started learning at the Philadelphia Yeshiva, and I clearly remember the angst and pain in the tefillos of the Roshei Yeshivah.

"That pain was not confined to the Beis Medrash. It was felt in homes across the country (and indeed, across the world). Thousands of miles away, in Monsey the ordeal reached the kitchen of my Bubby, Rav Yaakov's *zivug sheini,* whom my father referred to as *"der mumme,"* Rebbetzin Chana Kamenetsky, o"h.

"In anticipation of the coming Yamim Nara'im, specifically, Erev Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah, my grandmother was preparing kreplach well in advance of Rosh Hashanah. She had taken off a few and offered them to Rav Yaakov to put in his soup during a weekday supper.

"Although Rav Yaakov never refused anything that his rebbetzin offered (even remarking that ever since they were married, he had never had a stomach-ache from anything she made), this time he deferred.

"*Rav Hutner zitzt in tefisah, un ich zol essen kreplach?* Rav Hutner is sitting in captivity, and I should eat kreplach?"

"He simply could not allow himself an extra treat while Rav Hutner was imprisoned in the Jordanian desert.

"My grandmother heard these words and acted upon them in a remarkable way. She did not merely place the kreplach in the freezer for Yom Tov. She set them aside for Rav Hutner. If Rav Yaakov could not eat them because Rav Hutner was in captivity, then Rav Hutner himself would eat them when, with Hashem's help, he was released.

"My cousin, Rav Yitzchok Shurin, recalled the story years later in a letter to my Bubby's family in Toronto after her passing. He had spent the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah with my grandparents, and he remembered my grandmother explaining that there would be no kreplach while Rav Hutner remained in captivity. She added that she had put 18 of them aside to give him on his return.

"This is where the second part of the story comes in.

"Rav Hutner, was freed very shortly before Rosh Hashanah. Not long afterwards, a young talmid named Yisroel Gettinger (who would later become the Rav of Indianapolis) entered Rav Hutner's office and noticed a bag of kreplach sitting on his normally immaculate desk.

"Rav Hutner explained that Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky had brought them to him. They had been set aside for him by the Rebbetzin.

"Rav Hutner related to Reb Yisroel that he called to thank the Rebbetzin and asked her how many kreplach she had sent.

"She told him the number.

"That is the exact amount I received," Rav Hutner quipped. "You will be pleased to know that Rav Yaakov did not eat any along the way."

"It's a tale with many nuances: the sensitivity of my *zeide* (Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky), his *rebbetzin's* intuitive reaction, and, of course, the characteristic graciousness and wit of Rav Hutner.

"It radiates with hope and anticipation of salvation. Above all, it demonstrates compassion for another Yid's pain, which manifests in many ways. Sometimes, that means grand, global initiatives, other times, it means refusing to eat kreplach.

Good Shabbos and **גמר חתימה טובה**

Aaron Leitner



Rabbinic Saloon

There is a perplexing statement made in the middle of this week's Haftorah: **אֶהְיֶה וְיַז שָׂרָשָׁיו כַּלְּבָנוֹן כַּטַּל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִפְרַח כַּשּׁוֹשַׁנָּה** – I will be to Israel **like dew**; he will blossom like a rosebush, and his roots will strike out like a Lebanon cedar." (Hoshea 14:6)

What is the prophetic meaning of being like dew?

In order to fully appreciate the answer, we must first hear an incredible story shared in Rav Yair Weinstock's More Tales for the Soul.

One snowy midnight in Posen, a woman came weeping to **R' Akiva Eiger**: her husband, an innkeeper, had fallen behind on rent to the local poritz (landowner), who had thrown him in prison and threatened to kill him if the debt wasn't paid within two days.

R' Akiva was moved but stuck — the town's own poor already had many needs. Then he had an idea. Late at night, he and his son walked to the roughest part of town, to a saloon full of gamblers and drinkers. The men there were stunned to see the city's rabbi at their door, but welcomed him in.

R' Akiva told them the family's plight. Touched, the men emptied their pockets — and remarkably, it came out to exactly the sum needed. But instead of leaving, R' Akiva lingered. "I'd like to say a few more words, if you'll let me." The room grumbled — hadn't they given enough already?

With tears on his face, R' Akiva said: "I am responsible for every one of you. I think of you constantly, and it pains me to watch you heading toward ruin. I stayed silent because I didn't think you'd listen — but tonight, through this mitzvah, I see a crack has opened in your hearts. Don't let this moment pass. You can still return — who knows about tomorrow?"

He broke down crying, and soon the whole room wept with him. Some of those men were never seen in the saloon again — from then on, they could only be found in shul.

Rav Moshe Weissman (Weekly Haftaros 5:225) quotes the **Radak** who beautifully explains that when we rekindle our relationship with the Almighty, we will be spiritually refreshed as if by a rejuvenating layer of Heavenly dew. No matter how far we may have fallen, we cannot forget that our Father eagerly awaits to embrace us again.

We are in the middle of Aseres Yemai Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. During these days Hashem is extra close to us. Hashem eagerly and passionately awaits our teshuvah.

Hashem is our loving Father! No matter how far we have strayed and no matter how much we have sinned, Hashem wants us back!

Rabbi Yissocher Frand points out that every day in Shmone Esrei, we say a bracha about Teshuvah. **הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ אָבִינוּ לְתוֹרָתֶךָ וְקָרְבֵנוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ לַעֲבוֹדָתֶךָ וְהַחֲזִירֵנוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' הָרוֹצֶה בִּתְשׁוּבָה**

We are asking Hashem to help us repent and return to Him. The bracha ends with the words "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who DESIRES REPENTANCE!"

It does not mean that Hashem will merely accept our repentance. It means that Hashem WANTS our repentance! Hashem's desire for us to come back is so enormous that if we make even a minimal effort, Hashem will be waiting to take us back!

R' Hillel of Radoshitz ZT"L would say:

"If a person lives with the fear of sin, he will have nothing to fear from death!"



משה רבינו's Farewell Message

משה רבינו, the greatest leader humanity has ever known, prepares to bid farewell to his beloved people — the people for whom he sacrificed so much throughout his life to ensure their survival and continuity. This is the man who lived through **השם**'s miracles, who performed miracles, and who defended **כלל ישראל** time and again, even to the point of challenging **השם** Himself: " **מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת** — erase my name from the **תורה** You have written if harm is going to befall my people."

Now he stands at the moment where he must take leave. It is his last day on earth, and he knows full well the esteem and love the nation has for him. After all, he was the one who delivered to them the most precious heritage the world has ever known: our holy **תורה**.

So what could he possibly say at such a time? How does one say goodbye to the children he nurtured physically and spiritually for forty years? How does one ensure they will continue walking the proper path in the future?

משה calls together all the leaders and all the members of every tribe, and he delivers his final message in the form of a poetic **מוסר** song — a song he instructs them to constantly review and never forget. In it, he reveals the kind of life they must lead in order to survive as a nation, and he forewarns them of what the future holds if they abandon the statutes of the **תורה**.

He calls upon heaven and earth, **שמים וארץ**, to bear witness to the binding truth of his words and to the nation's acceptance of them, ensuring that no denial could ever arise in future generations. And

just as heaven and earth endure forever, so too would their covenant with **השם** endure forever.

Heaven and earth would always be there to shower their bounty upon the nation when they lived up to their word — or, **חס ושלום**, withhold their blessings if the covenant was forgotten. They would serve as constant reminders to **כלל ישראל** to return to the proper path whenever they strayed. Good deeds would bring abundance; sin, **חס ושלום**, would bring drought. Blessing and curse would be determined by the lifestyle the nation chose to lead.

משה wanted to etch into every heart that Jewish life is not a free-for-all. Becoming **השם**'s chosen people requires living according to a higher standard — a holy life based on the teachings of the **תורה**, distinct from the ways of the gentile world.

So he begs the people to internalize his words and to command their children to adhere to everything stated in the **תורה**. He makes clear to them **כי חייכם**— that **תורה** life is life itself, and that their entire existence depends on it. A Jew without **תורה** is like a body without a soul. The **תורה** is a Jew's guiding light, and it is impossible for a Jewish soul to survive the stormy ocean of exile without it.

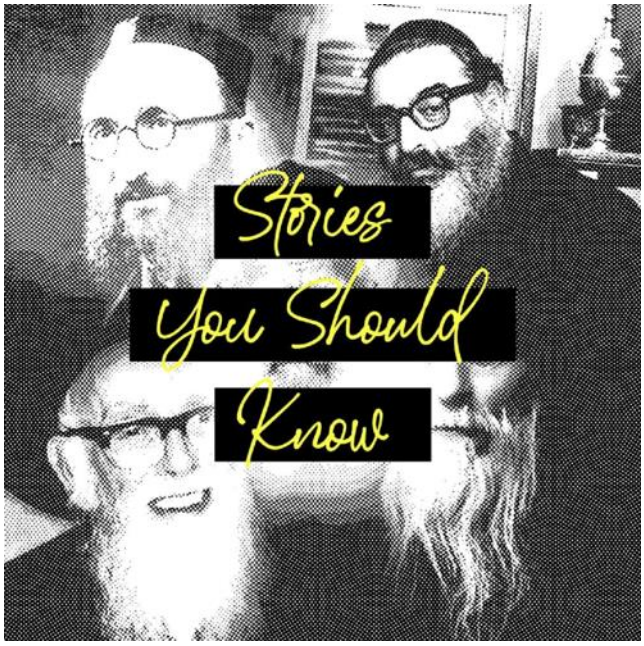
We need only study carefully the words of **משה רבינו**'s **האזינו** to see how everything he said — everything he foretold — has happened and continues to happen to this very day: the rewards for the faithful, and the retribution for those who abandon **השם**. Yet despite our shortcomings, our survival as a nation is guaranteed and our future redemption assured, because the **תורה** is everlasting. We have the promise **כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו**— the **תורה** will never be forgotten by the Jewish people. And as long as the **תורה** lives among us, we as a nation will continue to live.

Therefore, if a **ייד** wants to ensure his Jewish existence and continuity, he must make sure to include **תורה** in his daily life and ensure that his children are raised within true **תורה** living.

משה רבינו left us a legacy — a proven formula for successful living in this world. We must follow the time-tested path our forefathers traveled, the path that has carried us to this very day, when we are witnessing the ingathering of our people from all corners of the world and the return of our lost brethren to authentic **תורה** Judaism, as practiced throughout the generations.

How fortunate we are to witness prophecies coming true, and how encouraging it is to know that so too will the prophecy of our final redemption come true in the near future.

May we merit to see it soon in our days.



Perpetual Love Of Hashem- The Encouragement Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson Gave To Rav Yechezkel Abramsky

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky, also known as Rav Chatzkel, was well-known for his leadership and scholarship. He was the leader of Vaad HaYeshivos in Eretz Yisrael and the chief *dayan* of the famed London Beis Din. He was known to take a strong stance on several occasions where there were questionable halachic practices. The following story is one which reveals a completely different side of his personality.

In 1929, Rav Chatzkel was arrested by the communists and was subsequently sentenced to five years of backbreaking labor in Siberia. After two years of absolute torture, he was saved and decided to settle in England.

On one occasion, he was discussing his time in Siberia with Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the sixth Rebbe of Chabad. When they were

conversing, Rav Chatzkel related that there was one instance that really changed his entire thought process.

He explained: "One morning, when I woke up and started to recite **מודה אני**, I began to ponder: in my present situation, which may cause me to pass on, what am I thanking Hashem for? I don't have a *siddur* to *daven* from, I can only *daven* what I know by heart. I can't put on *tefillin*, it was taken from me. I can't learn Torah, as I have to work throughout the day and I have no books to learn from. Is this the life of a Jew?"

In that moment, when Rav Chatzkel felt truly heartbroken, an incredible insight struck him.

"But then I came to a realization," said Rav Chatzkel. "I am connected to Hashem, and Hashem loves me just for the fact that I am a Jew. So yes, I have something to be thankful for. I have a reason to rejoice."

Rav Schneerson turned to Rav Chatzkel and enlightened him with a powerful thought: "Rav Yechezkel," began Rav Schneerson, "the entire ordeal of Siberia was worth it to come to that realization."

What's so powerful about this story is that it uncovers for us something that we have at all moments.

We all have times where we are sick and can't learn, where we feel down and don't feel the sweetness of *davenen*, where things just don't seem to be going well. There is one thing that we can never let go of: that recognition that Hashem doesn't love me for all of my actions; Hashem loves me for my existence, for my very act of being. Hashem loves me simply because I am a Jew.

'The most damaging sin is not the sin itself but man's failure to believe in his capacity to repent and change.' ~ Kotzker Rebbe.

7 Days to Repair a Lifetime

The Arizal teaches that each day of the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah gives us the opportunity to repair the mistakes we made on that same day of the week throughout our lives.

But if there are only seven days of the week, why are there ten days of teshuvah?

Because Rosh Hashanah accounts for two days, and Yom Kippur for one—leaving seven days, one for each day of the week.

~ Divrei Yechezkel



The Picasso - Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Kivi Bernhard once traveled to Japan, where he had a meeting with an extremely wealthy Japanese businessman. The man's office was magnificent. It was located high above the city, on the top floor of a towering building. Kivi entered the office and began speaking with the businessman.

At some point, the man turned to him. "Mr. Kivi, let me show you something."

He pointed toward the wall. Kivi looked. And couldn't believe what he was seeing. - ***It was a Picasso.*** An original painting by Pablo Picasso. Picasso's works are among the most valuable pieces of art in the world. It was magnificent.

Kivi stared at it. "Wow."

Then the businessman asked him a strange question.

"Mr. Kivi," he asked, "what is the worst thing you could do to this painting?"

Kivi looked at him. He wasn't sure what the man meant.

"The worst thing?"

"Yes. What is the worst thing you could do to this painting?"

Kivi thought for a moment. "I guess I could cut it."

The businessman shook his head. "No, Mr. Kivi. If you cut it, then you're simply the idiot who cut a Picasso."

Kivi smiled. Okay. He tried again.

"Maybe I could pour black paint all over it." Surely that would destroy the painting.

Again, the businessman shook his head. "No, Mr. Kivi. Then you're just the idiot who poured black paint on a Picasso."

Kivi was getting confused. What answer was this man looking for?

He tried another answer.

"Take it off the wall so nobody can see it?"

"No, Mr. Kivi."

"Fold it?"

"No."

"Destroy it?"

"No."

Every answer was rejected. Kivi couldn't understand. What could possibly be worse than destroying a priceless Picasso?

Finally, he gave up. "Okay. ***What's the worst thing I could do to the painting?"***

The businessman looked at him. And gave him an answer Kivi never expected.

"The worst thing you can do to the painting," he said, "is cut out the painter's name."

Kivi looked at him.

The man explained. If someone slashes a Picasso - It's still a Picasso. A damaged Picasso. But a Picasso. If someone throws black paint across it - It's still a Picasso. A vandalized Picasso.

But everyone still knows who painted it. Even if someone damages the canvas - The identity of the artist tells you something about what you are looking at. This isn't an ordinary canvas. ***Picasso made this.*** And that changes everything.

But erase the artist's name - Forget who created it - And suddenly someone might look at a masterpiece and think it is nothing special.

We can do exactly the same thing to ourselves.

A person looks in the mirror and thinks: I'm average. I'm nothing special. Other people are more talented. Other people are more successful. Other people are more confident. Other people are more attractive. Other people are smarter. Other people accomplish more than I do. - And slowly, a person begins to look at himself as though he were an ordinary canvas.

When you think of yourself as average, you are cutting the Artist's name off the painting.

You are forgetting Who made you. HaKadosh Baruch Hu created you. There is a neshamah inside you. A piece of holiness that cannot be measured by your salary, appearance, popularity, intelligence or accomplishments. - You aren't some mass-produced painting that accidentally appeared on the wall. - ***You were designed.*** Every part of you. ***He made you exactly as you are.***

One of the most valuable things about you is knowing Who your Creator is. There is a neshamah within you that is connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. - ***You bear the signature of the Artist.***

Look at the name of the Artist. Because once you remember Who made you - You begin to understand what the painting is worth.

Garinim (Roasted Sunflower Seeds)



Akiva, an excellent young avreich, was approached by a kiruv organization. They had set up a program in which different avreichim would take a little time from their week, once or twice a week, to mentor a teenager who was strengthening his Yiddishkeit. They would learn together, build a relationship, and help the teen grow in his connection to Torah and mitzvos.

The organization had a wonderful young boy who was very enthusiastic about Yiddishkeit and wanted Akiva to learn with him. The only challenge was that Akiva lived in Yerushalayim, and this boy — Itzik — lived in Netanya, which posed a significant logistical challenge for a weekly commitment. Nevertheless, Akiva saw the immense value in the opportunity and readily agreed.

The learning sessions exceeded all expectations. Akiva made the trip every week to learn with Itzik. They both enjoyed not only the learning but also the conversations and the mentorship. Itzik looked forward to their sessions all week long; they provided him with the chizuk he needed to keep going, and indeed, he made tremendous progress.

One week, Akiva made his way to Netanya as usual. Given his tight schedule, he realized he wouldn't have time to go home for supper before heading out, so he decided to skip the meal and go straight to the session.

With an empty stomach, he boarded the bus, eventually arriving in Netanya, where he went straight to meet Itzik. Itzik was excited to see him, but as much as he was looking forward to the session,

Akiva was finding it difficult to ignore his hunger and fully concentrate on the learning. Still, he pushed through, setting aside his hunger and immersing himself in the sugya.

At one point, however, he noticed that Itzik had a bag of garinim (roasted sunflower seeds). Feeling increasingly hungry, he explained to Itzik how he had rushed straight from kollel and hadn't eaten, and he gently asked if he could have a few seeds to ease his hunger.

To Akiva's surprise, Itzik did not comply. He looked a little uncomfortable but declined to share.

A no is a no, and although Akiva was starving, it wasn't the refusal itself that bothered him. What unsettled him was the thought that here he was, coming every week without pay, making the tedious trip to Netanya solely to help and learn with this boy — and yet, when he asked for a few sunflower seeds, Itzik wouldn't share.

As much as Akiva didn't want it to bother him, it did. He tried to push the thought aside, but he couldn't shake the feeling.

The following week, Akiva came again. They tried to learn as usual, but Itzik could sense that something was bothering Akiva, and that, in turn, bothered him. Likewise, Akiva could feel that Itzik was uneasy, and it created an undercurrent of tension between them that was affecting their relationship.

Finally, Itzik broke the ice.

"I can see something is on your mind," he said. "Would you mind sharing it with me?"

Akiva, in a kind and gentle way, explained how much he enjoyed and valued their learning sessions. However, he admitted that he had been a little surprised the previous week when, despite being so hungry, Itzik had refused to share a few sunflower seeds.

Itzik smiled. "I understand," he said, "and I'd like to explain. But the only way I can do that is if you come with me to my apartment."

Before long, the two of them were on their way to Itzik's apartment in the center of Netanya. Itzik invited Akiva inside and led him into his bedroom.



Akiva was shocked by what he saw. The room was filled with bags, boxes, bowls, and cups — all brimming with sunflower seeds. Hundreds and thousands of them filled every container of every size throughout the room.

For a moment, Akiva grew nervous. Maybe this boy has a real issue — some extreme garinim obsession? Does he need help?

But before Akiva could say anything, Itzik began to explain.

"As you know, I wasn't brought up religious. I only recently did teshuvah and began pursuing a life of Torah and mitzvos. But since I spent so many years exposed to all kinds of things, I developed habits that aren't fitting for a shomer Torah u'mitzvos.

No matter how hard I tried, I struggled to break free from my past nisyonos and bad habits."

"I sought advice from my rebbi, and he gave me an incredibly powerful and life-changing tool. He instructed me to always keep a bunch of garinim in my left pocket. Every time I face a nisayon and overcome it, I take one seed and transfer it to my right pocket. At the end of the day, I take out all the seeds from my right pocket, count them, and celebrate my victories.

"This system has completely transformed me. It helps me see my progress, recognize my success, and reinforce my avodas Hashem.

"And now," Itzik said with a warm but slightly sheepish smile, "let me tell you about last week. The seeds you saw weren't just garinim — they were my victories. They were the nisyonos I had overcome that day. As much as I wanted to give them to you, I simply couldn't. They were my successes, and I hadn't counted them yet!"



כשעירים עלי דשא וכרביבים עלי עשב (דברים לב:ב)

– ***like soft raindrops upon vegetation and like [larger] raindrops upon the blades of grass***" (Devarim 32:2)

Moshe Rabbeinu opens Parshas Ha'azinu by comparing the Torah's eternal wisdom to life-giving, refreshing raindrops. He beseeches Hashem that the words of the Torah should nourish our neshamos just like dew and rain, which bring life and sustenance to the crops of the field.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh quotes a Medrash (Mishlei 10) to explain why Moshe Rabbeinu used more than one type of rainfall to describe the words of the Torah.

The Medrash mentions the words of Rabbi Yishmael describing what will transpire when a person faces the Beis Din Shel Ma'aleh after his years on this world.

Rabbi Yishmael says that a person who is fluent in Chumash will be asked why he did not master Mishnah. One who mastered Mishnah will be asked why he did not learn Gemara, while one who devoted his time to understanding Gemara will be asked why he did not delve deeply into the most difficult portions of the Gemara. And the **ברייתא** continues along this line.

To sum up, each person will be asked why he or she did not stretch him or herself to reach their fullest potential.

The Ohr HaChaim quotes this Medrash to point out that this Medrash liberates people by informing them that Hashem judges each person according to his or her ability – no more, and no less. He comments that Hashem will not ask the one who is fluent in Chumash why he did not master **מעשה מרכבה**. He will only ask about things one level beyond where he exerted himself, for he should have worked for the level above the level which he reached.

At the same time, however, it holds us all to a demanding standard – the very highest spiritual point that we are able to reach with our innate abilities.

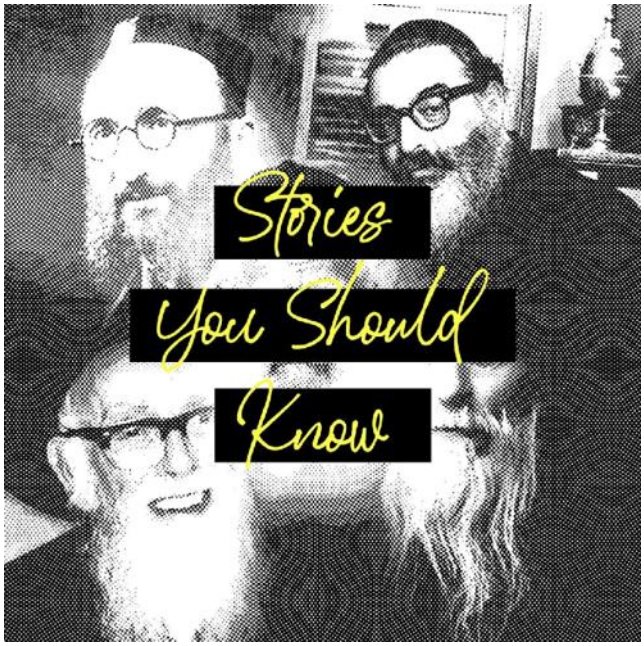
Moshe informs the Bnei Yisroel that the Torah provides nourishment to each person according to his or her level. Soft, gentle raindrops for the vegetation, which is small (easier learning topics for those who find difficult limudim beyond them) and **רביבים** which are larger, thicker drops and drenching rain for fields of grass (intricate sugyos for advanced learners).

This has both lenient and strict applications. It entails leniency on one who is unable to achieve more; conversely, it entails stringency on one who is able to achieve much, for they ask him everything, even **מעשה מרכבה**.

In all of one's **עבודת ה'**, a person must inspect his actions and his deeds, to seek out and search for the truth: Is he maximising his talents fittingly to complete that which **ה'** is seeking from him?

R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev ZT"L would say:

"Were the issue of Ga'avah and haughtiness not written about in so many holy seforim, it would be impossible to believe that a person made of dust and ashes, so flimsy and fragile, can possibly be haughty!"



A Sudden Change Of Heart- The Real Back Story Behind The Miraculous Survival Of Reb Yehoshua Zimbalist

One of the great teachers of **Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky** was a rather unknown figure named Rav Yehoshua Zimbalist. Rav Zimbalist ran a *yeshivah* for between 150 and 200 students for almost 15 years after the Bolshevik Revolution, despite the fact that there was a ban on religious instruction.

One day, Rav Zimbalist was called in for a meeting with the frightening NKVD. They were the Interior Ministry of the Soviet Union, which practically meant that they were Joseph Stalin's police force.

They would send people to work camps, or worse, eliminate them for trivial actions. They were absolutely terrifying. When one would get an invitation, one can assume that they should start packing up their belongings and get ready for a trip to Siberia. Purposely, the NKVD would force any person who is invited to see them to wait for hours.

This way, the fear would build up awaiting the fateful meeting. Finally, after a long wait, the chief investigating officer called Rav Zimbalist in. The investigation officer then did something completely out of the ordinary. He asked Rav Zimbalist to sit down.

Now, although this sounds meaningless, in those times, that was an attempt at showing consideration. The investigations officer then let it all out. "I want you to know that I am a Jew." He then went on to explain that he has a massive file on Rav Zimbalist, and time was running out. "In another six months, I'm getting a promotion, and I will no longer be able to protect you.

I suggest you leave the country, and I'll help you obtain the necessary papers."

Now, this made no sense. Why would an officer of the NKVD risk his position and potentially his life to help Rav Zimbalist? - The officer then revealed the backstory.

His mother was a poor widow. There was one *erev Shabbos* where she literally had no means to buy any food for Shabbos. On top of that, no storekeeper would extend her any credit, and she had nothing of value to even obtain some money from a pawnbroker.

As a last resort, she turned to Rav Zimbalist and related to him her story. Immediately, without hesitation, he reached into his pocket and gave her his gold pocket watch to be used as a pawn.

This unforgettable act of kindness stayed etched within the memory of this woman's son, and because of this act, Rav Yehoshua, his family, and his entire *yeshivah* were completely protected for all those years.



The Last Rock Song

The parsha begins with a shira, a song sung by Moshe Rabeinu for the heaven and earth to hear. Towards the beginning, the posuk proclaims "Ha'tzur tamim pa'alo, ki kol derachav mishpat. Keil emunah v'ein avel, tzadik v'yashar hu." Loosely translated, this means that Hashem's actions and decisions are solid and deliberate. Everything is just and correct, as is Hashem.

Most of us are familiar with these words as the opening phrase of the tziduk ha'din recited at a levaya, so it feels a bit out of place in a shira, but this is actually where the posuk appears in the Torah.

The Ohr Hachaim ha'kadosh explains that the shira begins by telling us that the source of rain and beracha in areas of parnasa is

Torah study and observing the mitzvos. Yet often, we see Torah scholars struggling with parnasa, or people who denigrate talmidei chachamim prosper. So, the posuk tells us that nothing is without reason and sometimes Hashem withholds parnasa from those who deserve it, but it is all with cheshbon, and so the Torah scholar must realize that He is a "Keil emunah", and Hashem will give him everything he deserves, and he must trust that everything is fair and just.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin zt"l notes that this was the shira that Moshe sang on his last day on earth. We also find that Dovid sang a shira before he died. It is interesting that there Dovid referred to Hashem as "sali" (my rock).

Even at the very end of their lives, when pretty much nothing could change, both Dovid and Moshe spoke of their relationship with Hashem as being solid like a rock.

Moshe davened so many tefilos beseeching Hashem to grant him entry to Eretz Yisroel, but He refused the request. Perhaps the B'nei Yisroel looked at Moshe and thought to themselves, "this man gave his life for us. He led us out of Mitzrayim and guided us in the midbar for forty years. He really deserves to go with us into Eretz Yisroel. Moshe is probably questioning the fairness of it all." However Moshe Rabeinu had full emunah that Hashem's decision was just, even though he didn't understand it, and so, he proclaimed "ha'tzur tamim pa'alo…".

So it comes out that Moshe's shira - and Dovid's too - was a proclamation of emunah. It was an announcement to the world that everything that happened throughout his lifetime was Hashem's part of Hashem's perfect plan. Clearly, Moshe Rabeinu knew this all along, but it was his parting message to us so that we should internalize it and aspire to do the same.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Hoff Shlita – Who Decides if we are like sons or servants?

רבותי, we're all collectively the whole of **כלל ישראל** fastly moving forward in the second half of **עשרת ימי תשובה**. Our **אלול** has gone by, **ראש השנה** has gone by, the first half of **עשרת ימי תשובה** has gone by, and we have remaining barely a few days, hours, and minutes, so precious. With the calling of being being **מזדרז** to do our **תפילות** extra in **איכות** and **כמות**, to do, being **מזדרז** in our **תורה** and our **מצוות** and our **חסד** and our **תשובה**, in order to utilize the precious time that we have available ahead of us for the maximum opportunity. I would like to share with you an insight in the **סדר** of the **ימי הדין**.

We said it in the **תפילות** of **ראש השנה: היום יעמיד במשפט כל יצורי עולמים, אם כבנים, אם כעבדים**. There's two ways in which this **משפט** may be considered: like children, **רחמנו כרחם אב על בנים**. Parents always want the best for their children. That's the best kind of favourable **משפט**.

ואם כעבדים, עינינו לך תלויות, we know that we're dependent on **הקדוש ברוך הוא**, which is also a **מדרגה**. But what decides **אם כבנים, אם כעבדים**? We all want to be **כבנים** to find that favour. So who's going to decide? And it's **מבואר** in the **מפרשים** that we decide. We, every **איד** defines his relationship with **הקדוש ברוך הוא**.

Is it **כבנים** or is it **כעבדים**? And the way you define your relationship is the way that **הקדוש ברוך הוא** will consider this. How do we define the relationship?

Two things. The first thing is: how do we do the **מצוות** and our **עבודה** of keeping **תורה**?

You know, a child sees it as a privilege to be **מקיים** his parents' wish. He wants the **כבוד** of his parents, he's wanting things to be well, and he does what he can do for **לשם** his **מצוה** of **כיבוד אב** with his whole heart, because he feels it's something which is of great **חשיבות** to be able to do, for the feeling for his parents.

And he does more than the very basic minimal that's required. Many children can't do enough for their parents. An **עבד**? And an **עבד** doesn't have any feeling to want to do the wish of his master. He has to do it.

He has to do it not by choice. He may have to do it to that, to its full detail, but it's not **מחמת רצונו**, it's because he doesn't have a choice. Now we need to define our **תורה** and **מצוות**: are we doing it because we have to do it, or are we doing it because we want to do it, we want to give **כבוד** to **הקדוש ברוך הוא**, we want to want it to be something which we see as a privilege?

If we do **תורה** and **מצוות** and we want to be **מדקדק** and **מהדר** to do more than the basic requirement, because it's our **רצון כרצון** a **בן** for his parents, then we've defined our **תורה** and **מצוות** as children for parents, and so **הקדוש ברוך הוא** will be now **אם כבנים, רחמנו כרחם אב על בנים**, because our relationship to **קיום** of **רצון** of **הקדוש ברוך הוא** is like a child to parents. That's up to us to decide how we do it.

And the more we do **מצוות בשמחה**, with **רצון**, with privilege, and we're more **מהדר, מדקדק**, we've brought out the **זכות** that **רבונו של עולם** should look at us **כבנים**. That's one **ענין**.

A second important **ענין** is how we care for each other, fellow **איד**. The **רמב"ם** says in **הלכות צדקה**, after the **רמב"ם** has told us how important **מצות צדקה** is, he says: **פרק י' הלכות מתנות עניים**

כל ישראל והנלוה עליהם כאחים הם, שנאמר בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם

You are all considered like brothers, because the **פסוק** says we are children to **הקדוש ברוך הוא**. That makes us all brothers.

אם אח לא ירחם על אח, if one brother doesn't care for his others, who then should care for him? And so the **רמב"ם** says that's **מחייב** us, obliges us to care for every **איד**, because we're all collectively children of **הקדוש ברוך הוא** and therefore siblings to care for each other.

The **רמב"ם** is telling us a **מוראדיקע ענין**. When we're **מחזק** with **צדקה**, whether it's money, whether it's other areas of **חיזוק**, and care, and compliments, and **מכבד** other people out there, whichever way, whether even if it's a phone call, extra phone call we make to wish somebody a **גוט יאר, אבער בכל אופן** that we do to make other people's lives and plights easier, we're bringing out the **בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם**. We're bringing the relationship of being children to **הקדוש ברוך הוא** to the fore, because we're relating to each other as our brothers.

אם אח לא ירחם על אח, that's **בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם**. So when we do more to care for others, financially, and as I say, whichever kind of support we can do to do so to care for other people, we share our hearts with others to make other people **בשמחה**, we're bringing out the relationship for every **איד** to his to **רבונו של עולם** as one as of a child to a parent, **הקדוש ברוך הוא**.

דער רבונו של עולם זאל אונז העלפן, אם כבנים, we're **בנים**, and we define that ourselves by doing **רצון ה' בשמחה**, by doing extra to care for others **בימים האלו**. The **חשיבות** of **מעשי צדקה** is so great, and with that we'll be **זוכה, רחמנו כרחם אב על בנים**. Every father wants it to be good for his children, and we'll be **זוכה דער אויבערשטער** would shower his ultimate and infinite **ברכות** and **ישועות** for all of us, **כל כלל ישראל**.

As we continue to be **מתחזק** in **דבקות** of these days, we should continue to find **רצון**, to find **ישועה** and **ברכה** and **שמחה**, and to make the year ahead of us and many years ahead of us good for **אלע אידן** for us and **צוזאמען, א גוט געבענטשטע זיסע יאר כל אחינו בית ישראל, בנים לה' אלוקינו**

"The fear of Yom Kippur is not the fear of punishment, but the awe of standing before our own potential. We tremble because we see who we could become." ~ Rav Hutner — Pachad Yitzchak, YK.

בס"ד

למודי משה

שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך- 'Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.' - *Hoshe'a* 14:2; *Haftorah* for Shabbos Shuvah)

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 17a) tells us that there were three people over whom the evil inclination held no sway: Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Some add a fourth, Dovid, who was also not subject to the pull of the *yetzer horah*.

The Reisha Rav (*HaDerash VeHaIyun, Bereishis* 95) details four excuses people give for not living up to what is expected of them, and to sinning instead:

The first justification is one's parents. "What do you want from me? My parents were no good and their bad habits became second nature to me. How can you fault me for what I've become?"

The second excuse is excessive wealth. As the Torah writes in *Ha'azinu* (32:15), "**וַיִּשְׁמַן יְשֻׁרוּן וַיִּבְעָט**— Yeshurun became fat and kicked." Growing up financially privileged can often spell a person's spiritual undoing.

The third defence is wicked friends and associates. "I grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and got in with the wrong crowd." Or: "They're all doing it; I'm no worse than them."

The fourth vindication is inherently evil tendencies as a result of one's *mazel*. As it says in the Gemara (Shabbos 156b), the astrological signs a person is born under can play a role in his life.

Each of these justifications can be found in the lives of one of the *Avos* or Dovid HaMelech, yet all four succeeded in overcoming their unique *yetzer horah*. The Gemara is not telling us that our Forefathers and Dovid HaMelech never had a *yetzer horah* to begin with, but that they had one and vanquished it.

Avraham Avinu's father, Terach, was a renowned seller of idols. Yet Avraham shattered those idols and with it the myth that one cannot overcome the natural tendencies he acquired from his parents. He despised that which his father honored, thereby breaking and overcoming that *yetzer horah*.

Yitzchok Avinu was staggeringly wealthy, with access to all he could possibly want. Yet none of that affluence led him astray. The *yetzer horah* and disability of the rich kid who lives a life of unwholesome leisure were broken and overcome by Yitzchok.

Despite living in the house of Lavan, his idolatrous and dishonest father-in-law, Ya'akov Avinu remained as righteous as always. As he informed Eisav, "I lived with Lavan, yet I observed the 613 *mitzvos* and did not learn from his evil ways" (Rashi *Bereishis* 32:5). He surmounted the normal sway that wicked friends can have; he broke and overcame that *yetzer horah*.

When seeing Dovid, who was an "*admoni* — redhead" (I Shmuel 16:12), for the first time, Shmuel HaNavi was taken aback and afraid to anoint him as king. To Shmuel, Dovid resembled a murderer like Eisav, who also had red hair. Hashem told him that Eisav had killed on his own, yet Dovid will kill only based on the instructions of Sanhedrin (*Yalkut Shimoni*, I Shmuel 124). In other words, even if this kind of *mazel* can lead to spilling blood indiscriminately, Dovid had defeated this aspect of his nature and it was under his dominion. Dovid, as well, had overcome and broken this *yetzer horah*.

These four spiritual giants show us that neither nature nor nurture govern. We are in control of our moral and spiritual destiny and are able to save ourselves from the abyss. The clarion call of "*Shuvah Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha*" applies to us all. The moment a person realizes that there are no excuses and no one else to blame, that is when true change can happen and a person can rise to the greatest heights.

Torah Wellsprings ~ R' Elimelech Biderman

שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך - 'Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.'



A remarkable teaching from the previous **Belzer Rebbe**, Rabbi **Aharon Rokeach** of blessed memory. He says as follows: The Gemara says there: **גדולה תשובה שמגעת עד כסא הכבוד, שנאמר שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך** - 'Great is repentance, for it reaches unto the Throne of Glory, as it is said: Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your G-d.'

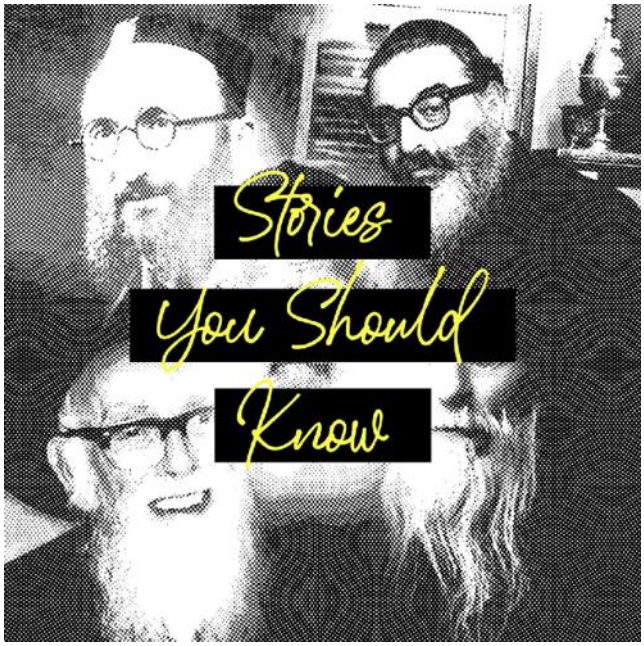
Why? Because it says- — **עד ה' אלקיך** unto Hashem your G-d— therefore repentance reaches unto the Throne of Glory.

The previous Belzer Rebbe asks: It says... why must the Gemara bring a pasuk from the Navi? Bring a pasuk from the Torah, where it says at the end of Parashas Nitzavim **ושבת עד ה' אלקיך** - and you shall return unto Hashem your G-d. You see, then, that repentance reaches unto the Throne of Glory.

He explains: In the Torah it says — **ושבת עד ה' אלקיך** ,and you shall return unto Hashem your G-d ;the pasuk concludes **בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך** - with all your heart and with all your soul.

You might therefore think that only a repentance of **בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך** with all your heart and with all your soul—only that is worthy.

He says: No. Even — **עד ה' אלקיך** - unto Hashem your G-d—even without- — **בכל לבבך** with all your heart—also reaches unto the Throne of Glory. - Every repentance reaches unto the Throne of Glory.



The Crucial Life Message the Chofetz Chaim Gave To the Chazon Ish

Rabbi Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz, otherwise known as the Chazon Ish, had a tremendous impact on all of Jewry as a leader until his passing in 1953. But he didn't always have an active leadership role. In fact, for the first fifty years of his life, he was completely unknown to most. He enjoyed a life of learning, on the quest of self-perfection, but one day that all changed.

Unexpectedly, he started getting involved in all aspects of Jewish life and made colossal decisions that would affect Jewish life to this day.

The question is therefore asked, why did the Chazon Ish all of a sudden decide to get involved as a leader of the Jewish people?

I heard from Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz the exact event that would compel the Chazon Ish to make such a magnificent change.

One day, he made up to go to a lecture given by Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, generally referred to as the Chafetz Chaim. Now, it was known at the time that whatever the Chafetz Chaim said at his public lectures would be exactly the message a person in the crowd needed to hear.

If a person was in conflict, he knew that he could go to the Chafetz Chaim's class and resolve his own personal dilemma. And so it was. The Chazon Ish traveled to Radin to hear the public lecture of the Chafetz Chaim. It was then that the Chafetz Chaim expressed a message that would be precisely what the Chazon Ish needed to hear.



The Chafetz Chaim there exclaimed that in the world that we live in today, where the Torah is so forsaken as a result of its issues, challenges, troubles, one is no longer afforded the luxury of just focusing on his own pursuit of self-perfection. Everybody has a responsibility to strengthen our generation that we live in today. One can no longer claim that someone else will do it.

The Chafetz Chaim went on to admit about himself that he could have known much more Torah had he not taken on public responsibility.

He could have written more books, expanded all areas of his knowledge, but something would be missing. When the Chazon Ish heard this, the message hit. He knew that if he would just continue on his path, he would be leaving Jewry without the gift of a great leader. It was at this point in time that the Chazon Ish decided to take responsibility for the generation.

The message of the Chafetz Chaim is clear. If a person has a talent, capability, or expertise in an area that can affect the Jewish people positively, one is obligated to use it.

R' Moshe of Bayan ZT"L would say:

"If a siddur drops on the floor we pick it up and kiss it. But a siddur has no feelings. On the other hand, when you see a person who has come upon hard times and has fallen, lift him up and embrace him with love!"