

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Pinchas



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Torah Wellsprings - Pinchas

Emunah: The Key that Unlocks Parnassah

It states (26:2) **שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדוּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, "Count the heads of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael..." The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni (תשע"ג) writes that there is another pasuk that is associated with this pasuk. The pasuk is (Tehillim 94:18) **אִם אָמַרְתִּי מָטָה רַגְלִי חֲסָדָךְ ה' יִסְעָדֵנִי**, "If I said, 'My foot falters', Your kindness, Hashem, supported me."

One wonders what the connection and similarity is between these two pasukim.

The Divrei Yisrael zt'l says that the similarity is with the words **רֹאשׁ**, head, which is written in this week's parashah, and **רַגְלִי**, feet, which is written in Tehillim. The head and the feet are both limbs of a person. Yet we still don't understand what the Midrash is telling us, and why the feet and the head are connected.

Here is the explanation:

There are times when a person is ill and can't walk. He thinks the problem is with his feet, so he goes to a podiatrist. But then he hears from the doctor that his feet are fine, and he advises him to go to a neurologist, because the problem is with his head. Sometimes an illness is in the head, and the pain is felt in the feet. When his head is cured, he can walk on his feet.

We now understand what the Midrash is telling us. **שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדוּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, means

that the minds of Bnei Yisrael should be well and healthy, and then **אִם אָמַרְתִּי מָטָה רַגְלִי חֲסָדָךְ ה'**, one's feet won't falter. They will be able to go well on their feet.

Regarding emunah and parnassah, the feet represent parnassah, as Chazal (Pesachim 119a) say from the pasuk (Devarim 11:6) **וְאֵת כָּל הַיְקוּם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֵיהֶם**, "all their fortunes at their feet". Chazal explain, **זה ממונו של אדם המעמידו על רגלו**, "This refers to a person's money that erects a person to stand firmly on his feet." **ראש** represents emunah, which is the belief one has in his head. These two matters are connected because when there is emunah, there is parnassah, as we will explain:

Some people struggle with parnassah. What should they do? Many will do more hishtadlus, and instead of working eight hours a day, they begin working twelve hours a day. They don't have time for Torah, they don't have time for tefillah, but they think that this is the only way to improve their parnassah.

This can be compared to when one's feet seem ill, and he tries to cure the feet, but the problem is elsewhere. When parnassah is lacking, the cure is in the emunah of the head. The problem is in their mind, in the **ראש**, and if they have emunah that parnassah comes from Hashem, they will succeed, and their parnassah will increase.¹

1. The Ben Ish Chai (Drush l'Shabbos HaGadol) zt'l quotes from the Alshich HaKadosh, a mashal of two friends, Reuven and Shimon, who always debated the topic of parnassah and hishtadlus. Reuven claimed that parnassah comes from hishtadlus. According to Reuven, if one doesn't have enough money, he should work more. Hishtadlus, according to him, is the means to make money. Shimon disagreed, arguing that parnassah comes from Hashem and does not depend on a person's actions. If Hashem decreed that the person should have parnassah, he will have it, even if he doesn't do hishtadlus. And if it was decreed from heaven that he lack parnassah, all hishtadlus in the world won't change his fate.

Once, these two friends were in a field, and they sat down under an apple tree. They looked up and saw that at the top of the tree, there was a large, beautiful apple. It was directly in the sunlight, and it appeared

לחם, bread, is often used in the Torah to refer to parnassah. There are also times that לחם alludes to emunah. For example, it states (Mishlei 12:9) וְחָסֵר לֶחֶם, "lacks bread," and the Zohar (vol.1 p.166a) says that the pasuk means he lacks emunah. The Yismach Yisrael zt'l (Toldos 6) understands from this Zohar that parnassah and emunah are associated. When there is emunah, there is parnassah. וְחָסֵר לֶחֶם, if emunah is lacking, parnassah will be lacking, as well. Therefore, when one doesn't have parnassah, עצתו אמונה, the counsel and the solution is to strengthen oneself with emunah. When he does so, he will have parnassah.

The Gemara (Shabbos 31a) writes, אמונת זה סדר, אמנות זה סדר, the word אמנות is related to סדר זרעים, the tractate of Mishnayos that discusses the halachos of plants and agriculture. Why is this tractate called אמנות? What is the connection between the halachos related to agriculture and emunah? Ateres Yehoshua zt'l explains that when one has emunah, the crops will grow well.²

Hishtadlus and Tefillah

The Chazon Ish zt'l would say that the primary hishtadlus is tefillah. There are times when a person must do actions of hishtadlus, as well. However, the Chazon Ish said that if one were to only perform acts of hishtadlus and doesn't invest in tefillah at all, he hasn't fulfilled his obligation of hishtadlus. (Maaseh Ish vol.7 p.103).

In last week's parashah, Pinchas took a spear and killed the sinners, which ended the plague. As it states (25:7) וַיָּרָא פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר "Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon HaKohen saw, and he stood up from amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand." (25:8) וַיִּדְקֹר אֶת שְׁנֵיהֶם... וַתִּעְצֹר הַמִּגַּפָּה מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, "He pierced them both... and the plague was halted from Bnei Yisrael." From this pasuk, we see that Pinchas made an action of hishtadlus, a deed. It doesn't state that he prayed.

In Tehillim (106:30), however, it states, וַיַּעֲמֵד וַיִּפְלֵל וַתִּעְצֹר הַמִּגַּפָּה, "Pinchas arose and prayed and the plague halted." It seems like a contradiction. From Tehillim, it seems that

ripe, sweet, and juicy. Reuven climbed up the tree to get the apple. He picked the apple and began his descent. There was a branch in the middle of the tree, and Reuven stopped there to rest. He called out to his friend, Shimon, "You see, it is as I say. I made hishtadlus, and I have the apple. You didn't make hishtadlus, and you don't have it."

Accidentally, the apple slipped out of Reuven's hands. It fell on Shimon's lap. Shimon made a brachah with simchah and bit into the apple. He said, "You see, my friend, it is as I said. I didn't make hishtadlus, and I got the apple. You made hishtadlus, and you don't have it. This is because hishtadlus doesn't determine who will get something. Hashem's decree determines what a person will have."

2. There is a renowned tefillah from the Or HaMeir zt'l, which the Tiferes Shlomo zt'l would say twice daily. He said that the tefillah is mesugal for parnassah. However, this tefillah doesn't mention parnassah even once! So, how is it mesugal for parnassah?

However, the tefillah has many expressions of emunah, and, as we explained, emunah is the catalyst of parnassah. For example, the tefillah begins with the words, רבון העולמים ידעתי כי הנני בידך לבד כחומר ביד היוצר, וגם אם, מתאמץ בעצות ותחבולות, וכל יושבי תבל יעמדו לימיני להושיעני ולתמוך נפשי, מבלעדי עוונך ועזרתך אין עצה וישועה, ואם חלילה יחפצו כולם להרע אז אתה Master of all worlds, I know that I am in Your hands, alone, like clay in the hands of an artisan. Even if I will be strong with counsels and techniques, and all people of the world will stand to my right side to save me and to support me, without Your strength and help, I have no counsel and there will be no salvation. If they will all want to harm me, than You, with Your compassion, will place Your eyes on me. You will look from Your abode in heaven to watch over me..." So, we can explain that this tefillah is mesugal for parnassah because it strengthens our emunah, and emunah is mesugal for parnassah.

Pinchas prayed, and from parashas Balak, it seems that Pinchas used a weapon. Which one was it?

The Sfas Emes explains that Pinchas certainly took a weapon in his hand and did an act of hishtadlus to end the sins and to halt Hashem's wrath, but he also davened. He did both. He wouldn't have succeeded in killing them, ending the plague, and annulling Hashem's wrath without his tefillos.

Pinchas used a mixture of tefillah and deeds of hishtadlus. The primary strength came from the tefillos, as the Sfas Emes writes, "All wars of Bnei Yisrael are fought with the power of their mouths."

Similarly, the Midrash (Shochar Tov) explains the pasuk (Tehillim 149:6) רִמְמוֹת אֵל-ל בְּגִרוֹנָם וְחָרֵב פִּיפְיוֹת בְּיָדָם, "The lofty praises of Hashem are in their throats, and a double-edged sword is in their hand." The Midrash states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'You praise Me, and I will make wars for you to save you from the galus and from the hardships.'" The Midrash also quotes the pasuk (Divrei HaYamim 2, 20:22) וּבָעֵת הַחֵלּוּ בְרָנָה וַתְּהַלֵּה נְתָן ה' מְאַרְבִּים עַל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן מוֹאָב וְהָר שַׁעִיר הַבָּאִים לַיהוּדָה וַיִּנְגְּפוּ, "As soon as they began their exuberant song and praise, Hashem set up ambushers against the children of Ammon, Moav, and Har Seir who were attacking Yehudah, and they were struck down." With praises to Hashem, Hashem saved them. For that is the power of Bnei Yisrael. They win wars with their praises and with their tefillos. That is their

strength. At times, hishtadlus with action is needed as well, but it is primary tefillah that brings us salvation. This is not only true regarding wars. All of man's needs can be attained with tefillah, for without tefillah, one won't have anything.³

The midrashim tell (and see Chida, חומת אנך ש"א כא) that when Shaul was pursuing Dovid, he entered a cave. Even in the cave, he knew that his life was still in danger because Shaul would soon pass by.

What did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? Hashem sent a spider to the cave, and it spun a web at the entrance.

When Shaul passed, he saw the web in front of the cave. Shaul figured that the web had been there for a long time, and he was certain that Dovid wasn't inside. This is how Dovid's life was saved. The chapter of Tehillim that discusses this episode is (142). It states there, מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ בְּמַעְרָה תַּפְלָה. The Chida explains בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ בְּמַעְרָה, when Dovid was in the cave, מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד Dovid understood that the only thing that can save him is תַּפְלָה, prayer. And with the merit of his tefillos, his life was saved.

This lesson is also written in the Midrash (Shochar Tov): It quotes the pasuk מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ בְּמַעְרָה תַּפְלָה and explains, "When Dovid was in the cave, he understood that money, strength, and wisdom won't help a person. Only tefillah can help him. מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד Dovid understood that the best thing for man is תַּפְלָה, to daven to Hashem."⁴

3. תפילה is gematria 515, the same as נחלה בלי מצרים. The Berzhaner Rav zt'l teaches that this means that when we daven, we merit בלי מצרים, that there won't be בין המצרים. The three weeks of mourning of בין המצרים will end. They will turn into days of redemption and joy. We can achieve this through tefillah.

4. Chazal (Vayikra Rabba 10:5) say, תפילה עושה מחצה, that tefillah accomplishes half. For example, if a person needs a million dollars, and he prays, his tefillos will grant him half the amount. He will receive \$500,000. Why doesn't tefillah provide the entire sum?

Rebbe Henoch of Alexander zt'l answers that this is because when he davened, he relied on the tefillah, while also trusting in the hishtadlus he planned to do. He was fifty percent trusting in the tefillah, and fifty percent trusting in his hishtadlus. Therefore, his tefillah helped him halfway. If he would trust in Hashem one hundred percent, the tefillah alone would grant him all his needs.

Davening with All One's Heart

The תורי זהב writes that throughout the year, most people aren't cautious to daven with kavanah. Only during the Yamim Noraim [Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur] do they awaken themselves to daven with all their strength. Ideally, however, a person should strive to daven with kavanah every day and at every tefillah.

Regarding this, the Torah writes (28:3) וְאָמַרְתָּ לָהֶם זֶה הָאֵשׁה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לָהּ כְּבָשִׁים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה תָּמִיד וְשָׁנִים לְיוֹם עֹלָה תָּמִיד. The תורי זהב explains, זֶה הָאֵשׁה, the אֵשׁה, you should daven with תִּקְרִיבוּ לָהּ, fire, *hislahavus*, the entire year. כְּבָשִׁים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה means that it shouldn't be that we conceal and subdue the fire and *hislahavus*, כְּבָשִׁים (כבוש), בְּנֵי שָׁנָה, throughout the year. שָׁנִים לְיוֹם עֹלָה תָּמִיד, twice a day, morning and night, you shall daven with *hislahavus*.

The main way to achieve kavanah is to want to do so. Reb Zev of Zbarazh zt'l (son of Rebbe Michel Zlotchever zt'l) said that when a person truly wants to daven well, Hashem will help

him pour out his heart before Him. This is hinted in the words (26:35) לְתַחַן מוֹשֶׁפֶחַת הַתַּחֲנִי. The word תַּחֲנִי means to say techinos (prayers) before Hashem. The pasuk hints to us לְתַחֲנִי, if you want to pray, מוֹשֶׁפֶחַת הַתַּחֲנִי, Hashem will help you daven well.

The word for tefillah is מתפלל. Tzaddikim (see also Reb Shmshon Refael Hirsh zt'l, HaChorev, p.456) ask that grammatically, the word for praying should be מפלל, and not מתפלל. מפלל means to pray. מתפלל means to turn oneself into the essence of tefillah. But the answer is that this is the goal of tefillah, to turn the words into a tefillah with all one's heart. As Dovid HaMelech said (Tehillim 109:4) וְאֲנִי תַפִּלָּה, "I am prayer." He davened with all his heart and soul, until it could be said that his essence was tefillah. This is the meaning of מתפלל, to turn oneself into an essence of tefillah.

Chazal (Taanis 2a) explain the pasuk (Devarim 11:13) וְלָעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם, "To serve Him with all your heart..." that it is referring to tefillah, because one should place his entire heart into the tefillah.⁵

5. The Baal HaSulam zt'l said that if a person bangs his fist on a table all day long, the table won't break. But if he bangs once, with all his strength, the table might break. This is a mashal for tefillah. Sometimes a person says hundreds and thousands of tefillos, but his tefillos aren't answered. And there is someone else who says one tefillah, with all his heart and soul, and the tefillah is answered. This is because the power of tefillah is not measured solely by the number of tefillos davened – although the number of tefillos is also significant. Rather, the primary strength of tefillah is the level of concentration that was put into the tefillah.

Laser beams are used for some medical procedures. A laser is a beam of light that remains concentrated on one spot. The light doesn't disperse and spread, as most lights do. It is a focused light, and it is very powerful. It can even cut through iron. We can use this technology as a mashal to understand the power of tefillah, when one davens with all his heart. There are times when people daven, their mouths are moving, but their thoughts are flying all over the place. Even if there are some moments when they have kavanah, it isn't focused, and there are many other thoughts floating around in their minds. But when the mind is focused, the tefillah has a much greater force. Such a tefillah will pierce the heavens, and his tefillos will be answered.

It is disgraceful when one takes out a cell phone in the middle of the tefillah to check who called him, or even worse, to place or answer a call. To explain the severity, consider the following mashal:

A couple came to a therapist for shalom bayis issues. The husband told the therapist that the problem began on the day of the chasunah, when they were still in the "Yichud Room". At that special time, his wife took out her phone and spoke with her close friend for an hour! When she finished the call, her husband asked her what that was all about. She told him that this is her best friend. She had recently broken her leg, and she was very upset that she couldn't attend the wedding, so she had to talk to her. The chasan replied, "Very nice, but still, this isn't the right time for it. And besides, you spoke to her earlier

The Gradual Approach of the Yetzer Hara

It states in parashas Balak (23:7) לָקַח אֶרְבָּה לִי יַעֲקֹב. Literally, this means that Balak said to Bilaam, "Come curse Yaakov for me". But there is another translation for the word אֶרְבָּה. In Mishnayos, it refers to when one picks figs off a fig tree (אורה בתאנים). There are trees and vegetation whose produce ripens at the same time. However, a fig tree ripens gradually. The figs don't all ripen at the same time. Therefore, the process of gathering figs is to check the fig tree every day, during the harvest season, to see which fruits have ripened. Each day, he picks the fruits that have ripened, and he leaves the others on the tree for later. The next day, he checks the tree again and removes all the ripened fruit. He does this every day until all figs are picked.

אֶרְבָּה, picking figs off a fig tree, is a gradual process. It doesn't happen in one day. We can therefore explain that Balak's request was לָקַח אֶרְבָּה לִי יַעֲקֹב, that Bilaam should harm the Jewish nation, slowly, gradually, step by step. He explained to Bilaam that it is impossible to cause Yidden to fall to low levels too quickly. It would occur more often when it is a gradual process, r'l, step by step, until the person falls to very low levels.

This is the reason Balak said, לָקַח אֶרְבָּה לִי יַעֲקֹב; he wanted the harm to the Jewish nation to come gradually and slowly, because that is the most dangerous and fatal approach.

The Beis Yisrael zt'l taught a similar lesson from the pasuk (Michah 6:5) עַמִּי זָכַר נָא מַה יַעֲזִיב בְּלֶךְ מְלֶכֶךְ מוֹאָב וּמָה עָנָה אֵתוֹ בְּלֶעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר מִן הַשָּׂטִיִּים עַד הַגִּלְגָּל, "My people, hear now from what Balak king of Moav counseled, and what Bilaam son of Beor answered him, from Shittim to Gilgal." הַשָּׂטִיִּים refers to aveiros, because Chazal say that a person performs aveiros when he has a רוּחַ שְׂטוּת, a foolish spirit. עַד הַגִּלְגָּל, represents the word גִּלְגוּל, which means to roll. It refers to the path of sins when one sin rolls and brings on the next sin. It represents the gradual path of degradation. Balak's counsel was that Bilaam shouldn't cause the Jewish people to fall to low levels immediately, because generally, that approach won't work. His evil plan was to cause the Jewish nation to sin with one aveirah after another, until they fall to low levels, r'l, as Chazal say, עֲבִירָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֲבִירָה, one aveirah leads to the next.

It states (Koheles 10:8) וּפְרֹץ גֵּדֶר יִשְׁכְּנוּ נָחָשׁ, "He who breaks down a wall will be bitten by a snake."

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l asks that it should have stated וּפְרֹץ גֵּדֶר יִשְׁכְּנוּ אַרְיָה, "He who breaks

today for four hours... And you spoke to her under the chuppah as well!"

The greatest problem was that the woman didn't understand what she had done wrong.

The nimshal is regarding those who take out their phones during the tefillah to check who called, or worse, to speak. We tell him, "Reb Yid, you have twenty-three hours in the day when you can use your phone. Now is when you should be coming close to Hashem, speaking to Him. Is this the proper time to be busy with your phone?"

There's a yungerman, a talmid chacham, who has several ill children, r'l. He is in and out of hospitals with his children. This yungerman radiates with emunah and joy. When he comes to the hospital, he gives chizuk and joy to everyone he meets, and this makes a kiddush Hashem. Once, a doctor tried a certain treatment on one of his children, and unfortunately, it didn't succeed. The doctor said to the yungerman, to excuse himself for the failed attempt, "You have to understand, you can't fight a war against a straight wall." He meant that the problem was so great, there was nothing much that he could do.

The father replied that it states (Yeshayah 38:2) וַיִּסָּב חִזְקִיָּהוּ וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל ה' "Chizkiyahu turned his face to the wall, and he prayed to Hashem." Why did he do this? To teach us the strength of tefillah. It can move walls. It can move anything that resembles a firm barrier, like a wall. With tefillah, everything is possible.

down a wall will be bitten by a lion." A lion is more powerful, and its bite is more damaging than a snake's. Why does the pasuk state specifically נָחָשׁ, snake?

The Chofetz Chaim says that וּפְרָץ גָּדָר, breaking down walls, hints at when a person doesn't keep the boundaries of kedushah. To use a current example, the gedolim teach us how and when we can use technology. They created walls and safeguards that preserve the kedushah of Bnei Yisrael. Some people knock down those boundaries. They think that they will be safe, and that nothing will happen to them.

Unfortunately, the results are bitter.

Therefore, a proper example to this is וּפְרָץ גָּדָר יִשְׁכְּנוּ נָחָשׁ, "He who breaks down a wall will be bitten by a snake." When a snake bites someone, the person thinks that it is a minor problem, just a tiny wound. Nothing will happen to him. But the poison is in his blood, spreading to all his limbs, and the danger is very great. This is unlike when a person is bitten by a lion. The wound is enormous, but he immediately knows the danger and damage, and he will rush off to the hospital.

This is similar to what occurs to those who break down the walls and boundaries. They say that it won't affect their ruchniyus. But it is like being bitten by a snake. The

poison is there, it is growing within him, and it is more perilous than he thinks.⁶

The Gemara (Menachos 43b) states, כָּל שֵׁשׁ לוֹ תְּפִילִין בְּרֵאשׁוֹ וְתְּפִילִין בְּזֵרוּעוֹ וְצִיצִית בְּבִגְדוֹ וּמְזוּזָה בְּפֶתַח הַכֵּל בְּחִיּוּק שֶׁלֹּא יַחֲטֵא, "Whoever has tefillin worn on his arm and head, a tzitzis on his clothes, and a mezuzah on his doorway... he won't sin."

The Gemara says that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Koheles 4:12) וְהַחוּט הַמְשׁוּלָשׁ לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה יִנְתָק, "A three-ply cord is not easily severed!" The three-ply cord is these three holy mitzvos: Tefillin, Tzitzis, and Mezuzah. These mitzvos protect the person from sin.

The Gemara also states the pasuk (Tehillim 34:8) חַנּוּךְ מְלֹאךְ ה' סָבִיב לִירְאָיו וַיַּחֲלֹצֵם, "The angel of Hashem encamps around those who fear Hashem and he releases them." Rashi in Tehillim writes, וַיַּחֲלֹצֵם מִהַחַטָּא, "he releases them from sin." The *Maharsha* explains that a *malach* is created from the performance of three mitzvos, and the malach protects them from aveiros.

The question is that all Yidden perform these three mitzvos. They wear tefillin and tzitzis, and they have mezuzos on their doorposts. Why do they fall into aveiros?

The Shevet HaLevi zt'l (Shlach תש"ע) answers that although everyone has mezuzos on their doorposts, they have other things in their home, too. They have forbidden and

6. Year, תשמ"ו, there was an accident at the nuclear plant in Chernobyl, Russia. Dangerous radioactive material was released into the atmosphere, and until today, people can't live there. It became a ghost town overnight. Everyone was afraid to go there.

But as time passed, there were some people who felt brave and confident. They decided to return to the disaster area, claiming that doing so won't harm them in any way.

After spending some time in Chernobyl, they left, and they reported to the media, "We were there, and nothing happened to us. The government is creating panic for no reason. You see? We are totally fine." In reality, they thought they were fine, but they were very ill. The radiation got into them. With time, it grew and harmed them. Furthermore, some of those who had children after this visit to the Chernobyl plant gave birth to unwell and deformed children.

This is a good example of what occurs when one breaches boundaries. He feels that he is healthy and spiritually sound. He claims that whatever he sees or hears doesn't harm him much. But the poison is incubating within him, developing and growing until it fills his entire being, ר'ל.

impure "keilim" (utensils) in the home. The mezuzah protects a person from sin, but obviously, this segulah won't work as well if there is an opposing factor in the home, drawing him to sin, r'l.

The Shevet HaLevi explained to us why the segulah of the mezuzah doesn't protect us, but what about the other two? Why don't the tefillin and the tzitzis protect us from sin? We can explain that these two holy mitzvos, worn on the Yid, protect him from aveiros. However, he has something else on his body, in addition to the tefillin and tzitzis. In his pocket, he has a non-kosher phone. The tefillin and tzitzis protect from sin, but the segulah is weakened when there is an opposing influence upon them.

It states (Vayikra 14:34) **כִּי תבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְכֶם לְאֻמָּה וְנִתְּתִי נֶגַע צָרַעַת בְּבֵית אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזַּתְכֶם**, "When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will give tzaraas upon a house in the land of your possession." They would have to cut away the tzaraas from the walls, and they would often find inside the walls of their homes gold treasure.

Rashi (Vayikra 14:34) tells us that during the forty years the Yidden were in the desert, the Amorites hid treasures of gold in the walls of their home. Hashem gave tzaraas to the homes of the Jewish nation, and when they would remove the tzaraas by breaking the walls of the home, they found the treasures.

The Shevet Levi asks, according to this explanation, why is it called a נֶגַע, a plague of tzaraas? The tzaraas seems to be a good thing; it brought them wealth!

The answer is that whenever a Jewish home needs to be broken, it is a plague, regardless of the wealth found hidden within.

The point is that there are people who think they will earn more money if they use the impure utensils in their homes. The response is that even if that is true, it is a נֶגַע צָרַעַת, a plague of tzaraas. Bringing these utensils into the home breaks the spirituality of the home, and therefore, even if there will be wealth, it is a נֶגַע צָרַעַת⁷.

7. The following story happened in Fez, Morocco, some two hundred and fifty years ago. There was a hunter who would catch wild animals and sell them to the local zoo, which was owned by the king of Morocco. Once, he caught a tiny lion cub. He decided to keep it for himself. When the lion cub grew larger, he needed to be more careful with it. So, he tied a rope around the lion's neck. The other end of the rope was bound to an iron gate that surrounded his property and bordered the street. He was comfortable that his pet was secure and that it wouldn't cause any harm.

Once, two Jewish merchants came to Fez for business. They bought a lot of cloth at the market and bound it up with rope so they could transport the cloth back to the city where they lived. They planned to sell it in their hometown.

They realized that they needed a bit more rope to tie up the bundles of cloth, so they headed back to the marketplace to buy rope. But then one of the merchants saw a rope tied to a metal gate. He quickly stopped the horses pulling their wagon and went over to the gate to get a better look. His partner said that they can't take it. It wasn't their rope, and taking it would be stealing.

The other merchant replied, "Even if you're correct, and it's an *aveirah*, but it is a minor *aveirah*. How much do you think this rope costs? Besides, the owner probably forgot that it's there. Furthermore," the merchant said, pulling his most convincing argument, "we need it for our *parnassah*!" (People think that for *parnassah* everything is permitted).

"I refuse to have anything to do with this," said the other merchant, and he climbed back into the carriage.

The merchant came to the metal gate, untied the rope, and began pulling it to himself. At first, the rope didn't come easily. He felt a tug; something was holding it back. He figured the rope was under some stones, so he pulled harder. Then the rope was forthcoming. But then he came face to face with the lion!

Bein HaMetzarim

We are now in the Three Weeks of בין

המצרים, and it is important to mourn the Churban Beis HaMikdash. The truth is, we should mourn every day, as it states in

The lion attacked the merchant.

The merchant in the carriage heard the shouts and the lion's roars. He looked out of the carriage, but it was too late. His partner wasn't alive anymore.

There were twenty mourners at the *shivah* (the late merchant's wife, his siblings, and his children). A rav at the *shivah* said, "If we can learn some lesson from what happened, it will be *liluy nishmoso* (for the benefit of his neshamah in heaven). The merchant thought taking a rope was a small sin - nothing serious. But this resulted in his death and twenty mourners. Let's learn from this that every *aveirah* is severe. There is no such thing as a minor *aveirah*."

Someone told the Lev Simchah (Gur) *zt'l* that it is hard for him to walk on the streets because it is difficult for him to have *shemiras einayim*. At first, the Lev Simchah told him, "If it is hard for you to guard your eyes on the street, don't go there."

The Lev Simchah was silent for a few moments, and then he added, "If your thoughts are immersed in Torah, even when you see something, it won't make an impression on you."

The Lev Simchah explained, "When your thoughts are on Torah, these *taavos* are disgusting to you, and you don't want them. I will prove it to you. When you walk on the street, you don't know how many cats are there, because you aren't interested in knowing. It doesn't make a difference to you. Similarly, when you are thinking Torah, all other matters aren't important to you. And if you accidentally see something forbidden, it won't affect your heart."

There was a father who wanted to take his son out of the yeshiva, Ohel Torah, where Reb Elchanan Wasserman *zt'l* *hy'd* was rosh yeshiva. The father explained that Chazal (Avos 2:2) say, *יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך*, "Torah is good when it is together with work." Reb Elchanan replied that he could have used an even more convincing argument to take his son out of yeshiva, and instead to teach him a trade, because the Mishnah also states, *שְׁיִגִיעַת שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּשִׁפְחַת עֵין. וְכֵן תוֹרָה שְׂאִין עִמָּה מְלֵאכָה, סוּפָה בְּמֵלָה וְגוֹרְרַת עֵין*, "When there is Torah with work, he won't commit aveiros. Torah without work, in the end he won't have Torah, and it results in sin."

Nevertheless, Reb Elchanan added that he still maintains that he shouldn't take his son out of the yeshiva.

He explained that Chazal say that if a person gave a bris milah to his first son, and the child died from the circumcision, *r'l*, and this happened a second time, with his second child, when a third child is born, he shouldn't circumcise him. It is obviously dangerous for his children to have a bris milah. If the father would make bris milah, it won't be counted as a mitzvah. It will be considered careless and even murder, *r'l*.

Reb Elchanan explained that today we see that when a person leaves the yeshiva, he is at spiritual risk. Although there are great benefits from Torah being joined with work, when one sees the hazard and the damage that has occurred to so many others, one understands that this is dangerous.

It states (Bereishis 22:10) *וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת הַמַּאֲכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת בְּנוֹ*, "Avraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son." The Yeshuos Moshe *zt'l* explains that *מַאֲכָלֶת*, the knife, comes from the word *אוכל*, food and *parnassah*. For the sake of *parnassah*, people are ready to *לְשַׁחֵט אֶת בְּנוֹ*, *r'l*. This means that for *parnassah*, they bring the internet home, and the like. They think they are earning *parnassah*, but they should recognize what they are sacrificing.

Another hint is from the pasuk (Bereishis 43:20) *וַיֵּרְדוּ בְּתַחֲלָה לְשָׂבֵר אֹכֵל*, "We have come down originally to buy food." This indicates that for food and *parnassah*, *וַיֵּרְדוּ בְּתַחֲלָה*, people are prepared to fall very deep, *r'l*.

Another hint is told by the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* from the pasuk (Vayikra 19:28) *וַיִּשְׂרָט לְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא תִתֵּנוּ בְּבִשְׂרָבְכֶם*. This hints that one shouldn't *וַיִּשְׂרָט לְנַפְשׁוֹ* ruin and harm his neshamah and soul, *בְּבִשְׂרָבְכֶם* for the sake of *parnassah*.

Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:3) רָאוּי לְכָל יְרֵא שְׂמִימִים (It is proper for every *yirei Shamayim* to be upset and worried about the churban Beis HaMikdash." Certainly, during these days of Bein Ha Metzarim, we should mourn.

The Gemara (Shabbos 31) says that when a person is niftar, one of the first questions that heaven will ask him is צְפִית לִישׁוּעָה, "Did you hope for Moshiach?"⁸

Reb Yaakov Emdin zt'l (*Siddur Beis Yaakov*, Tisha b'Av 6:16) writes, "If our only sin were that we didn't mourn over Yerushalayim, it would be sufficient to prolong our *galus*. In my opinion, this is the primary cause of all the terrible destructions – beyond comprehension – that befall us in *galus*. We are pursued, and we don't have peace... All because the mourning has left our hearts."⁹

8. Magan Avraham (551:45) writes, "The Arizal taught that one should mourn during these days [of the Three Weeks] after midday and cry for around a half-hour."

In the Chasam Sofer's yeshiva, they would recite Tikun Chatzos together and mourn the churban in the afternoons of the Three Weeks. Generally, the tzaddik, Reb Fishel Sofer zy'a, was the chazzan, and he would cry bitterly as he said it.

One day, Reb Fishel wasn't in yeshiva, and a young bachur with a sweet voice was chosen to lead Tikun Chatzos. This bachur didn't cry; it sounded more like a yom tov tefillah than kinos. When he finished, the Chasam Sofer commented, "We must verify whether this bachur doesn't belong to Shabtai Tzvi's sr'y group. Because how can one relate to the churban Beis HaMikdash with such ease and comfort?"

The Chasam Sofer said that whoever mourns over the Beis HaMikdash during the Three Weeks will merit good children.

During the Three Weeks, a tzaddik visited the Sfas Emes of Gur zt'l. "What brings you here?" the Sfas Emes asked. "You live very far from here!"

"My family's tradition is to travel during the Three Weeks," the tzaddik explained. "Hashem is, *kivayachol*, in *galus*, so it is our custom to go into *galus* too, during this period."

"The main thing is to remember that we aren't home," the Sfas Emes replied.

The Sfas Emes rarely traveled, but he frequently reminded himself that he wasn't home. We aren't where we ought to be. This realization should never leave our consciousness.

9. Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l related how the simple people in Pressburg waited for Moshiach. "I once heard two women speaking. One asked the other, "What did you prepare for lunch today?"

She replied that she had prepared beans.

"And what will you make tomorrow?"

The woman replied, "Sha! Sha! אַל תַּפְתַּח פֶּה לִשְׂטָן. Don't even consider it. But if chas v'shalom Moshiach doesn't come, I will cook potatoes."

A businessman came to the Apter Rav zt'l to ask for business advice. The Rebbe gave him wise counsel, and then the rebbe emitted a deep moan and said with a broken heart, "A great tragedy happened today."

"What happened?" the man asked.

"We didn't bring the *korban tamid* today..." and then the Apter Rav cried copiously.

Someone came to the Kotzker Rebbe zt'l, complaining that his son-in-law had become a Kotzker chassid. He told the rebbe that his daughter was very upset about this. The father cried, "If one has a heart, how could it not burst from pain seeing my daughter's sorrow?"

The rebbe replied, "If one indeed has a heart, how does it not burst from pain due to the *churban* Beis HaMikdash?"

Close to Hashem

It states (Eichah 1:3) כל רודפיה השיגוה בין המצרים, "all her pursuers overtook her between the boundaries."¹⁰

The Kozhnutzer Magid zt'l (Avodas Yisrael, Avos 2:14) writes that כל רודף י"ה means כל רודפיה, whoever pursues Hashem, השיגוה, can attain a connection with Hashem, בין המצרים, in the days of Bein HaMetzarim. During these days, it is easier for a person to become close to Hashem.

It is different than what we would assume. We think that during these days of mourning, we are distant from Hashem, when really it is a time of immense potential to become close to Hashem.

He brings a hint to this from the pasuk (Shemos 3:14) אלהי"ה אשר אלהי"ה. The gematria of אלהי"ה is 21. Thus, the pasuk can be translated, אלהי"ה, Hashem says, "I will be with the Jewish nation אשר אלהי"ה, during the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim.

Why is it easier to become close to Hashem these days? The Kozhnutzer Magid explains it with a mashal:

"When a king is in his palace, it is difficult for people to reach him. The guards surround the king and prevent people from approaching. Furthermore, if he is granted an audience with the king, he needs to present the king with a precious gift. But when the king is traveling, it is easy to see the king, and a small present will be in the

king's eyes like a large gift... The king will accept the present with a happy countenance, and this is because the king is traveling... Therefore, the Tana says הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה הוי. הוי is gematria 21. This hints at the 21 days of Bein HaMatzerim." This is an ideal time for studying Torah.

In another place (Parashas Masei), the Avodas Yisrael elaborates on the importance of studying Torah during these days. "Although we should be sad and mourn the churban Beis Hashem, nevertheless, we must be strong and purify our hearts to serve Hashem with Torah and tefillah *with joy*, especially when offering praises to Hashem. This can be explained with a mashal. It is the way of a human king to possess many things that can make him happy - singers, drums, dancing, flutes, and harps. When the king is happy, he doesn't need the singers and musicians. He is happy without them. But when he is sad, he calls for his musicians to sing and play before him. The nimshal is keviyachol with Hakadosh Baruch Hu... At the time of the churban, there is sadness in the outer chambers. Someone who cares about Hashem must strengthen himself and enter the inner chambers, without any sadness at all, to make the honored King happy."¹¹

During the Holocaust, people were amazed to see Rebbe Pinchas of Ustila zy'a (the son-in-law of Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zy'a) learning Torah with immense *hasmadah*.

10. According to its simple meaning, the pasuk discusses our troubles in galus. The goyim pursue and persecute us, and we have nowhere to escape. It is like there is a boundary on both sides of the road (בין המצרים), and we have nowhere to run.

Rashi adds that bein hametzarim can also refer to the days between the 17th of Tamuz and Tisha b'Av. At the time of the Churban, between these two metzarim (which means times of grief), the Jewish nation suffered greatly.

11. The Three Weeks are mesugal for tefillah. The Avodas Yisrael (Masei וד"ה וכבר הקדים) writes, quoting the Magid of Mezritch zt'l, "When a king is out of his palace and passes through the marketplace and the streets, he is close to all those who call out to him, and he listens to the shouts of those who call his name. Similarly, we must know that at this time... [Hashem is in galus], and everyone has permission to approach the King of the world, and He answers all."

How could he put aside all the pain and devastation and delve into Torah study?

He replied, "People asked my father-in-law this same question during World War I. People couldn't understand how he had the peace of mind to study Torah then. He explained that during hard times it's even more important to study Torah. The Mishnah says, 'When a person is in pain, the *Shechinah* says, 'My head hurts. My arms hurt,' which means Hashem suffers together with us. We live in a time when Klal Yisrael is in distress, and Hashem is certainly suffering together with us. It's our obligation to make Hashem happy, and nothing brings more joy to Hashem than a Yid studying Torah."¹²

Mourning with Joy

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg zy'a tells the following *mashal*:

A king was forced to escape and run away from his palace. He arrived at a distant land and stayed at the home of a good friend. The king asked him, "Are you happy or sad? If you are happy, why do you cry? And if you are sad, why do you appear happy?"

The host replied, "I am happy, and I am sad. I am sad because the king had to leave his palace and come here. And I am happy because I have the privilege to host the king in my home."

Reb Shmelke of Nickelsburg explains that this describes our emotions during the Three Weeks. We cry bitterly, and we mourn

because the *Shechinah* is in *galus*. But we also rejoice because the *Shechinah* is with us.

Shulchan Aruch (554:25) states, כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה, "Whoever mourns over Yerushalayim merits and sees in its joy." זוכה ורואה is written in the present tense. The Kedushas Levi and other *sefarim* explain that when one mourns the Beis HaMikdash, he immediately experiences the joy of the redemption. The Kedushas Levi (*Eichah*) writes, "When one thinks about holiness and mourns Yerushalayim.... he immediately perceives an element of the joy of Yerushalayim, of how it will be in the future."

At a *chasunah*, there are several times we remember the Churban. We say the *brachah* שוש תשיש, which is a tefillah for the *geulah*, and the *chassan* wears ashes on his head, and so on. The Sfas Emes (*Ki Savo* 5653) writes, "At every *simchah*, one must remember the Beis HaMikdash... When the Beis HaMikdash stood, the *simchah* was complete. Today, we merit this *simchah* through mourning and yearning for the Beis HaMikdash. As it states (Yeshayah 66:10) שישו אתה משוש כל המתאבלים עליה, 'exult her in exultation, all you who mourned for her.' ... Through his mourning, he will merit the joy of Yerushalayim."

The Joy of Shabbos

The pasuk states (*Bamidbar* 10:10), וביום שמחתכם, "On your day of joy..." Chazal (*Sifri* 19) say that this refers to Shabbos.

We should be happy every day of the year, as it states (*Tehillim* 100:2), עבדו את ה' בשמחה,

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

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

"Serve Hashem with joy."¹³ But there is an added importance to being happy on Shabbos, as it is *יום שמחתכם*, "Your day of joy." As we say in the *zemiros*, ביום השבת קודש שישו, "Be happy and joyous on Shabbos as those who received the Torah."

It states (*Devarim* 28:47), תחת אשר לא עבדת את השם, אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב. The pasuk is saying that the *tochachah* comes from not serving Hashem with joy. The Bnei Yissaschar (*Igra d'Kalah*) explains that תחת אשר can be translated as "under [or after] the letters אש"ר." In the order of the alef beis, the letters after אש"ר are שב"ת. So the Torah teaches us that the *tochachah* comes when you don't serve Hashem with joy on Shabbos.

Hashem told Moshe, "I have a good gift in My treasury, Shabbos is its name; I want

to give it to the Jewish nation. Go and inform them" (*Shabbos* 10).

The Chidushei HaRim says that this wasn't a one-time event. Every week, before Shabbos arrives, Moshe speaks to every Yid's *neshamah* and says, "Hashem told me to tell you that He is giving you the great gift of Shabbos."

Yidden feel uplifted during the *Kabboalas* Shabbos time when Shabbos comes in. The Chidushei HaRim writes, "Even a person alone in a room will experience the holiness of Shabbos as it arrives" because that is when he receives Moshe Rabbeinu's encouraging message, for he tells Yidden about the beautiful gift Hashem is giving them.

13. A child was choking on a coin, and his face was turning blue. The Chazon Ish *zt'l* exclaimed, "The only solution is to bring the child to the Ponovizher Rav because the Ponovizher Rav is an expert in getting coins out of people, even from the tightest places..."

Everyone laughed, including the child. The laughter dislodged the coin, and it made its way out. The Chazon Ish said about this incident, "Happiness saves people from all *tzaros*."

We'll add that the boy didn't necessarily "get" the joke. He was laughing because everyone else was laughing. But that was enough to save him. When a person is unable to be truly happy, he should pretend to be happy because that will also bring *yeshuos*.

The Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* said that a hint to this is in the words (*Devarim* 16:16) והיית אך שמח. The first letters of the three words spell שוא, falsehood, hinting that a person should pretend to be happy and have false joy because false joy will lead to true joy.

There was a Slonimer Chasid who lived in Tveria called Reb Mordechai (Motke) Leider *zt'l*. From time to time, Reb Motke traveled to Slonim, Lithuania, to be by his Rebbe, the Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l*. In those days, this was an extremely long trip.

Reb Shmuel Salant *zt'l*, the Rav of Yerushalayim, asked him why he undertook these long journeys and what was lacking in his *avodas Hashem* in Tveria.

Reb Motke replied:

The Mishnah (end of *Sotah*) states, משמות ר' מאיר בטלו משלים, "When Reb Meir was *niftar*, it became *batel*, annulled, people who knew how to tell parables. משמות בן עזאי בטלו שקדנים, when ben Azay was *niftar*, it became *batel* diligent Torah scholars, who study with *hasmadah*..." The Mishnah lists other things that became בטל over time. Then the Mishnah writes, משמות רבן גמליאל הזקן בטל כבוד התורה ומתה טהרה ופרישות, when Raban Gamliel the elder was *niftar*, the honor of Torah was *batel*, annulled, and purity and *prishus* died." Notice that by the final words, the Mishnah doesn't say that *prishus* became *batel*, rather that it died. This means טהרה ופרישות is still existent but in a dead state.

Reb Motke explained, "This is because there are people who practice purity and *prishus* (which means they detach themselves from unnecessary pleasures), but they do so with a heavy, sad heart. They don't really want to give up the pleasures of this world. I travel to Slonim because over there I learn how to have *taharah* and *prishus* with *simchah*. *Prishus* should be alive and practiced with joy."