

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Ki Seitzei



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Ki Seitzei

Bitachon and Hishtadlus

It states (21:10) **כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה** "When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver them into your hand." The pasuk doesn't state **כִּי תִלָּחֵם עַל אוֹיְבֶיךָ**, "When you will *battle* a war against your enemies," but **כִּי תֵצֵא**, "When you will *go out* to war against your enemies." Reb Chaim Vital zt'l (Eitz HaDaas Tov) explains that no person, and no nation, has the strength to fight a war and win it. All they can do is to go out to war and to make hishtadlus, then **וַיִּתֵּנוּ ה'** Hashem will give them success, and they will win the war. Reb Chaim Vital writes, "When you will realize that you don't have strength other than to go out to war... **וַיִּתֵּנוּ... כִּי תֵצֵא**, Hashem will make you victorious in the war. You will win the war because

you have bitachon in Hashem."

This rule applies to everything a person wants to accomplish. All he can do is **כִּי תֵצֵא**, to go out and make *hishtadlus*, then (Tehillim 32:10) **וְהַבֹּיֶשֶׁת בְּה' חֶסֶד יְסֻבֶּבְנִי**, "The one who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him." Due to his bitachon, he will succeed.

This lesson also applies to parnassah. No one has the ability to earn money. All he can do is **כִּי תֵצֵא**, to go out and to make hishtadlus, and to have bitachon. Because of his bitachon, he will succeed.

The same applies to a person's battle against the yetzer hara. His obligation is **כִּי תֵצֵא**, to try, to make hishtadlus, and to trust in Hashem. And then he will succeed.

One must believe that doing hishtadlus is because

Hashem decreed that a person must make hishtadlus, but hishtadlus doesn't bring results. Only Hashem gives parnassah, wins wars, and gives success to people.¹

1. In this week's *parashah* the Torah (25:19) writes, תמחה את זכר עמלק, "Erase Amalek's memory from beneath the heavens..." The Tiferes Shmuel *zt'l* shares a remarkable *pshat*:

Amalek says that things happen מתחת השמים, from under the heavens. They attribute everything to nature. They don't want to believe that Hashem, Above, orchestrates everything that occurs. The Torah obligates us תמחה, to erase the notion that things occur *under the heavens* and by chance. Everything is destined from Hashem in Heaven.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* offered a similar commentary on the words (*Eichah* 3:66) ותשמידם מתחת שמי ה', "Destroy them from under Hashem's heavens." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* explains that we must destroy the notion that things happen "under the heavens," and recognize that everything is directly from Hashem.

This week's *parashah* discusses the prohibition of *ribbis* (23:21-22), lending or borrowing money with interest. Why is it forbidden? The Kli Yakar explains that lending with interest causes people to cast away their trust in Hashem. In all other businesses, one raises his eyes to Hashem because he isn't certain whether he'll earn or lose money. However, when one lends money with interest, he feels that his income is set and certain. He's not afraid he might lose the money because he took collateral. Thus, lending money with interest causes people to lose their *bitachon*. The borrower is also guilty of this transgressing because he causes the lender to lose his *bitachon*....

It states in this week's *parashah* (*Ki Seitzei* 23:11), איש כי לא יהיה טהור מקרה, A person becomes impure because מקרה, he thinks that things happen by chance, and when problems crop up, he says, לילה, it is dark like night, everything is bleak and negative. He is wrong on both counts: What happened was not a מקרה, a chance occurrence. Hashem destined it. And

The renown acronym for **אֲנִי לְדוּדִי** is (Shir HaShirim 6:3) **אֲנִי לְדוּדִי לִי** can mean that everything I do, I give it over to my Beloved, to Hashem, to complete the deed for me. I know that I can't do anything on my own; therefore, **אֲנִי לְדוּדִי**, I give my deeds over to Hashem to complete. When I do so, it will be **דוּדִי לִי**, Hashem will help me.

Let us study the following pasuk, discussing bitachon, from Tehillim (123:2). It states **הִנֵּה קָעִינִי עֲבָדִים אֶל יְדֹוֹנֵיהֶם קָעִינִי**

שִׁפְחָה אֶל יָד גְּבוּרָתָהּ בֵּן עֵינֵינוּ אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, "Like the eyes of servants unto their master, like the eyes of a maid unto her mistress, so are our eyes unto Hashem, our G-d, until He will favor us." We trust in Hashem like servants and maids trust in their owners to care for them. The Malbim teaches that when a maid trusts her mistress, she is really trusting in the mistress's husband. She knows that her mistress doesn't have money. All she can do is ask her husband

therefore, it isn't **לילה**, night and bad. It is always bright and *lichtig* for a Yid.

The Brisker Rav had a large home, and one day, during World War Two, they found a note on the door. It said, "Within a few days, we will take your home to use it as an army base. In exchange, you can go to the house at..." The new address was in a different city.

The family panicked. "Who knows if Yidden live there? What will be with us?"

The Brisker Rav calmed them down. He said, "The letter on the door doesn't mean anything to me. If this isn't Hashem's plan, they can't remove us from our home. Everything happens first Above."

Indeed, the army never took their home.

for money on the maid's behalf.

Thus, הנה כְּעֵינֵי עֲבָדִים אֶל יְד, אֲדוֹנֵיהֶם כְּעֵינֵי שִׁפְחָה אֶל יְד גְּבֵרָתָהּ, "Like the eyes of servants unto their master, like the eyes of a maid unto her mistress..." are representing two types of bitachon. הנה כְּעֵינֵי עֲבָדִים אֶל יְד אֲדוֹנֵיהֶם, "Like the eyes of servants unto their master," refers to the people who turn directly to Hashem to help them. כְּעֵינֵי שִׁפְחָה אֶל יְד, גְּבֵרָתָהּ, "Like the eyes of a maid unto her mistress..." refers to the poor people who go to the wealthy to help them. But even they know that their main trust is on Hashem because the wealthy can't help them

without Hashem. כֵּן עֵינֵינוּ אֶל ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַד שְׂיִחְיֵנוּ, "So are our eyes unto Hashem, our G-d, until He will favor us."

The Malbim explains the difference between the names הו"ה and אלקינו. אלקינו is when Hashem leads the world according to the rules of nature, and הו"ה represents receiving directly from Hashem. The pasuk is saying that either way – whether we receive in natural or supernatural manners – we turn our eyes to Hashem and trust in Him, for everything is from Him. Even when one receives through natural means, everything comes from Hashem.²

2. When the Maharam Shik zt'l (the rav of Chust) was ill, the Yeitev Lev zt'l of Sighet came to visit him. The Maharam Shik said, "Sigheter Rav! Please daven for my refuah sheleimah! I don't understand why I deserve this illness. Chazal (Brachos 5a) say, "If yesurim come unto a person, he should inspect his deeds. If he doesn't find any bad deeds to warrant his illness, he should assume that the yesurim came because of bitul Torah." However, I checked my ways, and I didn't find any aveiros, and not even the aveirah of bitul Torah – not even once."

The Yeitav Lev told him a dvar Torah, which contained counsel on how the Maharam Shik can regain his strength.

Before writing this lesson, we will describe a kinyan, a form of acquisition, called קנין חליפין, which is a transaction through exchange. There are various forms of kinyanim. Some items are acquired through paying money, others by picking them up, as well as other kinyanim. One popular form of kinyan is חליפין, exchange, barter. For example, the buyer gives a handkerchief to the seller, and in exchange for this item, the matter that is being sold goes over to the possession of the buyer.

The Yeitev Lev said to the Maharam Shik, "Behold it states (Yeshayah 40:31) וְקוֹלֵה' יַחֲלִיפוּ כֹחַ, 'Those who trust in Hashem *exchange* their vigor...' We can explain that יַחֲלִיפוּ represents קנין חליפין, exchange, barter. Hashem has strength, as it states אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִכָּה וְהִגְבִּירָה. The person gives Hashem bitachon, and in exchange, Hashem gives him strength. This can be the meaning of וְקוֹלֵה' יַחֲלִיפוּ כֹחַ: when you have bitachon, in exchange, you will receive strength."

When one gives Hashem bitachon, he will receive strength and all his needs in exchange.

The author of sefer מתוקים מדבש writes that he was in an elevator of a tall building, and another Yid entered. This Yid pressed the button of the elevator and said, "I am familiar with this elevator. After you press the button, it takes a few moments before the elevator begins to go up."

The author of מתוקים מדבש replied, "No. I am also familiar with this elevator. You have to press the button several times. Once isn't enough... You have to keep pushing the button until the elevator receives the message and goes up."

מתוקים מדבש writes, "I soon realized that I was mistaken. It was sufficient to press the button once. It just took time before the elevator reacted to the signal. I thought that it required many pushes, but I was wrong. From this episode, I learned that a person should do his hishtadlus with calmness and patience. He doesn't have to press hard, and he doesn't have to press many times. With a small hishtadlus, Hashem can send him his needs. But people are impatient. They think everything is in man's hands. So, they do hishtadlus again and again. But all these extra hishtadlus doesn't help them at all. Even without the excessive

hishtadlus, they would receive that which was destined for them. People can work hard, if they want to, but they should know that they aren't gaining anything from it."

The sefer *לספר בציון* (p.399) tells a story (heard firsthand) about a yeshiva bachur, Naftali Binyamin, who learned in the Bobover yeshiva before World War Two. When he finished a zman in the yeshiva and was ready to return home, he came to the Rebbe, the Kedushas Tzion (Bobov) zt'l hy'd for a brachah.

The Kedushas Tzion told him the following:

The sefarim (see introduction to Sefer HaMakneh) explain that just as a chassan gives his wife a ring (or something of value) to make the kiddushin, so, too, keviyachol, Hakadosh Baruch Hu betrothed the Jewish nation with gifts. The gifts were *בית מצרים וביזת הים*, the immense wealth the Jewish nation received when they left Mitzrayim and at the Yam Suf. With this wealth, Hashem betrothed the Jewish nation.

The Kedushas Tzion added that in addition, Hashem gave another precious "ring" to betroth the Jewish nation. This is the gift of emunah, which is more precious than anything in the world. This is the meaning of the pasuk (Hoshei'a 2:22) *וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי בְּאֱמוּנָה וְיָדַעְתָּ אֵת ה'*, "I will betroth you to Me with emunah, and you will know Hashem". (We say these words each day when we put on tefillin, as we wrap the strap around the finger, like a ring around the finger.)

There is no person more fortunate, and no one happier than a person who has the great gift of emunah.

The Kedushas Tzion elaborated: When a chassan gives a ring to a kallah for marriage, she can place the ring in a box. Whenever she wants, she can take it out and wear it. The same can be said about emunah. The precious gift of emunah is often tucked away and concealed within people's hearts. They have many things on their minds, and it is hard for them to focus on emunah. Nevertheless, they can take out the emunah whenever they want to. For example, they can focus on Hashem's hashgachah pratis – which occurs at every moment – and suddenly the light of emunah that was within them springs forth with great force and strength. They have emunah in them, and when they focus on it, it shines forth.

The Kedushas Tzion added: The holy sefarim (see Avodas Yisrael, Va'eschanan ד"ה ותחת כי אהב את אבותיך) tell a mashal of an astounding phenomenon of nature: If a candle goes out, and the smoke rises upwards and reaches a flame that is on a candle that is above it, the flame from above grasps onto the smoke, as if the smoke was a wick, and the flame travels down, and will ignite the extinguished candle below. The same occurs with emunah. Although it was extinguished for a while because one wasn't thinking about emunah, when he begins thinking about emunah, the light of his emunah immediately becomes reignited. He produces a small level of emunah, on the level of smoke, but that is sufficient to pick up on the resources of the concealed emunah, and he becomes engulfed in the flame of emunah.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to every Yid, וארשתוך לי באמונה, I married you with emunah, and I request that you bring it forth. It isn't hard to do so because the emunah is already planted within you. All you have to do is ונדעת את ה', remember Hashem. Think about Hashem, think thoughts of emunah, and the light of your emunah will burst forth.

When the bachur Naftali Binyamin heard this lesson, he didn't realize how important this message would be to him. But soon afterward, the Holocaust began. Whenever he felt broken, he remembered the words of the Kedushas Tzion. He strengthened his emunah, and that kept him going.

It states in this week's parashah (24:10-11) כי תשעך בהעך מנשאת מאומה לא תבא אל ביתו לעבט עבטו, בחוץ תעמוד ויהאיש אשר אתה נושא בו יוציא אליך את העבט החוצה, "When you make your friend a loan of any amount, you shall not enter his home to take the collateral (*mashkon*). You shall stand outside; and the man to whom you lent shall bring the collateral (*mashkon*) to you outside." This means that when one lends money to another person, he wants collateral, a *mashkon*, to feel secure that he will not lose his money. (If the borrower doesn't pay up the debt, the lender can keep the *mashkon* for himself.) The Torah tells us that the lender may not enter the home of the borrower to take the collateral. He must wait outside, and the לווה, borrower, will bring out the *mashkon*. There are times when the collateral is handed over after the loan was already made. Even then, the lender may not go into the home of the borrower. He must wait outdoors for

the borrower to bring out the collateral.

One of the practical lessons we can take from this halachah is that hishtadlus has a limit. A person shouldn't think that he has to do the maximum. Common sense might dictate that you will be more guaranteed with your money if you enter the borrower's home to collect the collateral. But the Torah instructs you to wait outdoors. The borrower will bring it out to you. You don't have to panic, and you don't have to overdo your hishtadlus.

Reb Shalom Brander zt'l told the following story:

There was a very wealthy person who lived in Galicia. He once lent a large sum of money to a poor person. The time for payment arrived, but the poor person had no way to repay the loan. He tried to excuse himself, expressing his hope that he would be able to pay in a short while, etc., but the lender insisted that he must pay immediately. He gave the borrower no respite, and he made his life miserable in many ways. He kept demanding payment for the loan.

The Torah states (Shemos 22:24) אִם בָּסָף תִּלְוֶהוּ אֶת עַמִּי אֶת הָעֲנִי עִמָּךְ לֹא תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנֹשֶׁה, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor..." Rashi explains לֹא תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנֹשֶׁה: "Don't demand the money forcefully. If you know that he doesn't have money, treat him like you never lent him any money. In other words, don't embarrass him."

Unfortunately, this wealthy person kept the end of the pasuk, תִּהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנֹשֶׁה, "Demand the money forcefully." He didn't keep the beginning of the pasuk, לֹא, that he may not do so. He demanded the money, without considering the prohibition that was involved.

The borrower ran away to another city. He thought that the lender would leave him alone, but it didn't help. The lender followed him to the city he went to and demanded the money. The poor person ran to a third city, and then to a fourth, but he couldn't escape the nails of the lender.

The poor person escaped to Belz, where Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l lived. He hoped that there he would have respite, but the lender followed him there, too. The poor man ran to his rebbe, Reb Aharon of Belz, and told the Rebbe that he had no respite from

this creditor of his. Wherever he goes, the man follows him and makes his life bitter.

The Rebbe called for the lender and asked him why he chases after this poor man. The lender replied, "Why shouldn't I? He is a rasha, as it states (Tehillim 37:21) לָקֹחַ רָשָׁע וְלֹא יֵשְׁלֶם, 'The rasha borrows but doesn't repay.'"

The Rebbe told him that there is no reason to chase him because the money that is destined for him would get to him. The Rebbe explained, "Money that is destined for a person from heaven can never be taken away from him. If he loses money in one way, it will be earned somewhere else."

The lender asked, "Can you guarantee this to me?"

The Rebbe didn't respond to the request that he guarantee it, but he repeated what he said before. "If you forgive the debt, the money will come back to you in another way. The money that is due to you will find its way to come back to you." When the man heard this from the rebbe, he trusted that it would be so. He said immediately, "I am *mochel* the borrower with all my heart."

The lender left Belz and began his trip home. (He had no reason to remain in Belz, now that he had forgiven the debt.) At the train station, he bought a lottery ticket and won! He won the exact amount of money that he had lent to the poor man – not a penny more and not a penny less. It is as the rebbe told him: The exact amount he had lent was returned to him.

A *chashuve* rosh kollel told one of the gedolim of our generation that he was worried that he would have to close his kollel. At that time, he had a hundred students in his kollel, and several of his primary donors recently told him that they can no longer support the kollel. How could he keep the doors of the kollel open in this situation?

The gadol replied, "I advise you to do the opposite. Keep the kollel open and accept an additional twenty students into the kollel. Your mesirus nefesh to keep the kollel going will grant you a lot of siyata d'Shmaya. You will see that you will have money for 120 students."

Preparing in Elul for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Chazal (Avodah Zarah 3.) say, מִי שֶׁטָרַח בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת יֵאָכֵל בְּשַׁבָּת מִי שֶׁלֹּא טָרַח בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת מֵהֵיכָן יֵאָכֵל בְּשַׁבָּת "Whoever prepares erev Shabbos will eat on Shabbos. Someone who doesn't prepare on erev Shabbos, what will he eat on Shabbos?"

The holy sefarim (משמיע שלום - אלוה) from Reb Shimon of Amshinov zt'l and

others) explain that this Gemara alludes to Elul. Elul is the sixth month, and it comes before Tishrei, the seventh month, which represents Shabbos. Those who prepare on the sixth will succeed in the seventh.

The Beis Avraham (Netzavim) zt'l says that Elul is like Tosfos Shabbos (the minutes we add on to Shabbos from

The rosh kollel did so, and as the gadol said, he immediately saw siyata d'Shmaya. Large sums of money began streaming into the kollel. He decided to keep the kollel growing. He reached two hundred students. He wanted to add more students, and he went to ask the gadol once again whether he should do so. The gadol replied, "Don't take in more students. I am worried that you won't manage to support the current two hundred students. Certainly don't take in more students."

The rosh kollel asked, "Please explain this to me, because I don't understand. Before, when I didn't have money and was ready to close the kollel, you told me to keep the kollel open and to add twenty students. Now, when I have money and supporters, you tell me not to accept additional students because you fear that I won't be able to support the students that I already have. What changed?"

The gadol replied, "When you came to me before, you knew that you couldn't support the kollel on your own, so you relied on Hashem to help you. But now there is a lot of money coming into the kollel, and you think that, naturally, you can even grow further. Therefore, I am no longer confident you will succeed, and I am even worried about your existing yungerleit."

before and after Shabbos). It is known that brachos for gashmiyus (such as parnassah, health, etc.) come from Tosfos Shabbos. Shabbos itself is very exalted, and it only grants us *ruchniyus*. We receive *gashmiyus* benefits and blessings from Tosfos

Shabbos. Similarly, the Beis Avraham teaches that the brachos in gashmiyus for the upcoming year come from Elul, because it is like Tosfos Shabbos. It is the sixth, which is attached to the seventh.³

3. Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter Shlita tells that as a bachur, he wanted to learn in the Slonim yeshiva. He came to the Nesivos Shalom zt'l, who was then the rosh yeshiva, and he asked to be tested. The Nesivos Shalom asked him, "From all the pages that you prepared for this test, which Tosfos do you know the best?"

Reb Yaakov Meir chose a Tosfos. The Nesivos Shalom said, "Take a half-hour to review this Tosfos some more times, and then come back here, and I will ask you questions on the Tosfos."

Reb Yaakov Meir says that this episode taught him a new insight on the concept of tests. He had thought the purpose of the tests was to catch the students with mistakes. But at this test, he learned that the purpose of tests is to show the students that they *do know*. The purpose is to elevate the students' self-esteem, rather than to crush them. The students feel that their teachers want them to succeed. This feeling helps the students reach their fullest potential.

We add that this is the nature of the month of Elul. The purpose of this month isn't to bring out people's sins and inequities; its purpose is to cleanse us, so that we will be ready for the judgment.

There is a yungerman, a talmid chacham, who is an expert in stories of tzaddikim and a gifted orator. He was hired to lead a tour to kivrei tzaddikim for a week in Europe. The yungerman prepared stories of tzaddikim that he would share with the participants as they traveled from one place to another by bus, and when they arrived at the holy sites. He also prepared

inspirational discussions and divrei Torah to share with his group during the trip.

The flight to Europe was scheduled for five in the morning. He called a taxi to pick him up from his house at 2:00 a.m. It was 1:30 a.m., and he was fully packed, with half an hour to go, so he took advantage of this time to prepare some more material for the trip. But he was very tired, and he fell asleep as soon as he sat down at the table. The taxi arrived at 2:00 a.m., as scheduled. The driver called the yungerman's phone number, but he was sleeping so deeply, he didn't hear it. The driver tried sounding his horn. Probably everyone on the street woke up, but this yungerman didn't budge. He even came to the door and knocked and rang the bell, but nothing helped.

Finally, at 2:30, the attempts bore fruit, and he awoke with a start. He was afraid he might miss the flight, so he grabbed his bags and ran to the taxi. He was in such a rush that he didn't realize that one of the bags he grabbed was a bag filled with garbage.

The bags were checked at the airport, and the inspectors were shocked when they saw what was inside the bag. They called him to the side and interrogated him. They thought that perhaps he planned to take the cans and other items from the garbage to create a bomb on the plane. It took him some time to convince them that he was simply in a rush and didn't realize that he had grabbed a garbage bag. Finally, they let him on the plane (without the garbage). He arrived just in time for takeoff.

On the tour, he shared this story. He said that he learned from this episode that we are provided with wakeup calls, such as the sound of the shofar in Elul. If one hears the wakeup call of the shofar, he will have time to throw out all his garbage (aveiros) and come to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur clean. However, when one doesn't heed the wakeup sounds and wakes up late, he might arrive at these holy days with bags of garbage in his hands.

When the Iranians ym's sent missiles to Eretz Yisrael, the Yidden living in Eretz Yisrael received two warnings, so they could have time to get to a bomb shelter or to a "safe-room". The first warning was a phone call. The call told people to remain in the vicinity of

a bomb shelter or safe-room because in ten minutes the missile would reach Eretz Yisrael. Ten minutes later, a siren went off in the areas that were at risk of a hit. The siren informed people that they had a minute or two to get to the bomb shelter or safe-room.

Some people didn't pay attention to the phone call. Ten minutes later, when the siren went off, they rushed and panicked. Some even got hurt while running for shelter. Had they reacted immediately when they heard the first warning, they could have calmly walked to the shelter without any panic at all.

Even when the siren was heard, some people didn't immediately run for shelter. They first wanted to finish off something they were doing. But when they finally picked themselves up to go to the shelter, they rushed without yishuv hadaas (peace of mind) because they knew that they had just a few seconds to get to a safer place.

We tell this as a mashal to describe how people react to another siren. Because, I'havdil thousands of times, the call of the shofar during Elul and afterwards the shofar of Rosh Hashanah are to arouse us to do teshuvah. As the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4) writes, שׁוֹפָר בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה... קָמוּ יֵשׁ בּוֹ כְּלִמּוֹר עוֹרוֹ וְשִׁנִּים מְשַׁנֵּתָם וְנִרְדָּמִים הִקִּיצוּ מִתְרַדְּמֵתָם, וְחִפְּזוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיכֶם וְחִזְרוּ בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה וְזָכְרוּ בּוֹרְאֵכֶם. אֵלֹהֵי הַשּׁוֹפָרִים אֶת הָאָמֶת בְּהִבְלֵי הַזְּמַן וְשׁוֹגִים כָּל שְׁנָתָם בְּהִבְלֵי זְרִיק אֲשֶׁר לֹא יוֹעִיל וְלֹא יַצִּיל, הִבִּיטוּ לְנִפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם וְהִסִּיבּוּ דְרָבִיקֶם וּמַעֲלָלֵיכֶם וְנִעֲזְבוּ כָּל "The shofar of Rosh Hashanah... carries a message. It is saying, "Those who are sleeping, wake up from your slumber. Search your ways, do teshuvah, and remember your Creator... Every person should leave his bad ways and thoughts..."

During Elul, we receive the wakeup calls of the shofar. Those who listen to the call and improve their ways arrive prepared for the Yomim Noraim. Woe to those who wake up when it is already Rosh Hashanah!

The Imrei Elimelech of Gradzhik zt'l says that this lesson is alluded to in the words at the beginning of the parashah, **כִּי תֵצֵא לִמְלָחָמָה עַל**, **אִיִּכָּר**, this means we should go out to war *before the time, before the war begins*. This means to prepare in Elul *before* the days of judgment. Those who do so, **וְנָתַנּוּ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ**, HaheM will grant

One primary way to prepare ourselves in Elul is to study Torah. Torah purifies us from severe aveiros.

It states in this week's parashah (23:12) וְהָיָה לַפְּנוֹת עֶרֶב יִרְחֹץ בַּמַּיִם וּכְבַּח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ יָבֹא אֶל תוֹךְ הַמִּחֲנֶה, "When it will be toward evening, he shall immerse himself in water, and when the sun sets he may enter the midst of the camp." Knesses Yechezkel of Radomsk zt'l explains that לַפְּנוֹת עֶרֶב can mean: If a person wants לַפְּנוֹת, to remove aveiros that are so severe, which are called עֶרֶב, night, the counsel is יִרְחֹץ בַּמַּיִם; he should cleanse himself in the waters of Torah study. Torah will purify him.

In the past, a common way to remove the stain of aveiros was with yesurim and *sigufim* - afflictions. People would fast many times and undergo other kinds of afflictions to remove

the aveiros. When the aveiros were very severe, stronger yesurim would be needed to remove the aveiros.

But there is a better way to remove aveiros, and that is to study Torah.

It states (21:22) וְכִי יְהִי בָאִישׁ חָטָא מִשְׁפָּט מָוֶת וְהוּמָת וְתָלִית אֹתוֹ עַל עֵץ. Bris Avram of Zolazitz zy'a explains that the pasuk is referring to those who committed severe aveiros. "He sinned so much, until even if he does teshuvah, with *sigufim*, near death, it is possible that that won't be enough." Even if he fasts many days, and he endures other kinds of yesurim, until he almost dies because of them, this might also be enough to remove the aveiros. This is the meaning of the words וְכִי יְהִי בָאִישׁ חָטָא: a person has aveiros so severe that the atonement might need מִשְׁפָּט מָוֶת, afflictions that are almost death. And even

them success, and they will receive a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

that might not be enough! Therefore, it is best to go to the best counsel, which is to study Torah. As the pasuk concludes, וְתָלִיתָ אֹתוֹ עַל עֵץ, and עֵץ means Torah, as it states (Mishlei 3:18) עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמְחַיִּיקִים בָּהּ, "[Torah] is a tree of life..." The merit of Torah will atone even for very severe aveiros, which *sigufim* and afflictions near death won't atone.

Now, when it is Elul, and we want to cleanse ourselves from aveiros, there is no better solution than to study Torah.

On Rosh Hashanah, the custom is to blow shofar next to the bimah, where the Torah is read. The Mishnah Berurah (תקפ"ה סק"ג) explains that this is so that the merit of Torah will protect us and help us attain a good year. We understand from this that studying Torah in Elul will also be a great merit for us. In the merit of Torah, we will be able to ask תורה הקדושה, "Holy Torah, pray for us..." (From the Selichos of Tzom Gedalya).

Another important avodah in Elul is to say Tehillim, Selichos, and all types of tefillos.

Reb Shlomo Kluger zt'l (Tehilos Yisrael on Tehillim 42) writes, "The primary tefillos in Elul is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should give us the source of tears, that we should be able to daven with a lot of tears on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur."

He explains that Chazal (Brachos 32b) say, שַׁעְרֵי דַמְעוֹת לֹא נִנְעֲלוּ, the gates of tears are never locked." If we want to attain a good, sweet year with our tefillos on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we should daven with tears.

He explains that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Tehillim 42:4) הִיָּתָה לִי דִמְעָתִי לֶחֶם יוֹמָם וּלְלַיְלָה, "My tears were my bread day and night..." לֶחֶם, bread, represents parnassah. Everyone prays for parnassah. Dovid Hamelech says, הִיָּתָה לִי דִמְעָתִי לֶחֶם יוֹמָם וּלְלַיְלָה, "My tears were like my bread..." This means just as

everyone prays for bread, I pray for דמעותי, tears. I pray that I should be able to daven with tears, with emotion and feeling. A tefillah with tears is mesugal to be answered.

Reb Mordechai of Nadvorna zt'l taught that the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is determined according to the extent of tefillos that were said in Elul. How many chapters of Tehillim did he say? How often did he pour out his heart in tefillah, and so on. This is alluded to in the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון: מאי כבני מרון, הכא תרגימו כבני אמרנא... רב יהודה אמר שמואל כחיילות של בית דוד. We can explain

that the Gemara is saying בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו, on Rosh Hashanah the judgment will be כבני מרון. The Gemara asks "What does כבני מרון means?" The Gemara replies that כבני מרון means כבני אמרנא. This means the judgment will be according to the אמרנא, which means speech (אמר). It will be according to the amount we davened in Elul. Another opinion is that the judgment will be like כחיילות של בית דוד, this means the judgment will be according to the amount of Tehillim we said in Elul. (Dovid HaMelech composed Tehillim, therefore, חיילות של בית דוד alludes to tefillah.) We discover from this Gemara that the judgment of Rosh Hashanah

4. Literally, the Gemara means, "On Rosh Hashanah, everyone goes before Hashem like בני מרון. What does בני מרון mean? Here, it is explained כבני אמרנא (like sheep that go out of a gate one by one to be counted for maasar). Rav Yehudah says in the name of Shmuel, 'Like the soldiers of the house of Dovid (who were counted one by one, when they went out to war.'" The Gemara is saying that the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is each person, individually, with a focus particularly on him and on his deeds. People aren't judged in groups, but rather individually, each person, according to his deeds.

is dependent on the tefillos in Elul.

Also, in Elul one should make *kabalos tovos*.

This week's parashah has the halachos of a בן סורר ומורה, a rebellious child. He is punished with סקילה, stoning, for stealing money from his parents to drink a lot of wine and to eat a lot of meat. We wonder why he deserves this severe punishment? The Gemara (Sanhedrin 71b) explains, בן סורר ומורה נידן על שם סופו, מוטב שמוכרנו וימורנו ואל ימות חייב, "The ben Sorer U'Moreh is judged for what will be in the end. It is better that he should die when he is still innocent, rather than to die when he will be guilty." Rashi (21:18) explains, הגיעה תורה לסוף דעתו, סוף שמכלה ממון אביו ומבקש לימודו ואינו מוצא, ועומד בפרשת דרכים ומלסטם את הבריות, אמרה תורה ימות זכאי ואל ימות חייב, "The Torah understood what will be in the end. He will finish off his father's

money, and he will seek his addiction, and he won't be able to satisfy it. He will stand at the fork in the road and steal from people. The Torah says let him die innocent, and he shouldn't die when he is guilty."

We learn from this that Heaven judges a person, not solely as the person is now, but also what will become of him. The Alter of Kelm zt'l (Darkei Mussar) says that we can make a kal v'chomer: If a person is punished for the bad that will come from him, certainly, a person will be judged favorably when he makes a *kabbalah tovah* to become good. Even if he isn't good yet, he will be judged according to the good that he will certainly attain with time. He should be granted life, so he will have time to improve his ways, which is better than to die now, when he still has bad ways.⁵

5. The Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l told the following story:

A poor woman found an egg. Her hungry children were happy

The Path of Growth

The Tiferes Shlomo
(beginning of this week's parasha)
teaches:

"There are righteous people who battle against their yetzer hara and win, and a few days later, the yetzer hara returns, and they must wage war with

the yetzer hara once again! This confuses them, and they ask, 'What is this all about? I already fought and won against this yetzer hara. Why did it return?' ... The Torah discusses this situation and explains, כִּי הֵנָּה, the reason you came down to this world, לַמְלָחָה is for war. This is your life's mission. For this, you were created."

because they would have something to eat. The mother gathered her children and told them, "We are not going to eat this egg. We will bring it to our neighbor, and one of the neighbor's hens will sit on the egg until it hatches. " The children were happy. They will soon have chicken to eat. But the mother had other plans. "We won't eat the chick that will be hatched. We will let the chick become a chicken, and it will lay its own eggs. We won't eat those eggs. The eggs will hatch and become more chickens. Soon we will have many chickens and many eggs. We'll sell them and buy cattle. The cattle will have calves. We will have many sheep and cows. We will sell them to buy land." She went on and on, and as she described to her children their future wealth. She waved her hands to express her excitement... and the egg fell. All her plans, and her great imagined wealth, vanished in a moment.

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l used this story to describe how people often make grand plans in Elul of how they will improve in the upcoming year, but nothing materializes from all their plans. They tell themselves that things will be different this year, but within a few weeks, they revert to their same behaviors and habits.

Kabalos tovos, especially small kabalos tovos, can help bring about true change and improvement.

You cannot win the war once and for all because then life wouldn't have a purpose. There are always new battles to combat.

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

Reb Yitzchok Hutner *zt'l* writes in a letter, "When we discuss the greatness of *tzaddikim*, we have a bad custom that we begin at the end [of their lives] and discuss the great levels the *tzaddikim* reached. We skip the many years they struggled with their *yetzer hara*. We think they were born *tzaddikim*. [For example], everyone praises the Chofetz Chaim's *shemiras halashon*, but who speaks about his struggles and ups and downs he encountered until he reached this level? This is just one example among a thousand. Leaving out this chapter of their lives

creates a problem because when a *bachur* has a strong desire to grow in *avodas Hashem* and is confronted with a challenge, he thinks he will never reach the levels of the *tzaddikim* whom he wishes to emulate. He thinks that if he struggles with the *yetzer hara*, there is no hope for him. But that is ridiculous. Know, my friend, you will fall time and again. There will be battles that you will lose. But in the end, you will emerge victoriously and wear the crown of success on your head. The wisest of all men said, שבעה יפול צדיק וקם, 'A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises.' The wise understand that the *tzaddik* rises *because* he fell seven times. I beg you, don't think of *tzaddikim* as people who don't have a *yetzer tov*. Rather, when the *yetzer hara* is burning inside you, and you're struggling to overcome the *yetzer hara*, at these moments you are most similar to the *gedolim* – even more than when you are at peace with the *yetzer hara*."

A *bachur* complained to Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* (*rosh yeshiva* Kol Torah) that lately he had fallen from his high level and he isn't studying Torah like he used to.

Reb Shlomo Zalman told him a *mashal* of a person who brought expensive cloth to a tailor and asked him to turn it into a suit. The tailor began cutting the fabric at several angles.

"What are you doing?" the man shouted. "It's expensive material. Why are you cutting it into pieces?"

But soon he understood that each snip that the tailor made was important. One became a pocket, another cut became a sleeve, and so on. Reb Shlomo Zalman said to the *bachur*, "We would want the path of growth in Torah to be an upward ascent, always growing higher and higher, but it isn't that way. There needs to be ups and downs. There is no other way to grow in Torah."

In the sefarim, this process is called *ירידה לצורך עליה*. One falls, and from there he rises to even higher levels. A *mashal* to this is a seed that first rots in the ground, but then it grows. The Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* says that this represents the idea of falling to rise higher. He said that this is alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Bamidbar* 13:20). It states *והתחזקתם*, make yourself strong and courageous. Don't lose hope. You can reach high levels. And when you find yourself falling, *ולקחתם*, take encouragement, *מפרי הארץ*, from fruit. Fruit seeds rot, and then they become fruit. You will also grow from all your falls.

Value Your Good Deeds

Reb Shlomo Karliner *zt'l* said, "The reason *yungerleit* don't grow in *avodas Hashem* is that they don't value their deeds." They compare their mitzvos to how *tzaddikim* performed them, and they feel that their deeds don't have worth.

But all our deeds are incredibly precious. The Arizal taught that a simple act that people do in the later generations can be as precious as the mitzvos the Tanaim performed. Although they performed mitzvos with perfection, Hashem measures each generation according to their tests. In our times, there is a lot of tumah in the world, making it extremely difficult to perform mitzvos. Therefore, each good deed means so much.

The Chofetz Chaim told the following mashal:

A baker complained that he doesn't earn enough money. He said, "After I deduct the cost of flour, sugar, firewood, etc., the profits are very little. Furthermore, people aren't satisfied with my bread. They complain that the oven is too hot and the bread is burned, or that the bread is raw. As a result, some customers don't return..."

Some years later, the baker was very happy with his *parnassah*. Someone asked him, "I remember you complaining about your *parnassah* a few years ago. What changed?"

The baker replied, "Now it is wartime and there is a bread shortage. Everyone comes to me and pays triple the price for bread. No one complains about how the bread was baked. They are happy with what they get."

The Chofetz Chaim told this story to a *bachur* who felt disappointed with his spiritual level. The Chofetz Chaim explained to him that years ago, when there were great tzaddikim in the world, Heaven wanted perfect *avodas Hashem*. But today, there's a hunger in Heaven. They are waiting for good deeds. When a mitzvah goes up to heaven, it is cherished, and the reward is enormous, no matter how it appears.

The Chofetz Chaim once spoke about a time when

there was so much money in the world, no one would bend down to pick up a copper coin. He said, "But now people are poor, and they will bend down to pick up copper coins." The person listening to the Chofetz Chaim was surprised that the Chofetz Chaim was speaking about these matters. But then the Chofetz Chaim explained his intention. He said that in a generation with many tzaddikim, there is spiritual wealth, and only perfect deeds are accepted in heaven. But when only a few people serve Hashem, every good deed is welcomed and valued.

Here is another mashal from the Chofetz Chaim zt'l:

A king was traveling through his kingdom, and he stopped in every city. Before the king arrived, the people of the city knew that the king would arrive, and they prepared. Some cities conducted parades in honor of the king, and some cleaned their streets and

decorated the roads. But there was one city that had a terrible custom. Whenever someone new came to the city, no matter who it was, they would throw stones at the carriage of the newcomer as he drove through the streets. The leaders of the surrounding cities gathered the people and said, "In honor of the king's visit, preparations are going on in all cities of the king's kingdom. But we aren't asking too much from you. All we ask is that you don't throw stones. "

The Chofetz Chaim explained that Hashem comes to visit our cities on Rosh Hashanah, and we must prepare ourselves for this great visit. In the generations of the *Avos*, of the *nevi'im*, *tana'im* and *amora'im*, they prepared themselves properly and went all out to honor Hashem, the King. But in our times, we don't ask too much. We just should be careful not to throw stones. In other words, we should

avoid aveiros. For us, that is a significant accomplishment.

The Prohibition to Plow with an Ox and Donkey Together

One of the mitzvos of this week's *parashah* is (22:10), לֹא תַחְרוֹשׁ בַּשּׂוֹר וְחִמּוֹר יַחְדָּו, "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together." What is the reason for this prohibition?

1) *Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos* and the *Baal HaTurim* explain that an ox chews its cud, while a donkey doesn't. When they plow together, the donkey will think that its partner, the ox, is eating. The donkey

will be upset that it can't eat, as well. Therefore, the Torah says they shouldn't be bound together to plow.⁶

2) The Ibn Ezra says that the ox and donkey have different strengths, making it painful for them to plow together.

3) The *Chinuch* (550) explains that it is natural that animals like to be with their own species. The prohibition to have them work together is not to cause distress to animals. Therefore, the Torah forbids plowing with an ox and a donkey together. They will feel upset being with another species, and not with their own type.⁷

6. We can learn from this halachah a lesson in *mussar*. We learn that one shouldn't cause distress to others by showing that they have something that the others lack. Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l said, "If you have good children, don't speak about that before others because their children might not be as good, and this will cause them distress."

7. Rashi (22:10) and the Gemara (Bava Kama 54b) write that the prohibition of plowing with two species doesn't only apply to a donkey and an ox. "The same applies to any two species." According to the *Chinuch's* explanation, we can understand one

We quote here the Sefer HaChinuch:

כי מטעמי מצוה זו ענין צער בעלי חיים שהוא אסור מן התורה, וידוע שיש למיני הבהמות ולעופות דאגה גדולה לשכון עם שאינם מינן וכל שכן לעשות עמהן מלאכה, וכמו שאנו רואים בעינינו באותן שאינם תחת ידינו כי כל עוף למינו ישכון, וכל הבהמות ושאר המינין גם כן ידבקו לעולם במיניהן. וכל חכם לב מזה יקח מוסר שלא למנות שני אנשים לעולם בדבר מכל הדברים שיהיו רחוקים בטבעם ומשונים בהנהגתם כמו צדיק ורשע והנקלה בנכבד, שאם הקפידה התורה על הצער שיש בזה לבעלי חיים שאינם בני שכל, כל שכן בבני אדם אשר להם נפש משכלת "One of the reasons for this mitzvah is צער בעלי חיים, to not cause distress to animals, which this is a Torah prohibition. It is known that animals and birds have great distress when they are with others of a different species, and certainly, so, when they

work together. We see this with the animals that aren't raised by people: the species of one type of bird will flock together, and the same is with animals."

Here the Chinuch adds a practical application to this halachah. He writes:

"The wise will learn mussar from this, that they shouldn't appoint two people to do something, when their nature and behaviors are very different from one another. For example, a tzaddik and a rasha, or someone who isn't respected with someone who is respected. If the Torah was concerned about the distress of animals, which don't have intelligence, certainly people, who have intelligence...."

of the reasons for this prohibition. It is because any two species don't want to be together. They prefer being with their own type.