

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Shoftim



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Shoftim

Focusing on the Half-Cup That is Full

To maintain a positive outlook on life, a person should focus on the "half-cup that is full." This means everyone should focus on what he has, instead of moaning and complaining about what he lacks.

Reb Y. A. Dunner Shlita said that a cup, כוס, is gematria 86. Half of that is gematria 43. A person should focus on the 43, on the half-cup that's full. He should focus on the 43 words that are in (Tehillim 100)

מזמור לתודה, and on the 43 pesukim in Tehillim (107) הודו לה' כי טוב. These two chapters are filled with praises to Hashem for His kindness.¹ The final pasuk (Tehillim 107) states, מִי הָכֵם וַיִּשְׁמַר אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּתְּבוּנֵנוּ הַחֲסִדִּי ה' "Whoever is wise let him note these things, and they will comprehend the kindness of Hashem." We can explain that הָכֵם is roshei teivos for חֲצִי כוס מלאה, the half-cup that is full. The pasuk is saying, "The wise focus on the half-cup that is full. וַיִּתְּבוּנֵנוּ הַחֲסִדִּי ה' they are always thinking about Hashem's kindness."²

1. Tehillim (107) lists the four people who must praise Hashem for the kindness Hashem performed for them. They are: those who traversed a sea or desert, the ill who recovered, and the imprisoned who were freed.

2. Countless details of daily life are expressions of Hashem's kindness to a person. One should pause and appreciate that he has a roof over his head, family who cares for him, nourishing meals to sustain him, etc. The list is truly endless, and one must contemplate these matters. מִי הָכֵם וַיִּשְׁמַר אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּתְּבוּנֵנוּ הַחֲסִדִּי ה'. The wise think about the half cup that is filled, all the good they enjoy in life, and they praise Hashem.

When one focuses on the good and realizes that Hashem loves him and only wants to do good for him, it brings him to the next level - being happy with the empty half of the cup. As the author of *מחשבת יהושע* Shlita explains: When one focuses on the half-cup that is full, he discovers Hashem's love. Now he understands that even the half-cup that is empty, the matters he lacks in life, are also for his good.

Nachum Ish Gamu Zu would say גם זו לטובה. The gematria of גם is 43, which is half the gematria of כוס (86). He would say, גם זו, also the half-cup that is empty, לטובה, is for the good. He knew this because he focused on the גם, 43, the full half of the cup.

Some focus only on the half-cup that's empty. They focus on all their problems; on all the matters they lack. This focus causes them to lose sight of all the good they have. About them the pasuk (Malachim 1, 3:26) states, גם לי גם לך לא יהיה. If the focus is on the גם, the half-cup that is

empty, גם לך לא יהיה, they won't notice the half-cup that is full.

A talmid chacham added that this is the reason *birkas hamazon* is said while holding a cup of wine (see Orach Chaim 182). Birkas hamazon should be said with happiness. But how can one say *birkas hamazon* happily when he is going through severe hardships in his life? The answer is, he can focus on the half-cup that's full. With the focus on the kindness he receives, he knows Hashem loves him, and the half-cup that is empty is also filled with Hashem's kindness.

Dovid HaMelech suffered immensely in his lifetime, as it states (Tehillim 40:13) בִּי אֲפָפוּ עָלַי רָעוֹת עַד אֲיִן מִקְפָּר, "For innumerable tragedies have encircled me." There are several other pesukim in Tehillim that express similar ideas. Yet, he also said (Tehillim 23:5) כּוֹסִי רוֹבֵה, "My cup overflows" with Hashem's kindness. But how could he say that if he suffered so

much? The answer is that he believed that all his tzaros גַּמְלוֹת, were also for the good. He focused on the good he had and understood that whatever he didn't have was also Hashem's kindness. He could say כּוֹסֵי חַיִּים, "My cup overflows," and nothing was lacking.

We trust in Hashem that the day will come when all tzaros will end, and everything will turn around and become good. As it states regarding the redemption (Chavakuk 2:3) אִם יִתְמַהֲקָה חֶפֶז לֹא כִּי בָא יָבֹא לֹא יֵאָחֵר, "Though it might tarry, await it, for it will surely come; it will not delay." חֶפֶז is roshei teivos for כּוֹס, "the half-cup that is empty". This is alluding to each person, with his *peckel*, his problems in life; he should trust in Hashem and await the time when the half-cup will become full. As Rashi writes in this week's parashah on the words (18:13) תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה', אֵלֶיךָ, You shall be wholehearted with Hashem,

your G-d." Rashi writes, הִתְהַלֵּךְ עִמּוֹ בְּתִמְיּוּמוֹת וּתְצַפֶּה לוֹ, "Go with Him with temimus, and trust solely in Him". Trust in Hashem, and await the time when the half-cup will be full, and all tzaros will end.

It states (Devarim 13:5) אַחֲרֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ וְאֹתוֹ תִירָאוּ, "Hashem your G-d you shall follow and Him shall you fear." The Ibn Ezra writes, וְאֹתוֹ תִירָאוּ. מִלְּשֹׂאֹל לְמַה זֶה. Fear Hashem, and be afraid to ask, "Why is it this way?" One must fear Hashem and never ask such a question. He must believe that whatever Hashem does, it is certainly for our good.

It states (Tehillim 92:6-7) מַה גָּדְלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה' מֵאֵד עֲמִקּוֹ מִחֲשָׁבְתֶיךָ, אִישׁ בְּעַר לֹא יֵדַע וְכִסִּיל לֹא יִבִּין אֶת זֹאת, "How great are Your deeds, Hashem; exceedingly profound are Your thoughts. A fool cannot know nor can he understand this."

The question is why the pasuk specifies that fools don't understand Hashem's ways. Behold, even the

wisest people in the world can't grasp the depths of Hashem's path and ways, as it states, מְאֹד עֲמֻקּוֹ מִחֻשְׁבֵּתֶיךָ, "exceedingly profound are Your thoughts."

We can explain that those who are wise, at least know that Hashem's ways are deep and far beyond their comprehension. When something happens to them or to the world that doesn't make sense, they immediately respond, "Obviously I don't understand Hashem's ways. This is to be expected. Who am I to understand Hashem's ways? His thoughts are far beyond my perception!"

The fools, however, think that they should be able to understand Hashem's ways.

When they don't, they question Hashem, *chalilah*. אִישׁ בֶּעַר לֹא יָדַע וְכִסִּיל לֹא יָבִין אֶת זֹאת, a fool doesn't understand that it is impossible for a human being to fully grasp Hashem's ways.

With the awareness that Hashem's ways are beyond our perception, it is easy for us to believe that everything is for our good. We often won't understand why it is good, but we can believe that it is for our good. We don't understand because Hashem's ways are far beyond our understanding. As we wrote, the focus on all the good that he sees in his life will help him believe that it is all for the good, even when he doesn't understand it.³

3. On the 23rd of Av, a family from Bnei Brak went to Tzefas to daven at the kivrei Tzaddikim. One of the children accidentally stepped on one of the graves covering the mountain. The mother reminded the children to be careful with the kavod of the niftarim. She took a stone and placed it on the kever, as customary, to honor the grave that they had inadvertently desecrated. Then the family said a chapter of Tehillim together before this grave. They then tried to read the inscription on the kever, so they would

Battling the Yetzer Hara

The Ohr HaChaim zt"l (20:1) says that the yetzer hara is stronger than us in three ways:

(1) The yetzer hara is a trained warrior. He knows how to lure people into his net. We aren't trained in the strategies of this war against the yetzer hara.

(2) The yetzer hara fights with us by luring us into *matters we desire*. He offers us sins that appeal to us, which we think are sweet and are for our benefit.

(3) We have committed aveiros in the past, and the aveiros give the yetzer hara

extra strength. So, we aren't only battling with a yetzer hara; we are fighting a yetzer hara that we fortified with our aveiros.

Considering these three advantages that the yetzer hara has over us, it seems likely that we will lose the war.

What is the solution? How can one win over the yetzer hara?

The Or HaChaim writes:

"Hashem tells us, כִּי תֵצֵא, למלחמה וראית בעיני שכלך סוס ורכב, 'When you go out to war [against the yetzer hara], and you see his horse and chariot.' The horse represents

know the name, and pray for this niftar. They were amazed to see that the yahrtzeit was on the 23rd of Av! Hashem arranged for this niftar to have a frum family daven at his grave, on the day of his yahrtzeit.

We can add another lesson: Don't get worked up when someone "steps" on you; it may very well be for your benefit.

For our topic, the hashgacha pratis we see in life should act as a constant reminder that everything is bashert, and for the good. Even when we don't understand, we say גם זו לטובה, this too is for the good.

the *yetzer hara* who is trained in warfare, unlike man, who isn't. רכב, chariot, represents the *yetzer hara*'s strength has increased, because of your many sins. Nevertheless, Hashem comforts us and says, לא תירא, don't be afraid, כי ה' אלקיך, Hashem is with you.

עמך, Hashem is with you. If you fight with your own strength, you will lose the war. That is true. But Hashem is with you, and His strength is great. He will save you... המעלך מארץ מצרים... *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is your proof because just as Hashem saved you from Mitzrayim, He will help you win the war against the *yetzer hara*.¹⁴

4. Let us repeat the three concepts the Or HaChaim discusses, the three strengths of the *yetzer hara*, and we will see how they apply to one of the primary *yetzer haras* of our generation – the internet.

The Or HaChaim's first point is that the *yetzer hara* is trained in war strategies while we aren't. This is one of the significant problems with the internet. Websites are built and designed by professionals who have studied these strategies for years; their primary motive is to get people addicted to the internet. The average person never studied addiction avoidance strategies. How can he expect to outsmart the system and be protected from the negative side of the internet?

The second problem the Or HaChaim mentioned is that the *yetzer hara* sells what the human body desires. This also applies to the internet.

Finally, the Or HaChaim explains that our past sins strengthen the *yetzer hara*, making it harder to free ourselves from his grip. This is particularly true regarding technology. The more one becomes accustomed to internet technology, the harder it becomes to leave it.

The only way to win this battle is with Hashem's help and by following the guidelines the chachamim of our generation established.

Chazal say (and the Or HaChaim writes it in this section) הָבָא לְטָהָר מִסִּיעֵין אוֹתוֹ, "Those who desire to be pure, Hashem helps them." The Yismach Moshe zt'l said that מִסִּיעֵין אוֹתוֹ is written in the plural because Hashem helps us together with the chachamim of the generations, for they instruct us how and when to use the internet and when to stay away. They also supply us with helpful tips and advice. Those who follow their counsel will remain pure and holy. Those who think they can battle this yetzer hara of our generation on their own will undoubtedly fail.

This week's parashah states (17:11) לֹא תִסּוּר מִן הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לָךְ יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל, "You shall not turn away from the word they tell you, neither right nor left." With these words, the Torah obligates us to obey the lessons, guidelines, and boundaries set by the chachamim.

The Torah is eternal, and this law also applies to our generation. We must abide by the guidelines established by the gedolei hador.

There is a well-known discussion among the poskim regarding which day of the week one must observe Shabbos in Japan, since its location raises uncertainty as to which side of the halachic date line it falls upon. Some locals there decided that they would keep Shabbos one day, and on the second day, they would only keep the d'Oraysas (Torah obligations) but would be lenient with the d'Rabbanans (Rabbanic laws). But this idea didn't last long because they were soon cooking, carrying, and doing all malachos on the second day. This is because the rabbanim established their halachos to safeguard Shabbos, and it is impossible to keep Shabbos without their safeguards. One can think that he is smart and disciplined, and he will be able to keep the d'Oraysas without the d'Rabbanans, but it is an attempt that is certain to fail, for it is impossible to keep the Torah without the boundaries the chachamim established.

The Or HaChaim (Devarim 12:28) writes, הוּא דְּבַר הַמַּעֲמִיד דּוֹרוֹת עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, "[The chachamim's enactments] is what preserves the generations of the Jewish nation forever, to keep them distant from loathsome matters, and the like."

It states (Bamidbar 30:2) וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רָאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה', "Moshe spoke to the heads of the shevatim of Bnei Yisrael, saying: This is the matter that Hashem has commanded."

וְהָיָה בְּקִרְבְּכֶם (20:2-3) אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה וְנָגַשׁ הַכֹּהֵן וְדָבַר אֶל הָעָם, וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם קִרְבִּים הַיּוֹם לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֵיכֶם "It shall be when you draw near to the war, the Kohen shall approach and speak to the nation. He shall say to them, 'Hear, Yisrael, you are coming near to the battle against your enemy..."

The Imrei Yehudah of Brezhan zt'l asks that Chazal (Bereishis Rabba 42:3) say, אֵין וְהָיָה, אלא לשון שמחה, וְהָיָה, it is an expression of joy. Why is there joy in this pasuk, at a time when they are going out to war? Why does it state, וְהָיָה בְּקִרְבְּכֶם, אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה?

He answers that the pasuk is alluding to the war against the yetzer hara. Hashem is very happy when a Yid arouses himself to do teshuvah, and he declares war against the yetzer hara. It states אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה, "It shall be when you draw near to the war..." Even if you didn't begin the war yet, the fact that you are preparing to stage war against the yetzer hara already creates immense nachas ruach and joy for Hashem.

It states (ibid.) וְנָגַשׁ הַכֹּהֵן וְדָבַר אֶל הָעָם, וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם... אֶל יִרְךָ לְבַבְכֶם אֶל תִּירָאוּ וְאֶל תַּחֲפֹזוּ וְאֶל תַּעֲרֻצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוֹלֵךְ עִמָּכֶם לְהִלָּחֵם לָכֵן עִם

The miforshim discuss why this mitzvah was explicitly given to ראשי המטות, the heads of the shevatim.

The Sefer HaChaim (Sefer HaZechus vol.1, ch.2, written by the Maharal's brother) writes, "This is to teach us that the takanos that the leaders of Bnei Yisrael establish as safeguards for the needs of the time are included in 'זה הדבר אשר צוה ה', Hashem's command." We shouldn't consider the chachamim's laws secondary and less important than the Torah obligations. The pasuk tells us 'זה הדבר אשר צוה ה', "This is the matter that Hashem has commanded." This means the decrees that the leaders of the generations make for Bnei Yisrael in all ages are like a command from Hashem Himself.

אִיִּבְיָכֶם לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם, "The Kohen shall approach and speak to the nation... Let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, do not panic, and do not be broken before them. For Hashem, your G-d is the One Who goes with you to fight for you with your enemies to save you." Imrei Yehudah explains that "Kohen" is referring to Hashem. Hashem tells the Yid who plans to do teshuvah (ibid.) "Let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, Hashem, your G-d will fight your enemies and save you." Hashem tells every Yid not to be afraid because Hashem will help him succeed in his war against the yetzer hara.

These words are especially encouraging now, in chodesh Elul. People are worried: will they succeed with their teshuvah? Will they actually change and improve their ways, once and for all? So many times, they tried to improve their ways and failed. Hashem tells them, אַל יִרָךְ לְבַבְכֶם, don't

be afraid. Hashem will be with you, and He will help you. He will save you from the yetzer hara's hands.

And even if he doesn't succeed with his teshuvah, his attempts to improve his ways will create immense joy in heaven, and his teshuvah is precious to Hashem.

The yetzer hara says, "Your teshuvah has no value because it won't last. Soon you will be back to your old ways!" The yetzer hara supports his discouraging words from the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2), which states that teshuvah is accomplished when the teshuvah will endure. As the Rambam writes: וְזֶה הֵיאֵר הַתְּשׁוּבָה. הוּא שְׂעִיבֹב הַחוּטָא חֲטָא וְיִסְרֹר מִמַּחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וְיִגְמֹר בְּלִבּוֹ שְׁלֹא יַעֲשֶׂהוּ עוֹד שְׁנָאִמָּר (ישעיה נה-) 'עֲזֹב רָשָׁע דְּרָפוֹ' וְגו'... וְיַעֲדֵד עָלָיו יוֹדֵעַ תַּעֲלֹמוֹת שְׁלֹא יֵשׁוּב לָהּ וְיִשְׁעִיבֹב, "What is teshuvah? It is that the sinner should leave his sin and he should take it out of his mind, and he should decide in his heart that he won't sin again, as it states (Yeshayah 55:7) 'Let the

wicked one abandon his way...¹ The One Who knows the secrets should testify on him that he won't ever return to this sin again." The yetzer hara claims that any teshuvah that doesn't last has no value and purpose.

But his claim isn't valid. A moment of teshuvah is invaluable, even when it doesn't last.⁵

We will bring a hint to this from the halachos of fish. It states (Vayikra 11:9) כל דאשר לו סנפיר וקשקשת במים, "Any [fish] that has fins and scales in the waters"... is a kosher fish. Chazal say that even if the scales fall off as soon as the fish leaves the water, it is a kosher fish. This is because the Torah states explicitly וקשקשת במים, which means the scales were in the water, but not afterward. If the scales fell off immediately

upon leaving the water, it is nevertheless a *tahor* fish. We can explain that the sea represents Elul. Even if the signs of purity were solely during Elul, but soon afterward, he returns to his old ways, and the signs of purity are no longer there, nevertheless, he is *tahor*.

Reb Yeruchem zt'l (י"ד, quoting the Alter of Kelm) proves the specialness of trying to do teshuvah from the halachos of a מסית ומדיח (someone who incites and encourages people to worship avodah zarah, r"l). The laws of the Torah regarding the מסית ומדיח are very strict, without any compassion at all. We don't find this approach in other areas of the Torah. For severe aveiros, the Torah tells us that we should search for ways to save the person from being

5. Reb Avraham Falk (Mashgiach of Slabodka) asked the Chazon Ish zt'l, "What is the value of teshuvah, if soon after Elul people return to their old ways?" The Chazon Ish replied, "To be close to Hashem even for a few days is also something." (This is also written in Maaseh Ish vol.4, p.59).

persecuted in court. Still, for the sinners of מסית ומדיח, the people who seek to influence others to worship avodah zarah, no compassion is given to them. For example, regarding sinners of מסית it states (Devarim 13:9) לֹא תֹאכְלֶה לוֹ וְלֹא תִשְׁמָע אֵלָיו וְלֹא תַחֲסֹם עִינֶךָ עָלָיו וְלֹא תִתְחַמֵּל וְלֹא תִבְסֶה עָלָיו "You shall not love him, and you shall not listen to him; neither shall you pity him, have mercy upon him, nor shield him."

Rashi explains that לֹא means "Do not love him (לֹא תֹאכְלֶה לוֹ)". It states, ואהבת ואהבת, 'You shall love your fellow man as yourself' (Vayikra 19:18), but this person, you shall not love." On the words וְלֹא תִתְחַמֵּל, Rashi explains, לֹא תִתְחַמֵּל בְּזִכּוּתוֹ, don't seek to find merit. Don't

seek to exempt him from the punishment."

A מסית ומדיח is punished for trying to convince people to worship avodah zarah. Even if the מסית ומדיח didn't succeed in convincing anyone to worship avodah zarah, nevertheless, his judgment is severe because he *tried* to lead people astray. As it states (ibid. 13:11) וּסְקָלְתוּ בְּאֲבָנִים וְמוֹת כִּי בִקֵּשׁ לְהַדְיֶכָה מֵעַל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ "You shall stone him with stones so that he dies, because he *tried* to lead you astray from Hashem, your G-d."⁶

Reb Yeruchem said that we can make a kal v'chomer to the great reward for those who try to help people serve Hashem. Even if they don't succeed, just for trying, there

6. This is also written in the Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 5:1): הַמְסִיתִי אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין אִישׁ בֵּין אִשָּׁה הֵבִי יָדָהּ נִסְקָל אָף עַל פִּי שֶׁלֹּא עָבַד הַמְסִיתִי וְלֹא הַמּוּסָת עֲבֹדָתוֹ "When someone incites a Yid – either a man or a woman – to worship avodah zarah, he is to be stoned, even if both the inciter and the one he spoke with, didn't actually worship avodah zarah. It was just that he told him to worship avodah zarah..."

will be a great reward. Reb Yeruchem concludes, "Even if a person tries to be *mekarev* himself (he tries to improve his ways), his reward will be great – even if he didn't succeed..." Every good deed that one does in Elul for the sake of teshuvah will be rewarded greatly. Saying Tehillim, listening to a drashah of mussar, studying Sifrei mussar, and every other attempt of improving is called **בְּקָשׁ**, trying. Heaven will seek ways to acquit him, and to deem him

righteous in the judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.⁷

Teshuvah in Elul

The Arizal teaches that the pasuk (Yeshayah 43:16) **הַנִּוֹתֵן בְּיָם דָּרֶךְ**, "Hashem Who made a path through the sea" is associated with Elul. In this month, Hashem creates a **דָּרֶךְ**, a path for teshuvah, to return to Hashem.

What is the connection between teshuvah in Elul

7. It states in this week's parashah (17:15) **שׁוּם תָּשִׁים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ**, "You shall set a king over yourself." The holy sefarim say that this means that a person should accept upon himself the yoke of heaven and make Hashem his king. Chazal (Bava Metzia 31a) say that a double expression means many times. For example, the Torah writes, **הַעֲנִיךָ**, **תַּעֲנִיךָ**, and **הַשֵּׁב תְּשִׁיבֵם**, and regarding tzedakah it states **נָתַן תָּתֵן**, and this means "even a hundred times." Therefore, when the Torah writes **שׁוּם תָּשִׁים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ**, this means to appoint Hashem above you constantly. If you forget that Hashem is king, strengthen yourself with your emunah and pronounce Hashem king, again and again.

The Gemara (ibid.) states regarding **נָתַן תָּתֵן**, that if a person gives a small donation for tzedakah, and then the poor person comes again and again for more, each time he should give again. This lesson can be extended to **שׁוּם תָּשִׁים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ**, "You shall set a king over yourself." One must accept upon himself the yoke of heaven again and again, even if it is only a small acceptance every time. All these times will add up to a strong acceptance of **עוֹל מַלְכוּת שְׁמַיִם**.

and a path in the sea? We can explain that after a person travels the sea, the path that he used in the sea isn't seen at all. The same is with a person who does teshuvah. After the teshuvah, there is absolutely no sign of

the aveiros that were there before. The teshuvah totally removes the aveiros.

This is true for every month of the year, and certainly in Elul. Teshuvah totally erases the aveiros.⁸

8. This week's parashah lists the people who are exempt from going out to war. It states (20:8) **כִּי הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה יִרָא וְרֹדֶף הַלֵּבָב יֵלֶךְ וְיָשֹׁב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יָמֹס**, "Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him return to his house and let him not melt the heart of his fellows like his heart." Rashi writes two explanations for why this man is afraid and therefore exempt from war.

Reb Akiva says **בְּמַשְׁמַעוֹ**, it is literal. "He is unable to stand in war, and see swords drawn." He is afraid of war. He should go home, because his fear will influence others to be afraid along with him.

Reb Yosi HaGelili says, **הִירָא מַעֲבִירוֹת שְׂבִידוֹ**, he is afraid because he has aveiros. He fears that he will be punished and fall at war due to his aveiros.

Notice that, according to Reb Yosi HaGelili, he isn't sent away from the front due to his aveiros. He returns home because he is *afraid* of his aveiros. This is because aveiros can be rectified with teshuvah. Aveiros aren't a reason to avoid a war. He can rectify them, and they will be like they aren't there, and it will be safe for him to go to war. But if he is *afraid* of his aveiros, this means he doesn't believe in the power of teshuvah; that is a serious problem. He is afraid, and he should return home.

To explain this some more, we quote a renowned lesson from Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen (Tzidkas HaTzaddik 154): "Just as a person must believe in Hashem Yisbarach, so, too, must a person believe in himself. He must believe that Hashem is interested in him, and that he isn't here for no purpose... He must believe that Hashem

derives pleasure from him doing Hashem's will."

I heard the following mashal: Naturally, a person floats in water. He doesn't need any skill or chachmah to float. It is natural. Even a person who sleeps in water, or *chalilah*, a corpse, will float. Nevertheless, take a child in the water, hold him in your hands, and tell him that he can let go of you, and he will naturally float – the child will sink. He won't float. This is because when a person loses belief in himself, he falls and sinks, although it is against nature.

The same is true for a child who can ride a bike with training wheels. The father quietly takes off the training wheels. If the child doesn't know they were removed, he will continue riding. But if he knows that the father took off the training wheels, he loses trust in himself, and he will fall off the bike.

Trust in oneself is essential, and therefore, when one trusts that he can do teshuvah, he doesn't have to fear war. But if he loses trust in himself, and doesn't believe he can do teshuvah, he must return home.

In Brisk, a group of non-religious people put on a show to illustrate how the Yidden went out to war. They based their play on this week's parashah (ch.20), and they played out what the Torah writes. They intended to exaggerate the situation and mock the Torah, *chalilah*.

In their play, someone stood before the soldiers and announced, "Whoever built a home and didn't yet live in it should return home and not go to war." Some of the soldiers left the troop.

Then the man announced to the remaining soldiers, "Whoever planted a vineyard and didn't yet eat its fruits should return home," and a few more soldiers left.

Finally, the man announced, "Whoever is afraid should go home," and everyone ran home. Only two older, bent-over men remained. Each of them then honored the other one to take the first shot.

The morning after the play was performed, the religious Yidden in Brisk were very upset as the play was intended to mock the

Torah. The Brisker Rav saw the commotion in his beis midrash and inquired about it. They told him about the chillul Hashem caused by the play. The Brisker Rav replied, "Everything they showed in the play was true. The only part they left out was to show how the two elderly men won the war!"

It states (20:8) מִי הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְנָךְ הַלֵּבב יִלָּךְ וְיִשָּׁב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יִמָּס אֶת לִבּוֹ אֶחָיו קִלְקֵבֹהוּ, "Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him return to his house and let him not melt the heart of his fellows like his heart." Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz zt'l (Sichos Mussar תשל"א) writes that we learn from this that we must be cautious not to weaken other people's *bitachon*. Fear is contagious. If you show that you are worried about your finances or any other matter, people will learn from you to be afraid, too. But if you demonstrate firm trust in Hashem, people around you will learn from you to remain calm and trust that Hashem will help them.

Pirkei Avos states, "Greet every person with happiness" (Avos 3:12) because joy is contagious, and when you smile at someone, you can make their day. You never know who needs a smile to raise their spirits.

Reb Yisrael Salanter zy'a taught that someone who goes around with a sour face will be held accountable for all the people who become discouraged because of him. Reb Yisrael calls him a בור ברה"ר, a pit in a public domain. He is damaging others, causing them to be sad together with him. By contrast, those who are happy will be rewarded for all the people who become happy as a result.

The tzaddikim of Ziditchov zy'a said that a שמייכל (smile) is roshei teivos for, כולם יהיו משועבדים לעבודתו יתברך שמו, everyone will devote themselves to serve Hashem.

One of the benefits of a happy countenance is that when you smile, people smile back at you. The following story demonstrates this:

Mr. and Mrs. S. found an apartment that was large enough for their needs and in a great area, and they were looking into buying it. "What about the neighbors?" Mrs. S. asked the seller. "Are they friendly?"

Teshuvah is called a path in the sea also because each person has to find his own way. The path isn't carved out. Each person must seek his way, and find his path in teshuvah.

In parashas Re'eh, it states that the *brachos* and the *klalos* should be given on Har Grizim and on Har

Eivel. The Torah tells exactly where these mountains are located, as it states (11:30) הֲלֹא הָמָּה בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן אֲחֵרֵי דָרֶךְ מִבּוֹא הַשְּׁמֶשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּעֶרְבָה מִזֵּל הַגִּלְגָּל אֵצֶל אֱלֹנֵי מֹרֶה "Are they not on the other side of the Yarden, far, in the direction of the sunset, in the land of the Canaanite, that dwells in the plane far from Gilgal, near the plains of Moreh?"

"Of course," the seller told them. "You won't have any problems with them. They are all helpful and caring people."

"Good, otherwise, I don't want to buy it."

A moving truck brought over all their furniture. As Mrs. S. approached the main entrance, she saw one of the neighbors glaring at her.

She quickly called the seller and said, "Why did you trick us? You said that we'll have good neighbors, but the neighbors are glaring at us. It is evident that they are unhappy that we moved here."

The original homeowner advised her, "Put a smile on your face, and you will see that the neighbors are good."

She did just that, and this time she saw that the neighbor was smiling back at her. She looked closer and realized that she was looking into a mirror. When she frowned, the mirror frowned back. When she smiled, the mirror smiled back.

The same happens in life. The way we treat others is the way they will treat us. Therefore, greet everyone with a joyous disposition. It will bring them joy, and we will also benefit, because our kind words and friendly smiles will be returned to us.

A few pesukim later, the Torah discusses the Beis HaMikdash, and suddenly the Torah becomes very ambiguous about the location. It states (12:5) כִּי אִם אֵל הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִכָּל שְׂבִטֵיכֶם לְשׁוּם אֶת שְׁמוֹ שָׁם לִשְׁכֵנוֹ תִּדְרָשׁוּ וּבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה "Rather, only at the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose from among all your tribes to place His Name, there shall you seek out His presence and come there." But where is this place? Where is the place of the Beis HaMikdash? The Torah doesn't tell us. The Beis HaMikdash needs to be searched for and found.

As the Ramban (12:5) writes, "You should come from distant lands and ask, 'Where is the way to Hashem's home?' People should say to their friends, לָכֵן וְנֵעֲלֶה אֶל הָר ה' אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, 'Let us go up to Hashem's mount, to the house of the G-d of Yaakov' (Yeshayah 2:3). As it states (Yirmiyahu 50:5) צִיּוֹן יִשְׁאָלוּ דֶּרֶךְ הַנֶּה פְּנֵיהֶם, 'They will ask about Tzion, their faces will be turned to it.' And it

states in Sifri (Re'eh 8) תִּדְרָשׁוּ, 'seek it', you search for it with the help of a *navi*. Perhaps you will wait until the *navi* tells you where it is? Therefore it states לִשְׁכֵנוֹ, 'seek out His presence and come there'. Search for it, find it, and then the *navi* will tell you."

The same is for all concepts of kedushah. If one searches, he will find. As it states לִשְׁכֵנוֹ תִּדְרָשׁוּ וּבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה, if you search, you will arrive. The same applies for the path of teshuvah. The path isn't told, and it is up to each person to find it on his own.

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg zt'l said that he doesn't want to be *niftar* because in Heaven there isn't any Elul, and what is life without the month of Elul worth? (Sarfei Kodesh).

It seems that the explanation of his holy words is as follows: There is judgment in heaven, with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. A hint to this is the Chazal סְפָרֵי חַיִּים וְסְפָרֵי מָתִים

פתוחים לפניו, "The books of the living and of the dead are opened before Him." (The literal meaning is that the books of who will live and who will die are opened before Him, but hinted is that the virtues and deeds of the living and the dead are opened before him, on the days of judgment. Hashem judges the living and those who are already in heaven.) There is Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; there is judgment; however, there is no Elul in Heaven. The love and closeness that we have with Hashem

during Elul, the special *siyata diShmaya* we have to do teshuvah, this doesn't exist in heaven. Therefore, Rebbe Shmelke said he wanted to remain in this world, so he can have Elul, and he can experience אני לדודי ודודי לי. For it is known that the *roshei teivos* of (Shir HaShirim 6:3) אני לדודי ודודי לי, "I alone am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine," is אלו"ל. It is a very special time that he didn't want to miss.⁹

9. One of the *tzaddikim* said that דודי can be translated as uncle. This can be compared to a child who asks his father for some sweets. If it is time to eat the meal, the father will say, "It isn't the right time for sweets. Now it is time to eat healthy foods. After the meal, you can have some sweets." But if the child asks his uncle for sweets, the uncle will give it to his nephew at all times of the day. That is the way of an uncle, to give unrestrictedly whatever the nephew or niece requests. In Elul, Hashem acts to us like an uncle, and whatever we ask from Him, He will grant us.

We can add that although the אני לדודי, the devotion we have for Hashem, has perhaps lessened over the generations, the ודודי לי, Hashem's love and devotion to us, remains the same today as in the past. He loves us and will fulfill our requests.

Agra d'Kalah (Va'eira ואלקתי) writes that (Shemos 6:7) וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם, "I shall take you to Me for a nation" is אלו"ל. This hints that because of our teshuvah during this month, Hashem takes us to be His nation.

In a letter, the Alter from Kelm writes about Elul, "The beloved and the precious... The Ramban writes that the mazal of Elul is בתולה, maiden, to show the love to the Jewish nation. Hashem chose this month for them, that they should prepare their heart to their Father in heaven. He loves them immensely when they come close to Him..."

Reb Shlomo Wolbe zt'l shared some memories of chodesh Elul from when he studied in Mirer yeshiva, before the war. After Shacharis, rosh chodesh Elul, Reb Wolbe returned to the home where he stayed, and the baalabayis came home around the same time. He had also just finished davening Shacharis. It was obvious from his appearance that he was in a very "Elul" mood, filled with awe and a desire to grow and improve his ways. Shortly afterward, his wife came home. She had just returned from the marketplace where she bought herring. She placed the bucket of herring on the table, and her husband asked her how much it cost. She told him the price. Her husband thought she paid too much for the herring, and he became angry and shouted. She was so overwhelmed, she fainted and fell to the ground. The mashgiach Reb Wolbe repeated this story and said, "I am certain that if it weren't Elul, her husband wouldn't have shouted like that. But it was the fear of Elul that made him uptight and nervous, until he couldn't control himself. (Written in אני לדודי).

This story opens a discussion. Some people are so scared of the judgment that they end up losing their minds and committing aveiros (as in this story). Sometimes, their anxiety causes them to wish that they could skip over the entire Elul and yomim tovim period and begin with the day after Simchas Torah. This occurs to people who don't realize that Elul is a precious time, happy days for Bnei Yisrael. Sweet days. Throughout the entire year, the neshamah awaits this special time. It is told about Reb Yitzchak Blazer zt'l (from the renowned baalei mussar) that he gave a drashah in a beis medresh on erev Rosh Chodesh Elul. Then, he opened the aron kodesh and said before the Sifrei Torah, and before the entire congregation, מודה אני לפניך ה' אלקי, השבח והודיה לך שנתת לנו את חודש אלול הזה. "I thank before You, Hashem my G-d, with praises, that You gave us this month of Elul. Ribono Shel Olam, we accept Elul with love and joy". After

he said this, the entire community cried. (Or Yechezkel p.297).

Nothing compares to the joy and pleasure of the Jewish neshamah when it returns to her Father in heaven. There is no greater bliss than experiencing *דודי לי*, Hashem's love and closeness to His beloved children. And there is no greater joy than having the opportunity to prepare for ourselves a good year.

Although Elul is a time to increase yiras Shamayim, there shouldn't be any sadness in Elul – only joy. As it states in Tana d'Bei Eliyahu (Rabah ch.3) *יראתי מתוך שמחתי ושמחתי מתוך יראתי*, "I am afraid amidst my joy, and I have joy amidst my fear." Fear and joy come together and complement one another.

It states (Tehillim 96:11-13) *יְשׁוּחֻוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתִגַּל הָאָרֶץ... יִצְלָו שָׂדֵי וְכָל אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ אֵין יִרְגְּזוּ*, "The heavens will be glad and the earth will rejoice... The field and everything in it will exult; all the trees of the forest will sing with joy. Before Hashem when He comes to judge the earth." Before Hashem comes to judge, there is joy. This is the joy of the month of Elul.

It states (Yirmiyahu 31:12) *אֲזָ תִשְׂמַח בְּתוּלָה בְּמִחוּל*, "Then the maiden shall rejoice with dance." Bnei Yissaschar (Elul 15) writes in the name of Reb Elazar of Lizhensk zt'l that *בְּתוּלָה*, maiden, represent Elul, because the mazal of Elul is *בְּתוּלָה*, maiden. *אֲזָ תִשְׂמַח*, this is a time for joy, and the reason is *בְּמִחוּל*, Hashem is *מוּחַל*, forgives our aveiros. The Bnei Yissaschar adds that *מזל אלול בתולה* is gematria (Tehillim 113:9) *אם הבנים שמחה הללויה*. This is another indication that Elul is a month of joy.

People asked Reb Yaakov Kazlik zt'l, "What is the avodah of Elul?" He replied, "In Elul we are to rejoice that we captured the ganav (thief – the yetzer hara)." We add that even if we didn't yet capture the yetzer hara, and the yetzer hara is still not in our hands, if we are happy and serve Hashem with happiness, we will succeed in capturing and conquering the yetzer hara.

Although we must be cautious not to waste a moment of Elul, that doesn't mean being anxious, uptight, nervous, or sad. It can be compared to a mother who is taking care of her young children. She is watching them at every moment, making sure that they don't hurt themselves, but obviously, she does so without sadness.

Bitachon

There are different levels of bitachon. The *Sefer Ha'Ikrim* explains that the ideal level of bitachon is when a person feels confident that Hashem will help him. Just like a person waiting for the morning is convinced that it will come, so should we wait for Hashem's salvation, feeling certain that it will eventually occur.

When you have this type of bitachon, you will be

happy and praise Hashem for His salvation, even before it occurs.

The Brisker Rav said that this is hinted in the following words: בטח בה' trust in Hashem, והתענג על ה' and experience the joy and pleasure of the salvation, even before the salvation comes because you are certain that Hashem will help you. ויתן לך משאלות לבך, in the merit of your *bitachon*, Hashem will grant you all your heart's desires.¹⁰

It states (Tehillim 15:3) לֹא רָגַל עַל לִשְׁנִי, "Who has no slander on his tongue." The final letters of these words spell אלול. One of the tzaddikim of our generation Shlita says that this hints that we must be cautious from forbidden speech in Elul. This means to be cautious from lashon hara, rechilus, and speaking during the tefillah. During Elul we invest in tefillos, and the mouth must be pure so that our tefillos will go up to heaven.

Elul is also a time to guard the eyes. A hint is (Succah 53b) אֲנוּ לִי-ה' וְעֵינֵינוּ לִי-ה', "We are to Hashem and our eyes are to Hashem." The roshei teivos spell Elul. The Imrei Chaim (Re'eh) says that this hints to the obligation to guard the eyes on these holy days, and then our eyes will be לִי-ה', to Hashem.

10. It states, השלך על ה' יחבך והוא יכלכלך, "Cast your burden onto Hashem, and He will supply your needs." We'll explain this *pasuk* with a *meshal*:

Someone goes over to his friend and says, "Can you watch a bag of precious gems for me?" He refuses. No one would. Who would want to take on this responsibility? Why should one accept responsibility for such a fortune? But if someone tosses the bag at his friend and, as he runs away, he says, "Watch this for me. I'm rushing to catch the train," his friend will guard the bag of precious gems for him. What else could he do? Similarly, the *pasuk* is implying that when one flings his bag of worries onto Hashem, and he doesn't leave himself with even the smallest worry, it is certain that Hashem will take care of him.

More than a hundred years ago, in a *kollel* in Yerushalayim, there was a person who was extremely jealous of his fellow *kollel* student and was always slandering him, trying to harm him and lower his esteem in people's eyes. The poor student didn't understand why he deserved this treatment, and he complained to his rebbe, Reb Dovid Biderman *zt"l*.

His rebbe advised him to follow Chazal's counsel, שומעין חרפתן ואינם משיבין, to be silent and not answer back.

When his children became of marriageable age, his nemesis was still slandering him, and due to the *lashon hara*, he ruined many potential *shidduchim*.

His rebbe encouraged him to have *bitachon*. "Hashem will help. Eventually, you will see that this is all for your benefit."

His oldest child was a daughter, but due to all the *lashon hara*, she was getting older and was still single. And then his second child, a boy, was "in the *parashah*" waiting to get married. His opponent worked overtime, because now he spoke *lashon hara* on both children. Many *shidduchim* suggestions were ruined, *r"l*. Nevertheless, as Rebbe Dovid Biderman taught him, he focused on his *bitachon*. Hashem can do anything. Despite the *lashon hara*, the right *shidduch* will come.

Baruch Hashem, both children got engaged on the same night, to the same family. There was another family in Yerushalayim that had an older boy and girl in *shidduchim*, and they made "an exchange" (what people in Yerushalayim call "a *bayt*"), and their children were engaged to each other.

He traveled to Vienna to collect money for *hachnasas kalah* for the two upcoming *chasunos*, but he hardly made any money. His rebbe taught him not to lose hope, so he said to himself, "I thought I would get money in Vienna, but Hashem can help in other ways, too."

On his last night in Vienna, he went to the hotel's bathroom and found a wallet filled with money. Most guests of this hotel were non-Jewish, so according to halachah he wasn't obligated to return it. He went downstairs to leave the hotel, with the wallet filled with money in his pocket, but the doors were locked. The police had already been alerted of the lost wallet, and they locked the doors, so no one inside could go out. Everyone would be checked. No one could leave without an inspection.

He mixed the money with his own and threw away the wallet. When the police checked him, they found the money, but the amount wasn't exactly the amount that was lost. The wallet wasn't the same, either.

"How do you have so much money?" they asked him. "You look like a poor person."

"Why do you say so?" he replied. "I have very big businesses in Yerushalayim."

The police sent a telegram to Yerushalayim to find out about this Yid, whether he was indeed wealthy.

The person who received the telegram was none other than his arch-enemy, the one who sought every opportunity to slander him. Once again, he sought to harm him. When he saw that the telegram asked whether this person had money or not, he figured that the question was posed by a baal tzedakah, who wanted to know whether the person collecting money in Vienna was legitimately poor.

"I know him", he replied in a telegram. "He is extremely wealthy." He didn't know that the police were asking this question, and hearing that he had a lot of money actually helped him. The police were convinced that the Yid was wealthy and that the money he carried was his own. They permitted him to return to Yerushalayim

with the money.

We learn the following lessons from this story:

- (1) Everything is for the good. Reb Dovid Biderman told him that something good would come from his enemy who constantly tried to humiliate him, and that is what occurred in the end.
- (2) Have *bitachon* in Hashem and Hashem will help you. This man had a hard time doing *shidduchim* and earning money, but with *bitachon*, everything worked out well. He made *shidduchim*, and he had wealth, too.

Our first request in the brachah ולמלשינים in *Shemonah Esrei* is אל תהי תקוה, that our enemies should lose hope. Afterward we request their downfall, as we say תאבדו, תעקר "May they be lost... uprooted," and so on. But we begin with אל תהי תקוה, that they should lose all hope, because losing hope is the root of all the troubles and disasters that follow, *chalilah*.