

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Tazria - Metzora



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Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Tazria - Metzora

Tefillah	4
<i>Shemiras Einayim</i>	6
Torah.....	9
<i>Ben Adam l"Chaveiro.....</i>	10
Today	13
The Benefits of Shame.....	13
<i>Lashon Hara</i>	15

Torah Wellsprings - Tazria - Metzora

Tefillah

The pasuk says (13:45) וְהִצְרֹעַ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ הִנָּגַע... וְטָמֵא "The person who has tzaraas... he is to call out 'Tamei! Tamei!'" Why is this necessary? Rashi writes that he must tell people that he is tamei, to warn them to be cautious not to become tamei from him.

The Gemara (Shabbos 67a) tells that he must tell others that he is tamei, so they will know about his distress and daven for him.

The Gemara (ibid.) states that when a tree cannot hold its fruits (the fruits fall off the tree before they ripen), the tree owner should paint it with a red marker. This is to inform those passing by to daven for the tree. The source for this custom, the Gemara says, is from the pasuk וְטָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא. The metzora should tell people that he is tamei so they will daven for him. Likewise, when one's tree is dropping its fruit, or when faced with any other problem, tell people about it, and they will daven for you.¹

1. If such a problem were to occur in our times, that a tree wasn't holding its fruits, people would advise the owner to use a higher quality fertilizer, or to seek professional advice from agricultural experts, who could help him save the tree. The Gemara reveals that the ultimate solution is tefillah

I heard the following story from the *baal hamaaseh*:

"Some years ago, I worked as a *melamed*. Two or three weeks before the new semester in the cheder began, the rebbe who taught the class I would be teaching the previous year warned me that the class is very chutzpadig, and that I would have a very hard time teaching them. His words scared me.

"I am a devoted rebbe, and I take my job very seriously. I felt I must do everything possible to succeed with this class. (I had a difficult childhood, so when I began my career as a rebbe of young children, I made a firm decision to be fully there for my students. I didn't want them to go through what I did when I was their age.)

"During the weeks before the school year began, I read many books on chinuch and classroom discipline. I wanted to come in prepared.

"On the first day of school, I came to class with four or five handwritten pages of tips that I collected from the various books I read – counsels on how to respond to chutzpah, how to maintain discipline in the classroom, and other related ideas. However, as soon as I walked into the classroom, I realized what I had gotten myself into. The boys were simply not interested in anything. They were wild and rowdy and turned over the class. It was a complete disaster; I couldn't teach them a thing. All the counsels I had read up on didn't help at all. After three weeks of trying to teach this class, I was ready to give up. I planned to leave for a year and return the following year, when I would hopefully have a tamer class.

"One morning, during this difficult period, as I was davening shacharis, and I broke out in tears. I was saying: מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר חֲנֻכַּת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד... שְׁוֹעֲתִי אֵלֶיךָ וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי... וְאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי בְּשִׁלּוֹי בֵּל אֲמוּט לְעוֹלָם... הִסְתַּרְתָּ פָנֶיךָ הַיְיָ מִיָּדִי נִבְהַל, אֵלֶיךָ ה' אֶקְרָא וְאֵל ה' אֶתְקַרְבֵּה לִי, הִנֵּה עֹז לִי, הַפְּכֵת מִסְפְּדִי לְמַחוּל לִי אֶתְחַנֵּן... שְׁמַע ה' וְחַנּוּנִי ה' הִנֵּה עֹז לִי, הַפְּכֵת מִסְפְּדִי לְמַחוּל לִי "I have cried out to You, and You have healed me... I said in my tranquility, 'I will never falter.' ... You hid Your countenance and I became frightened. To You, Hashem, I call, and to Hashem I supplicate... Hear, Hashem, and be gracious to me; Hashem, be my helper. You have turned my lament into dancing for me..." As I said these words, I said to my Father in heaven: 'I relied on advice from professionals and forgot that I can't do anything without Your help. This is why I am suffering. Ribono Shel Olam, from now on, I rely on You, alone. I don't rely on my experience as a rebbe, or the books I read. Today, I will go to the cheder and rip up all the pages that I prepared for myself. From now on, I place my trust in You alone.'

"Everyone around me had already finished Shacharis, and I was still at the beginning of Shacharis, at מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר. When I finally finished davening, I came to class, and wondrously, everything had turned around.

There are several lessons that we can learn from this Gemara. Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l learns from this the power of a small tefillah. Those passing the tree didn't spend the entire day davening. They probably said a short tefillah for the tree's well-being, as they passed by, and apparently it was sufficient to turn things around. Sometimes there is a *יום תפילה*, a whole day devoted to tefillah. Sometimes, people say the entire Tehillim, etc. This is very recommended, but people don't always have time. We learn from this Gemara that short prayers are sufficient and accomplish a lot.

We also take out from here the importance of davening for your fellow man.

The Tiferes Shlomo (ד"ר ויאמר Yisro) teaches: It states (Shir HaShirim 2:14) *הַשְּׂמִיעֵינִי אֶת קוֹלְךָ בִּי קוֹלְךָ עֶרֶב*,

"Let me hear your voice of tefillah, because your voice is *ערב*..." The word *ערב* can be translated as, "because you daven for others."

(*ערב* refers to the unity and responsibility for all Yidden to care for one another. כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה, every Yid is responsible for his fellow man.) Thus, the pasuk tells us that each Yid should daven for the wellbeing and benefit of his fellow man.

Also, Shmuel HaNavi said to the Jewish nation (Shmuel 1, 12:23) *גַּם אֲנֹכִי חָלִילָה לִּי מִחֲטָא לֵאמֹר מְחַדֵּל לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַיהוָה בְּעַדְכֶם*, "Also, I, far be it from me to sin against Hashem and refrain from praying on your behalf..." This tells us that if one doesn't daven for his fellow man in need, it is called a *חטא*, a sin, *chalilah*. Tiferes Shlomo writes, "The tefillos that are heard the most in heaven are the tefillos that one says for his fellow man!"²

There is no logical explanation, other than that my tefillah and my recognition that I am dependent on Hashem had immediate results. All the children were silent. I told them to begin davening, and they all listened, without exception. Afterwards, when I taught them, they all paid attention. Everyone participated. By the end of the week, the students knew the material I taught them, and by the end of the year, they had grown exceptionally in Torah. I am sure that this occurred in the merit of tefillah and because I realized that I couldn't do anything alone without Hashem's help.

2. On the need to daven for one's fellow man, we share the following story. One of the *baalei hamaaseh* is the melamed whom we quoted in the footnote above:

When cheder was out for summer vacations, this melamed would often go to Eretz Yisrael. One year, his neighbor asked him for a favor. He said, "When you go to Amukah, to the kever of Reb Yonason ben Uziel, which is known to be mesugal for shidduchim, please daven there for my four older sons."

The neighbor was a good friend, so he didn't hesitate to ask this favor, and the melamed naturally agreed.

Indeed, he came to Amukah and davened for his neighbor with all his heart and soul, with tears and immense kavanah. Even for his own relatives, he never prayed with so much intensity. He davened for the four older bachurim, each one by their name.

The melamed says, "When I left the tzion, I got into the car waiting for me and immediately called my neighbor. His wife answered the phone and said her husband would be available in an hour. I called an hour later and told him about the fervent prayers I davened for his children in Amukah. The neighbor replied emotionally, "Nine months ago, a shidduch was suggested for my eldest son, but the girl's father said that he wasn't interested. Just an hour ago (when the melamed was at the tzion in Amukah), they called back that they were interested in pursuing the shidduch!"

Seeing that his tefillos were taking effect, the melamed went on to daven at Reb Meir Baal HaNeis. The melamed tells, "When I finished davening at Reb Meir Baal HaNeis, they had already completed the shidduch, broke a plate, and shouted mazal tov.

There is an addition to this story, because two years later, the melamed once again went to Eretz Yisrael for his summer vacation and went to Amukah. This time, he davened for his own son, who by then had gotten to the age of shidduchim. The moment he left the tzion, his wife called him from his home in Monsey. She told him to come home immediately because a very good shidduch was suggested for their

Reb Ben Tzion Gutfarb Shlita said that his mother once asked him to go to Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt'l and ask him the following question. She had been davening for a certain salvation for a long time, but her tefillos hadn't been answered so far. She wanted to know whether she should take it as a sign that Hashem doesn't want to fulfill her request, and she should stop davening for it, or perhaps it means that she should daven again and again until she receives her salvation?

Reb Ben Tzion traveled to Bnei Brak to perform the mitzvah of *kibud eim*, and ask Reb Chaim this question. Reb Chaim replied that the answer is written in the Gemara (Brachos 32b): "If a person sees that he davened and his tefillos weren't answered, יחזור ויתפלל he should daven again, as it states (Tehillim 27:14) 'קוּה אֵל ה' תִּזְק וְיִצְמִיץ לָךְ וְקוּה אֵל ה'."

Reb Chaim added that the Gemara states יחזור ויתפלל, "Go back and daven." It doesn't state ימשיך להתפלל, "continue davening." The Gemara is implying that he should go back and daven, as though this was the first time he was davening.

This is because when people see that their tefillos aren't answered, their nature is to daven again, but with less *kavanah* and with less fervor than they had the first time. The Gemara tells us יחזור ויתפלל, go back and daven like the first time. Each time you daven, consider it the first time, with an outpouring of your heart. In this manner, your tefillos will be answered.

We can compare this lesson to a story that Reb Yaakov Landau zt'l, the Rav of Bnei Brak, repeated. When he was young, he was in the beis medresh of the Maharash of Lubavitz zy'a during a *hachnasas sefer Torah*. The joy was immense, and there was a lot of

animated dancing. There was a man there who didn't understand the reason for all the joy since there were already several Sifrei Torah in the *aron kodesh*.

He said tiredly, "Another sefer Torah", as if to say, "What do we need it for?"

The Maharash replied with holy emotion, "Another sefer Torah!" Not a small matter at all. Another sefer Torah was being brought to the beis medresh!

As it relates to our discussion, when one davens, it shouldn't be just "Another tefillah." It should be "Another tefillah!" Each tefillah and request should be expressed with all one's heart and soul. This approach will break through all barriers in heaven preventing his tefillah from going up, and he will have his salvation.

Shemiras Einayim

The words נגע and ענג have the same letters. The difference between them is where you put the ע. If the letter ע"ן is at the end of the word, it is נגע, plague. If placed at the beginning of the word, it is ענג, pleasure. The Beis Avraham zt'l explains that this hints to the importance of *shemiras einayim*, guarding the ע"ן, eyes. It can make the difference between plague and pleasure. Those who guard their eyes live a life of pleasure, they have spiritual joy, and joy in this world. Those who don't guard their eyes suffer in both words. They experience נגע, plague.

This is hinted to in this week's parashah, (13:55) וְהִנֵּה לֹא הִפָּךְ הַנֶּגַע אֶת עֵינָיו... טָמֵא הוּא, Behold, the tzaraas has not changed its ע"ן ...it is tamei." The Beis Avraham explains that if you don't change the place of the ע"ן to turn נגע into ענג (or in other words, if you don't guard your eyes) טָמֵא הוּא, this is tumah.

son, and the other side was interested in pursuing the shidduch.

He returned home the next day. One day later, the shidduch was completed. He felt that this was like hakaras hatov: at the same place he helped his neighbor's son find his shidduch, his son also found his shidduch.

The Gemara (Nedarim 64b) states סומא חשוב כמת, "A blind person is compared to a dead person." The Beis Avraham explains that this hints that when one isn't cautious with his eyes, he doesn't have a life. In contrast (Tehillim 33:18-19) הִנֵּה עֵין ה' אֵל יִרְאִיו... לְהַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת נַפְשָׁם, "Behold, the eye of Hashem is on those who fear Him... to rescue their soul from death." The pasuk means that when one sanctifies his eyes (so that they are called עֵין ה', Hashem's eyes), this will save him from death – literal death (as it states ויראת ה' תוסיף ימים, fear of Hashem adds on life), and he will be saved from spiritual death. He will have spiritual life, as it states והאר עינינו בתורתך, that our eyes will be enlightened in Torah. In contrast, he loses his life in both worlds if he doesn't guard his eyes.

Therefore, a person should make a reckoning with oneself. Is it worth it to be lax with his eyes? He will lose so much! Instead of נגע (pleasure), he will have נגע (plague)! Instead of והאר עינינו בתורתך, eyes that see and love Torah, he will have darkness. Instead of life... Isn't it wiser to wage war against the yetzer hara and guard one's eyes? He will earn both worlds, parnassah, life, good children, and all pleasures.

We will continue with more sources and benefits from guarding the eyes.

It states (Tehillim 119:37) הִעֲבֵר עֵינִי מִרְאוֹת שָׁוְא בְּדַרְכְּךָ, "Avert my eyes from seeing futility, through Your ways preserve me." The Ibn Ezra explains that this tells us that a person's life will be lengthened if he doesn't stray after his eyes.

The Saraf of Strelish zt'l said, "A person who guards his eyes, his children will live, he will raise them without tzaar, and they will be protected from dangers that arise in their day (Imrei Kodesh p.101). Who doesn't need this segulah?

Sefer Chassidim (495) discusses the importance of guarding one's eyes: "A great reward goes to him... because he is controlling his eyes. When a person struggles and has tzaar, this becomes the merit of his children, as it states (Yeshayah 53:10) יִרְאֶה וְרַע יִצְרִיךְ, "He will see offspring and live long days."

The Beis Avraham (Chanukah ד"ה ולא teaches that the Torah uses the expression of זונים, when it discusses guarding the eyes. For example, it states ואתם זונים, and the Gemara has an expression מזין עינו מדבר עבירה, to satisfy his eyes with an aveirah.³ These words, מזין and זונים are similar to the term מזונות, which refers to food and parnassah. This is because to the extent that a person guards his eyes, that is how much parnassah he will have. A hint to this is the Gemara (Sotah 48a): "When taharah ceased, the taste of fruit left." Fruit doesn't have the same taste as it had in the past, when Klal Yisrael had taharah. This hints at the purity of guarding the eyes, which causes parnassah.

It states (Bamidbar 11:7) וְהָיוּ כְּזֶרַע גֹּד הוּא וְעֵינוּ כְּעֵין הַבְּדֹלֶחַ. The Beis Avraham (בהעלותך ד"ה והיו) explains that the manna represents parnassah. It will come to a person וְעֵינוּ כְּעֵין הַבְּדֹלֶחַ, when he has pure eyes. Through *shemiras einayim* his parnassah increases.

As it states (Tehillim 145:15) עֵינֵי כָל אֱלֹכִים יִשְׁבְּרוּ, "The eyes of all look to You with hope and You give them their food in its proper time." Tzaddikim explain that יִשְׁבְּרוּ (with a shin) means to break. When a person "breaks" his eyes (which means he guards his eyes and he doesn't look where he shouldn't) it will be וְעֵינוּ כְּעֵין הַבְּדֹלֶחַ, he will have parnassah.

It states (Derech Eretz Zuta 1:4) אַל תִּכְשַׁל בְּעֵינֶיךָ, "Don't stumble with your eyes. Stumbling is always with the eyes."

3. Chazal have an expression זון עינו מדבר עבירה, satisfying his eyes from an aveirah. This expression isn't expressed by other aveiros. For example, it doesn't state וזון פיו מלשון הרע, that he satisfied his mouth with lashon hara. It is written specifically regarding the eyes, because parnassah, זון, depends on the kedushah of the eyes.

Also, it states (Derech Eretz Zuta 9:10), "This world is compared to the eyeball of a human being. The white of the eye is the ocean that surrounds the world. The black of the eye is the world. The קומט שבשחור, the pupil of the eye, is Yerushalayim, and the form of a person that is seen in the pupil is the Beis HaMikdash that should be built speedily in our days, and in the days of all Yisrael, amen."

The Binyan Yehoshua quotes the source we just mentioned and explains the reason the world is compared to a person's eye: "Just as a person can roll his eyes, so it is in the person's strength to lead the entire world with his merit, as it states צדיק יסוד עולם. This means that when he keeps his eyes holy, he can lead the entire world with his merit.⁴

4. Madreigas HaAdam (Darkei Chaim ch.3) from the Alter of Novardok zt'l brings a story that happened many years ago. A young rav was appointed as rav of the large city of Hamburg, which had a large Jewish community. On the day he arrived in Hamburg, a simple woman came from the marketplace and told the rav that she wanted to call a wealthy person to a din Torah. This gvir (wealthy person) was one of the most respected people in the city. The rav asked if the matter could wait until the next day, as he was tired from the trip. She replied that she wanted the din Torah right away, and gave several reasons it the matter couldn't wait.

The rav immediately summoned for his *shamesh*, and instructed him to go to the gvir, and summon him to a din Torah.

The shamesh was very afraid to do that. The wealthy person was very honored in Hamburg. How could he call him to a din Torah? But the rav insisted that he do so.

The shamesh arrived at the gvir's home, but he didn't have courage to knock on the door. So, he stood outside and waited for the wealthy person to leave the house. When the wealthy person came out, the shamesh approached him. The gvir asked, "What do you want?" The *shamesh* stuttered, and with half-words expressed that the new rav was calling him for a din Torah. The wealthy man replied, "There is time."

The shamesh returned to tell the rav the wealthy man's response.

The rav asked the woman whether she agreed to wait, and she repeated that she couldn't. The rav sent the shamesh again to the gvir to tell him that he must immediately come to the din Torah. The shamesh was now even more afraid. How could he cause this disgrace to the honored gvir? But the rav forced him to go.

When he arrived, he couldn't open his mouth, until the gvir asked, "What did the rav say?"

The gabbai repeated the message. The gvir became angry and said, "Tell the rav that I am the gvir of this city and the rav is new here and he doesn't know the ways of the city. I will come to the din Torah when I have time."

The shamesh returned and told the rav what the gvir said. The rav stood up and said to the shamesh, "Go back to the gvir and tell him that although he is the gvir of Hamburg, when I call him, he must come immediately. I don't have an army to force him to come, but I have three letters ה-ר-ם, and that can bring him."

The shamesh was very afraid to repeat this sharp message to the gvir. He pleaded to the rav to find someone else to relay the message, but the rav rebuked the shamesh and forced him to return to the gvir immediately to give over this message. He went to the gvir's home, and with terror in his voice asked forgiveness. He said that although he tried to get out of this mission, the rav forced him to do it. He repeated the message, and without daring to look at the gvir's face, he immediately left.

Shortly afterwards, the gvir arrived at the rav's beis medresh and announced loudly and joyously, "Mazal tov! You are worthy of being the rav of Hamburg. There was never any din Torah. The whole episode – the woman's claim and my refusal to come – was just a test, to see whether the rav is worthy to be the rav of Hamburg, and whether he lives with the pasuk (Devarim 1:17) לא תגור מפני איש 'You shall not fear any man.'

Torah

The halachah is that when something is immersed in liquid for 24 hours, it is called *chavush* - pickling. Chazal say, *chavush* *chavush*, pickling is like cooking. This means that when foods are cooked together, the tastes of the foods transfer from one to the next. Something similar occurs when food is placed in liquid for 24 hours. The tastes pass from one to the other.

Another halachah of *chavush* is that if the item is removed from the liquid before 24 hours pass, the process ends, and it isn't compared to cooking. Even if the item is returned daily to the liquid, and accumulatively, it was in the liquid for more than 24 hours, it isn't considered pickled if it didn't have 24 hours straight, without interruption.

Based on these halachos, the Kedushas Yom Tov (and some say that it was first said by the Chasam Sofer zy'a) explains a phrase that we say on Succos, in the Hoshanos (אום אני חומה). We say, *chavush* *bagul* *lומדת יראתך*, "The Jewish people are captured in galus, and they study Your Torah." The Kedushas Yom Tov zy'a teaches that *chavush* can be translated as *chavush*, pickling.

The phrase is saying, *chavush* *bagul*, what can a person do that he won't be considered

pickled in galus? As we wrote, *chavush* is compared to cooking, and the taste of the foods in the liquid merge. What can a person do not to be considered *chavush* *bagul*, pickled in galus, to the extent that he picks up the attitudes of galus, and the negative traits of the goyim who surround us? The solution is *lומדת יראתך*, to learn Torah. We shouldn't let 24 hours pass without Torah study, and then we won't be considered pickled in galus. As we wrote, pickling (*chavush*) occurs solely when something is in liquid for 24 hours without interruption. Therefore, let us not allow 24 hours to pass without Torah, and this will save us from becoming *chavush* *bagul*, pickled in galus.

Sometimes a person is busy and he doesn't have much time, but that doesn't excuse him from finding time to study Torah, and to be *קובע עיתים לתורה*, set times for learning Torah. It is known that *קובע* can be translated as "stealing." As the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 26b) states *קבען פלניא*, "Ploni stole from me." Also, it states (Malachi 3:8) *היקבע אדם אלקים*, "Should a person steal from Hashem...?"

Accordingly, *קביעת עיתים לתורה* means to steal time from one's busy schedule to find time for Torah study.⁵

But now that we see that the rav doesn't bend the rules for his position, honor and parnassah, we know that you deserve to be the rav of our city."

If the rav hadn't passed the test, he may have lost his position and parnassah. Because he passed the test that he remained with his rabbanus, and the gvir honored him immensely. This is what a person should tell himself when he has a test. He thinks that he will lose out by passing the test, but actually, it is just a test from the yetzer hara. If you pass the test, you will gain so much.

5. I heard the following nice thought:

One of the primary mitzvos of the Seder night is *והגדת לבנך*, to teach the children about yetzias Mitzrayim. However, if you ask young children what they consider the highlight of the night, they will likely say it's the stealing of the afikomen. Why should this be the most important memory for them? It seems we are teaching the children to "steal" more than we are teaching them about yetzias Mitzrayim!

But it is known that the afikomen is taken from the middle matzah, the matzah that represents Shevet Levi. (The first matzah represents Kohen, the second matzah Levi, and the third matzah Yisrael.) The Rambam (end of Hilchos Shemitah v'Yovel) writes, *לֹא שָׁבַט לְוִי בְּלִבְדּוֹ אֶלָּא כָּל אִישׁ וְאִישׁ מִכָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר נִדְבָה רֹחוֹ אוֹתוֹ וְהִבִּינוּ מִדְּעוֹ לְהַבְדִּיל לַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי ה' לְשִׁרְתּוֹ*, "It isn't only the tribe of Levi, rather any person from the world who devotes himself... to serve Hashem... he becomes kodesh kadoshim..."

The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:9) writes, "Every Yisrael must study Torah, regardless of whether he is wealthy or poor, healthy or a baal yesurim..." Being busy isn't an excuse not to find time to study Torah.

The Skulener Rabbe zt'l discussed the mistake some bachurim make, those who don't set times to study Torah during ב"ן הזמנים, vacation. He said, "Torah is our life, as it states הם חיינו. Would a person refrain from food for a month? How can a person stop learning for a month? How can he live without studying Torah?"

A mashal is said about someone who went to a doctor complaining that he always felt weak. The doctor asked him about his daily schedule, what he does for his health. The doctor discovered that he exercises daily but rarely eats. The doctor said to him, "It is excellent that you exercise, but exercise is second in importance to your health. Most imperative is that you eat. That gives you the vitamins and minerals you need for your health!"

The nimshal is that people occupy themselves with many parts of avodas Hashem, which are all good and important. But he shouldn't neglect the avodas Hashem that is most important for him – the food for his soul – and that is to study Torah.

When there was a *sugyah* that Reb Issar Zalman Meltzer zt'l didn't understand, he would wait to study it on Friday afternoon. He explained that there was less Torah in the world on Friday afternoons as everyone is busy preparing for Shabbos. When there is less Torah in the world, those who do study Torah at that time receive extra *siyata dishmaya* to succeed in and understand Torah.

Ben Adam I"Chaveiro

During the days of Sefirah, as we mourn the petirah of the students of Reb Akiva who were niftar because they didn't sufficiently honor one another, we must increase *achdus* among Klal Yisrael and work on improving in this area.

The Midrash Tanchuma (Nitzavim 1) writes, "The nature of the world: When there is a bundle of sticks, no one can break them at once. But even a child can break a single stick. The same is with Yisrael. They are redeemed when they are united... When they are united, they receive the face of the Shechinah."

This describes the strength of Yidden when they are united. Each person, individually, may be weak and easily broken.

This Rambam is what people call a שווערע רמב"ם, a difficult Rambam. It isn't difficult to understand, but it is difficult to keep. People have families, obligations, how can they put everything aside and devote themselves entirely to studying Torah?

Therefore, at the Seder, at the time we perform the mitzvah of והגדת לבנך, we take the middle matzah, the one that represents the shevet Levi, and we teach them to steal and to snatch the matzah. In other words, parents are telling their children, "If you want to be like Shevet Levi, the people who devote themselves to studying Torah, you must "steal" time to study Torah. Find time in your busy schedule and devote it to studying Torah.

When one does so, he might be working less, but he won't lose parnassah because of this, as Chazal (Avodah Zarah 19b) state, "Whoever studies Torah, he will enjoy success with his properties." The Maharasha explains that he will have success in all areas, even without hishtadlus. As the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 19a) states, כל העוסק בתורה הקב"ה עושה לו חפציו, "Whoever studies Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does his will." Whatever he desires, חפציו, Hahem will grant it to him.

Indeed, this is also taught in the Rambam, who concludes with the words, ויזכה לו בעולם הזה דבר המספיק לו כמו שזכה, לזכור, "He will be granted his needs in Olam HaZeh, as was given to the Levi'im."

But as a community, nothing can harm them.⁶

Rashi (14:4) writes, "Tzaraas comes from *lashon hara*, an act of chattering (מעשה פטפוטי דברים). Birds are needed for the purification because birds are always chatting and whistling...."

Why then were two birds necessary for the atonement and purification of the *metzora*? Why was one chattering, whistling

bird not enough to teach this lesson? What does the second bird represent?

To answer this question, Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz ז"ל (*Leket Imrei Kodesh* p.51) tells us to study the following line from the *Zohar* (Tazria 46:):
כמה דעונשא דהאי בר נש בגין מלה בישא כך עונשיה בגין מלה
טבא דקאתי לידיה ויכיל למללא ולא מליל
"Just as one is punished for speaking *lashon hara*, so is one

6. One year, when Reb Yisrael Salanter ז"ל had yahrtzeit for his father, he planned to daven before the amud, but another person came in and said that it was his daughter's yahrtzeit. She passed away young, and the father wanted to daven before the amud in her memory. Reb Yisrael Salanter was mevater and gave up the amud to this man.

When the opportunity arose, Reb Yisrael Salanter's students asked their great rebbe why he was mevater. According to halachah, a yahrtzeit for a father is a greater obligation than a yahrtzeit for one's child. "For the sake of *kibud av*, you should have insisted that you want to daven before the amud", the students asked.

Reb Yisrael Salanter replied, "My father ז"ל received a greater benefit from my *vitur*, than if I had davened before the amud" (*Chayei Mussar* vol.2 p.217).

Let us learn from this story that the greatest merits come from being mevater. You earn much more in this manner than from what one gains by insisting that his demands be met.

I heard from one of the gaba'im of the Beis Yisrael of Gur ז"ל, that once, close to Shabbos, a Yid who had many tzaros came to the Beis Yisrael's home. The rebbe asked him what he could offer him to drink, "Cold or hot?" The broken man replied that he wanted both.

The Beis Yisrael told his gabbai to go to beis medresh and to tell them to begin to daven without him. In the meannime, he prepared for this man the two drinks that he requested.

The gabbai returned and found the Beis Yisrael preparing the drinks. As he did so, he was saying the Chazal, המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו, a person goes beyond his limits for the sake of others, all of his aveiros are forgiven.

I heard the following story from the baal hamaaseh. He was a very good bachur; he had yiras Shamayim, good middos, and was a talmid chacham. But throughout his yeshiva years, there was one bachur who continuously harmed him with his *lashon hara*. For example, he would speak against him to his chavrusos, and succeeded, at times, to convince them to stop learning with him. When someone asked him for information for a shidduch, he gave negative information, which caused the other side to reject the shidduch.

Then the bachur, who was always speaking *lashon hara* on him, got engaged. As was customary in that yeshiva, he invited all the bachurim of the yeshiva to his chasunah. The bachur (who told me this story, the one who was harmed due to the *lashon haras*) debated whether he should attend the chasunah. He had another chasunah that night to go to, so he had an excuse prepared if asked why he didn't come to the chasunah. Nevertheless, he decided to forgive and forget everything the bachur did to him, and go to the chasunah. He danced there energetically in the chasan's honor.

The next day, a shidduch was spoken for this bachur. The shidduch had been suggested months before, but at that time, the girl's father of the girl didn't want to consider it. This time, the father was interested. Two days later, the girl's father said, "Such a good shidduch shouldn't be pushed off." That very day, the shidduch was completed. We learn from this story the power of *vitur*, when one is mevater and is מעביר על מדותיו with *mesirus nefesh*, how much he gains!

punished for the good words that he had the opportunity to say, and he refrained."

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz explains that the bird that is *shechted* – and thereby silenced – alludes to the atonement needed for speaking *lashon hara*. The other bird, dipped into the water and blood mixture and then sprinkled on the *metzora*, was set free. This bird continues chirping and singing, reminding us to speak many kind words to help our fellow man.

The Ketzos in his sefer Shev Shmatsa (Hakdamah 3) explains the Gemara (Shabbos 151b) אריה אבי תרי לא נפל, "A lion doesn't attack two people." So why does it occur at times that a lion will attack a group of people? It must be that the lion failed to realize that they were people. They appeared to be animals, not human beings.

The Shev Shmatsa explains that the translation of the Zohar's words, אריה אבי תרי, לא נפל, isn't that a lion won't attack two people, because we see that it does. Rather, the Zohar refers to someone thinking about how to help others. He is one person and he is called אבי תרי, "two" because he always has other people in his thoughts. Caring for others is the attribute of a human being. The lion considers this person a human being, and therefore, the lion won't attack him.

This is as the Zohar (Bereishis, Hakdamah p.13b) states on the pasuk (Bereishis 1:26) נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצִלְמֵנוּ, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." The Zohar says that when one has *rachmanus* on the poor and

brokenhearted, to help them, about them it states נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם – he is a human being. But when one doesn't have compassion for others, he is like an animal, and a wild lion won't refrain from attacking him.

Simchas HaRegel adds that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Tehillim 41:2) אֲשֶׁרִי מְשַׁכֵּיל, "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy. On a bad day, Hashem will deliver him." When one thinks about the needs of others, and the needs of those who are poor and broken, he carries the image of an אדם, of a human being (the *roshei teivos* of אֶל דָּל מְשַׁכֵּיל spell "אדם"), and he will be protected and saved from all troubles.

Sefer Chasidim (553) states that a person should feel the pain and agony of others. Otherwise, how is he better than animals? About him it states (Koheles 3:19) וּמוֹתֵר הָאָדָם מִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין, "Man has no superiority over beast."⁷

The Aruch HaShulchan (and many other sefarim) writes that on the days of sefiras ha'omer, we elevate ourselves from being like animals to becoming humans. The hint is that on the first day of sefiras ha'omer (the second day of Pesach), we bring a korban omer made from barley, which is animal food. On Shavuot, we bring the korban *shte'i halechem*, two breads made from wheat, a product consumed by humans. This indicates that on these days, we elevate ourselves from being like animals to being human. As we are explaining, one attains this elevation when he thinks and cares about the needs of others.⁸

7. Someone asked the Chazon Ish zt'l "From where does the rav live?" The Chazon Ish replied, "My entire chiyus (lifesource) comes from doing kindness with others. That is what gives me life."

The Chofetz Chaim explained the brachah בורא נפשות רבות וחסרון, that Hashem created all people with something lacking. Everyone has some problems in life (חסרון). The reason is להחיות בהם נפש כל חי, to give life to others. People help them, and that is what gives them life.

8. There are other ways to become a "human being", and among them is to eat as a human being, and not as a gluttonous animal.

Rebbe Zev of Zhitomir zt'l once looked out his window and said, "I see a cheese blintz running down the street."

Today

One of the lessons of Sefiras Ha'Omer is to focus on today. We proclaim היום יום... לעומר. I ignore yesterday's failures, errors, and aveiros, and I don't think about how I can possibly keep up my teshuvah tomorrow. Today I can serve Hashem, and that is my focus.

It states at the beginning of parashas Metzora (14:2) ביום טהרתו, "on the day of his purification." The Divrei Shmuel zt'l explains that the pasuk instructs us to focus on ביום, this day, and that will help us attain taharah. He writes, "Don't think about your aveiros of the past [which will make you distressed and lose hope] and don't think about what will be in the future [which will make you feel that it is impossible to maintain your teshuvah for a long time]. Think about this day only. Today I can make a nachas ruach for Hashem with Torah and mitzvos." Focus on this day alone, and you will become tahir.

The Benefits of Shame

Reb Eliyahu Dessler zt'l tells the following mashal:

A king wanted to do a favor for one of his servants, so he sent him to a room with many precious gold items, and the king told him that he could fill his bags and take anything he wanted.

The servant didn't believe that the king truly meant his favor, and he didn't believe that the items he saw in this room had any actual value. He told himself, "The king probably wants to have this room cleaned up, and he thinks he can trick me into working hard, to take everything out for him. I won't be fooled." He took a few small items and smugly said to himself, "I will show the king and his men that the next time they want to clean up a room, they should find someone else to do it. I am not a fool."

But when he brought the few items home, he discovered that these trinkets were made from real gold and silver. It wasn't a trick after all, he found. The king truly wanted to grant him a great treasure. The servant ripped his clothing from regret. He could have taken so much more, but he didn't.

The nimshal is related to Torah and mitzvos. We often don't fully believe there

The chassidim looked out the window, wondering what their Rebbe was referring to, but all they saw was a *yungerman* running down the street with his tallis and tefillin tucked under his arm. The Rebbe explained, "That man's mother-in-law made cheese blintzes this morning and told him to daven quickly, so he could eat them while they're hot. The Baal Shem Tov zt'l teaches that a person is where his thoughts are. Therefore, since this *yungerman* was so excited about the cheese blintzes, that's how he appeared to me."

Reb Hillel Kolemaia zt'l was visiting Rebbe Avraham Yaakov of Sadigura zt'l. When Reb Hillel was getting ready to leave, the Sadigura Rebbe said, "Reb Hillel, you are renowned for your *mussar* lessons. Please give me some *mussar*."

Reb Hillel Kolemeia asked, "Why doesn't the Rebbe give *mussar* to his chassidim?"

The Rebbe replied, "I teach my chassidim to eat properly. If they do that, their deeds will automatically be good."

It states in this week's parashah (15:31) והזרתם את בני ישראל מטמאתם, "You shall separate Bnei Yisrael from their tumah." The Sfas Emes (Tazria 5643 and Metzora 5646) says that the root of the word והזרתם is זר, which means crown. This teaches us that when you separate from the impurity of this world, that becomes your crown.

Furthermore, the Sfas Emes teaches that if you fall into aveiros, r'l, and then you separate yourself from them, והזרתם, the aveiros and tumah themselves and become your crown. This is based on the principle that when one does teshuvah, his aveiros become virtues. Thus, והזרתם, he receives a crown, מטמאתם, through the aveiros and tumah.

will be a great reward, so we don't invest in grabbing as many mitzvot as possible. However, there will come a day when we recognize that each mitzvah is "gold", and we will regret that we didn't take more.

This story is also a mashal that can help us understand the benefits of yesurim or the benefits we earn from shame and humiliation. We think we are only losing. But the day will come when we discover that each humiliation and hardship was gold, and we wish we had more.

Baalei mussar tell a parable of a king who told someone that he must stand in a public area, and when people pass by, he must take off their shoes and put new shoes on their feet. He couldn't believe that this was forced onto him. He had never felt so disgraced in his entire life.

But if this person owned a shoe store, he would do the same and be happy with it.

The difference is that when one knows he will gain from the task, he doesn't feel the humiliation. The same applies to all yesurim and shame. If we knew what we gained

from them, we would be happy with them, and they wouldn't bother us at all.

The Belzer Rav zt'l said that when one collects money for tzedakah, he needs two pockets. One pocket is for the money he receives, and the other for the humiliation he endures. Which pocket receives the better portion? The Belzer Rav said humiliation is far better because embarrassment for a mitzvah removes all aveiros.

The Midrash states, "Don't be afraid of negaim (tzaraas) because they are for the goyim. However, you will eat and drink and be happy."

Rav Vosner explains that the goyim need yesurim and negaim to atone for their aveiros, but you don't need yesurim to remove your aveiros. Your aveiros are removed with humiliation. This is a rectification, without any physical pain. Therefore, you can eat, drink, and be happy. You will be healthy and have no pain or problems because whatever aveiros needed to be removed were removed with the humiliation you endured.⁹

9. There is a beis medresh in Lakewood that was built through the fundraising efforts of one yungerman, who was one of the gabai'im of that congregation. He felt that since he raised the money, he had the right to make the rules of the beis medresh. So he insisted that there be no speaking during the tefillah.

Each week before kriyas haTorah he stood on the bimah and announced, "In this beis medresh, we don't speak from the beginning of the tefillah until the end."

Some members of the shul didn't appreciate his weekly announcements. Each week, after his weekly announcement, they would shout sarcastically, "Yashar koach! Yashar koach!" They made a joke out of it (primarily because they wanted to speak during the tefillah).

Their jeers bothered the gabbai. However, it didn't stop him from making his weekly announcement because it was important that there shouldn't be any speaking during the tefillah.

One week, the mockers' insults at him were more insulting than usual. They shouted, "Who are you to tell us what to do? Just because you have a loud voice doesn't make you in charge..."

He descended from the bimah in shame. He didn't answer. After the tefillah he went over to his friend, Reb Aharon Deutsch, who was also in the beis medresh. Reb Aharon Deutsch was childless for seventeen years of marriage, and the gabai said to him, "In the merit of the shame I just endured, and in the merit of my silence, may Hashem grant you children."

The following Shabbos, the gabbai went to the bimah again and made his weekly announcement, but his heart was no longer in it. He was still hurting from the humiliation. A short while later, he decided to leave that beis medresh.

Lashon Hara

It states (14:35) כִּנְגַע נֹרָאָה לִי בְּבֵית, "Something like a nega (tzaraas) has appeared to me in the house." The כִּ at the beginning of כִּנְגַע means that the man isn't telling the kohen that he saw a *nega*, rather that he saw something that appears like a *nega*.

Rashi explains, "Even a *talmid chacham*, who knows that it is definitely a *nega*, shall not make his statement using a decisive expression, saying, 'A *nega* has appeared to me.' He should say, 'Something like a *nega* has appeared to me.'"

What is the reason for this halachah? Why can't the person say, "I saw a *nega*. I saw *tzaraas*"?

Reb Chaim Vital zt'l answers that the *tzaraas* seen with physical eyes is only a reflection of the primary plague, which is deep within his *neshamah*. Therefore, one says, כִּנְגַע נֹרָאָה לִי בְּבֵית, "I saw something that appears like *tzaraas*..." but he didn't see the primary *tzaraas*. The primary *tzaraas* is on the *neshamah*.

With this information, we understand that *tzaraas* can also be present in our times. It is a mistake to think that *tzaraas* don't

exist anymore. Although *tzaraas* doesn't exist in our times as a white mark on one's skin, it does exist in the realm of the soul.

Furthermore, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l writes (quoting early sefarim) that in our times, *tzaraas* doesn't appear as a white mark on the skin or as a red blotch on one's clothing. Today, the mark of *tzaraas* is poverty. So, if a person wants to save himself from poverty, he should be cautious and not speak lashon hara.

The Gemara compares *lashon hara* to the three cardinal sins: idolatry, adultery, and murder.

The Or Hachaim HaKadosh (14:9) writes, "Nothing distances a person from his Creator like *lashon hara*." Yet, people aren't careful with it. The sefarim explain that every mitzvah has a mazal. *Lashon hara* has a poor mazal. People aren't cautious with it.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 155:) teaches, לֵית דַּעֲנִיָּא מִכֻּלָּבָּא וְלֵית דַּעֲתִיר מִכֻּלָּבָּא, "There isn't anything poorer than a dog, and nothing wealthier than a pig." The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains that the Gemara hints at the wealthiest and poorest mitzvah. The richest and best-kept mitzvah is the prohibition of eating חֲזִיר.

Nevertheless, he kept up with his friends from this beis medresh, especially with Reb Aharon Deutsch.

One day, he said to Reb Aharon, "The 3rd of Iyar, the yahrtzeit of Rebbe Shaye Kerestirer zt'l is approaching. Come with me to Kerestir, and you can daven at the tzaddik's kever for children. Many have experienced yeshuos there."

By then, it was already eighteen years after his chasunah. Reb Aharon had lost hope of ever having children. His friend (the former gabbai) urged him to reconsider.

Reb Aharon replied, "If you make peace with the people who embarrassed you in our beis medresh, I will go with you to Kerestir."

That wasn't an easy request, but it was important for him that his friend goes to Kerestir. So, he called up the people who humiliated him and made up with them. They also asked him for forgiveness and they said that they hope he would return to the beis medresh. They promised never to embarrass him again.

Reb Aharon and the gabbai traveled to Kerestir on the yahrtzeit. Less than a year later, Reb Aharon had a daughter.

Reb Aharon Deutsch commented, "Chazal say there are three partners in the creation of man: the father, the mother, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But for this child, there were five partners because she was born in the merit of the gabbai's humility, and in the merit of Rebbe Shaye Kerestirer."

The poorest and least kept mitzvah is the prohibition of speaking *lashon hara*. (The dog represents lashon hara, as the Gemara says, "Whoever speaks *lashon hara*, it would be proper to throw him to the dogs.")

Despite its severity, people aren't as cautious as they should be with this prohibition.

The Beis HaLevi *zt'l* would often open his *tabak pushkah* (snuffbox) and immediately close it. One of his students was curious

about this, so when he had the opportunity, he opened the snuffbox and he found the letters שפ"ו שמ"נ written inside. He asked the Beis HaLevi about this. The Beis HaLevi replied that they are *roshei teivos* for שומר פיו ולשונו שומר מצרות נפשו, "Someone who guards his tongue is protecting himself from troubles." The Beis HaLevi would open his snuffbox, read the message, and remember to be careful with his speech. You save yourself from much trouble when you are cautious with your speech.¹⁰

10. Rebbe Uri of Strelisk *zy'a* said, "When one desires to say something forbidden and he holds back, it's as though he fasted eighty-four days. Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zy'a* added, "And I say, *nach un nach, un nach*," which means that it's like fasting for eighty-four days, and much, much more than that.