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Vayikra

The Purpose of the Sacrifices

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:1-2)

It is customary that the first portion of the Torah taught to children is parashat *Vayikra* (*Tanchuma* 96:14). This is despite the fact that this parashah is more difficult than all others, since it deals with the complicated laws of sacrifices. Nonetheless, this is the first parashah that they are taught, because it trains and teaches them what self-sacrifice is. The pasuk says, "אדם כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring." This indicates that a person should bring himself as a *korban*. Every person should dedicate himself to serving Hashem.

In line with this, David Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 44:23), "Because for your sake we are killed all the time." However, self-sacrifice does not only

mean its literal form, as in the *assarah harugei malchut*, Channah and her seven sons, and the like. Chazal (*Gittin* 57b) explain that self-sacrifice is expressed by elevating oneself in the service of Hashem, to the point that he is prepared to sacrifice and relinquish his own will and desires for His sake.

We teach the youth the concept of devotion, which is the basis of Judaism, from early childhood, since impressions made upon their tender *neshamot* remain permanently etched, just like when one prints words on a clean sheet of paper (*Avot* 4:20). By training them from an early age about the concept of self-sacrifice, as demonstrated by the *korbanot*, they will more easily grow *bisiyata di'Shemaya* to be staunch, believing Jews, steeped in fear of Heaven and willing to dedicate themselves to the service of Hashem.

It is important to note that self-sacrifice for Hashem's sake does not only include major occasions that demand great self-sacrifice, but also the more minor and simple occurrences one encounters on a daily basis. For example, when one overcomes his fatigue and rises like a lion in order to pray with a minyan, this is considered a sacrifice. Likewise, when a person invests his money to purchase an exceptional set of tefillin instead of spending it on luxuries, this too is considered a sacrifice. Such actions demonstrate true *mesirut nefesh* and are considered by Hashem as if one has sacrificed a *korban*.

The pasuk (*Hoshea* 14:3) states, "And let our lips substitute for bulls." Our Sages (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21) explain that since the service of sacrificing *korbanot* was abolished, today our prayers substitute for them. When a person turns in prayer to Hashem and repents his wrongdoings, these prayers arise as an *olah*-offering before Hashem. We are commanded (*Devarim* 4:30), "And you will return unto Hashem, your God." This teaches that the way to attain closeness to Hashem is through teshuvah. When one departs from his errant behavior, admits his guilt, and resolves never to repeat his wrongdoings, this is considered as if he has brought a *chatat*-offering before Hashem.

Why does Hashem command us to sacrifice offerings? Does Hashem, Who has no semblance of a body and is not corporeal, require the *korbanot* that our forefathers sacrificed on the Altar? Without a doubt, Hashem Himself does not obtain any benefit from the *korban*; it is completely for man's advantage. Moreover, Hashem commanded us to sacrifice various types of *korbanot*, since each one has its own specific purpose.

We may imagine that the Beit Hamikdash was a huge slaughterhouse, since multitudes of Jews would constantly ascend there, seeking to sacrifice their individual *korbanot*. We may feel that it would have been more fitting for the Beit Hamikdash to be perceived in the eyes of the world as the symbol of holiness and cleanliness, without involving the slaughter of sheep and cattle, with all that entails.

In fact, Chazal paint a very different picture than what we would imagine. They state (*Avot* 5:5), "No fly was seen in the place where the meat was butchered." Also, the fragrance from the *ketoret* permeated the Beit Hamikdash and all of Yerushalayim, to the extent that women did not require any perfume because of the overpowering heavenly aroma that filled the atmosphere. Notwithstanding, we would imagine that the service of the *korbanot* somehow contradicts the essence of the Beit Hamikdash, which was one of holiness and spirituality.

The Rambam resolves this conflict with the following explanation (*Moreh Nevuchim*, III, 46). When Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, they witnessed the Egyptians idolizing their cattle. This made an impact on the Jews, causing them to harbor a degree of reverence for such animals in the recesses of their hearts. As proof of this, when Moshe Rabbeinu delayed in descending from Heaven, Bnei Yisrael looked for an alternative leader. Since they revered cattle, they established an image of a golden calf to lead them. Had they not been influenced by the Egyptians to revere their animals, they would not have chosen to create a calf as their idol. Perhaps they might have sought for themselves other gods in the form of the hosts of the heavens, or other such images.

The Rambam suggests that the purpose of the sacrifices was to uproot from the hearts of Bnei Yisrael the misconception that cattle possess qualities of godliness and control. This was accomplished by sacrificing the animals on the Altar and witnessing them perish and burn, emphasizing their transience. By slaughtering and sacrificing the idols of the Egyptians on the Altar, they removed the notion of idolizing cattle that still lingered deep within them from the days of their enslavement in Egypt, until their hearts were totally cleansed. They were thus able to serve Hashem exclusively.

In fact, Bnei Yisrael were introduced to sacrifices immediately prior to the Exodus, with the command of the *korban* Pesach. Bnei Yisrael had to take a lamb, the idol of the Egyptians, tie it to the foot of their beds for four days (*Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 5:17(55); *Shemot Rabbah* 16:3; *Tur, Orach Chaim* 430), and thereafter roast it over a fire and eat it in groups. This supports the Rambam's explanation that the main purpose of the *korbanot* was to uproot the idol worship of the Egyptians from the hearts of the Jews, in order that they would be sanctified solely to Hashem.

The Torah (*Shemot* 32:11-14) states that after Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to Hashem to pardon their iniquity. Hashem accepted Moshe's supplications, as it states, "Hashem reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people." Rashi (*Shemot* 33:11) says, that on Yom Kippur, eighty days following the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem said to Moshe, "I have forgiven in accordance with your words."

When Hashem invited Moshe to return and ascend to Heaven in order to receive the second tablets, Hashem warned him (*Shemot* 34:3) to ascend alone, without anyone accompanying him to the mountain, in order that his ascent would be concealed and hidden from the Satan, since blessing prevails only on that which is concealed from sight (*Bava Metzia* 42a). Hashem additionally warned Moshe (*Shemot* 34:3) that even the cattle should not graze in the vicinity of the mountain at that time. Why did Hashem instruct Moshe to send away the cattle?

This was in order to clarify the following point. If Moshe would instruct only the people to retreat, but would allow the cattle to graze on the mountain, the people might erroneously conclude that the cattle were more important and possessed a higher degree of holiness and godliness than them. To ensure that the Jews would not entertain such a belief, Hashem instructed Moshe to send away the cattle from the mountain; if they were to draw near, they would perish.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 1:9) offers a different explanation for the sacrifices. He says that their purpose was to make a person aware that everything that was done to the *korban* was actually meant to be done to him, due to his sin. However, since Hashem is a merciful and compassionate God, as well as patient, gracious and just, He instructed man to sacrifice a *korban* that would atone for his sins.

When man sins, he places greater value on his physical, bestial characteristics than on his spiritual essence. Bringing an animal as a *korban* served to remind him that it was his bestial inclination that caused him to sin. Slaughtering the animal and bringing it as a *korban* is symbolic. It teaches man to eradicate the bestial inclinations within him, thereby atoning for his shameful sins.

In our days, since the Beit Hamikdash has been destroyed, and we no longer have *korbanot*, we must make the effort to arouse ourselves to eradicate the bestial inclinations within us by strengthening our spiritual qualities, the godly portion from above that Hashem has instilled in us.

During my many years in dealing with the public, I have witnessed many people who are willing to spend fortunes of money to build themselves lavish homes, purchase expensive furniture, and buy the latest car. However, when it comes to spending on a new pair of fine tefillin, suddenly they become stingy, arguing that the price is too high. When I hear such excuses, it causes my heart to leap, and I want to shout, “Why when regarding spiritual matters, all of a sudden you begin to calculate sparingly? Why do you not make such calculations regarding all your material acquisitions?”

Without a doubt, this is just the ploy of the *Yetzer*, who attempts to weaken man in spiritual matters, and instead, strengthen his bestial inclinations. To combat this, the Torah states, "When a person from among you will bring." This teaches that it is incumbent on every man to sacrifice himself and his desires in order to fulfill Hashem's will. He should not prefer his personal passions over the will of Hashem.

The *Navi* Yeshayahu says (1:11) that Hashem revealed Himself to him and told him that He did not desire the sacrifices of the Jews anymore. Why didn't Hashem desire the sacrifices that served to connect man to his Creator and which atoned for his sins? In the days of Yeshayahu, Am Yisrael used to bring *korbanot* not because of their desire to connect to Hashem, but because it was the conventional custom among the nations to bring sacrifices. Since the manner of sacrificing the *korban* did not emanate from pure and holy intentions, but from a desire to imitate the nations, Hashem did not want to accept their offerings. This fact illustrates that the *korbanot* are a holy and exalted matter, and include many important issues. When Bnei Yisrael do not intend to fulfill the purpose of the *korban*, Hashem does not desire their offerings.

As we previously mentioned, the first *korban* that Am Yisrael were commanded to bring as a nation was the *korban* Pesach. It is interesting to note why this *korban* was specifically termed the *korban* of "Pesach" and not called the "*korban* of Spring," the "*korban* of Matzah," or the "*korban* of the Exodus of Egypt," etc.

Perhaps we can answer that the *korban* Pesach is called by this name because Hashem skipped over (*pasach*) the Jewish homes during the plague of the firstborn and killed only the firstborn Egyptians. There is a strong connection between the killing of the firstborn Egyptians and the purpose of the *korbanot*. Both serve the purpose of eradicating the idolatry of the Egyptians. Just as the animals were revered by the Egyptians, so too, were the firstborn. They held a position of honor and godliness in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, as well as the Egyptians. Therefore, Hashem struck and killed them. Thus, the *korban* Pesach was called specifically by this name, in order to hint to the Jews that just as they

were at that time "skipping over" the idols of the Egyptians by slaughtering sheep as a *korban*, so too, must they "skip over" the Egyptian idea of viewing the firstborn as an idol. By severing their ties from both of these idols, they were ready to leave Egypt and receive the Torah.

Because of the great importance of the *korban* Pesach, those who were defiled by carrying the remains of Yosef requested to sacrifice it at a later date (*Bamidbar* 9:7; see *Sukkah* 25a). Despite the fact that there is a law that "if the designated time elapsed, the *korban* is void" (*Berachot* 26a – see the *Tosafot* beginning with the word *ta'ah*), these men, who were impure, did not willingly waive their right to sacrifice this *korban*, which was laden with so much meaning. They pleaded with Moshe Rabbeinu to consult with Hashem how to resolve their dilemma. Therefore, they merited to be the conduit for the establishment of the new halachah of Pesach Sheini.

In Summary

- It is customary to first teach children the parshiyot concerning the *korbanot*, in order to initiate them from a young age to serve Hashem with *mesirut nefesh*. Self-sacrifice is not only accomplished by being killed for Hashem's sake, but also includes making simple sacrifices in one's daily life concerning relatively trivial matters.
- Since Hashem has no need for sacrifices, why are we commanded to bring them? How can we understand the sacrifice of animals in relation to the Beit Hamikdash, which was the symbol of beauty, holiness, and grandeur?
- The Rambam explains that the purpose of the *korbanot* was intended for Bnei Yisrael, in order to uproot from their hearts any reverence held for animals which the Egyptians idolized. Since the Jews were enslaved in Egypt for many years, this belief had inevitably captured their hearts. This is illustrated by the fact that later on they sought to establish for themselves an idol in the image of a golden calf. The slaughtering of a *korban* was meant to uproot this conception.
- The Ramban's opinion is that the purpose of the *korban* was to arouse

man to contemplate that everything done to the *korban* was in fact meant to happen to him, due to his sins. Through such reflection, he would fully repent. Additionally, since his bestial characteristics led him to sin, the sacrifice of an animal brings atonement. Thus, he would be awakened to eradicate these characteristics by slaughtering the animal as a sacrifice.

- The *korban* Pesach is specifically called by this name because Hashem "skipped over" the Jewish homes and killed only the firstborn Egyptians. This indicated to the Jews that they must "skip over" (*pesach*) the idols of the Egyptians, uprooting their reverence for both animals and the firstborn. Because of the importance of the *korban* Pesach and its relevant lessons, those people who were impure because they had transported Yosef's remains, and were therefore denied the opportunity to join in the sacrifice at the designated time, pleaded to be allowed to partake of this elevating mitzvah. Therefore, they merited that the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini was established through them.

Dedication

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:1-2)

The Torah states, "אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן – When a person from among you will bring an offering." The Ramban explains (*Vayikra* 1:9) that the

word קרבן (sacrifice) always denotes (הקרבה) "self-sacrifice" or dedication. The essence of the *korban* is meant to train man to dedicate himself to Hashem, relinquishing his own will and desires for His sake. Therefore, it is customary to begin teaching children specifically the parshiyot that deal with sacrificing *korbanot* first (*Tanchuma* 96:14), in order that they be trained from early childhood in the *middah* of absolute dedication.

If we were to ask a child to arise in the middle the night to go on an exciting trip or to receive a treat, he would happily forego his sleep in order to do so. The trait of self-sacrifice is inborn in every child, and he readily sacrifices of himself for things that appeal to him. Chazal have instructed us to harness this very trait for the service of Hashem, so that the child will be used to dedicating himself for Hashem's sake from a very young age. This can be accomplished by teaching him the subject of *korbanot*.

The younger the child, the easier it is to train and mold his character traits. He is compared to a young seedling that can be easily bent to grow in the desired direction. Once the trunk of the plant is fully developed, and its roots are firmly entrenched in the ground, it is impossible to divert its growth. Therefore, our Sages instruct us to take advantage of the stage when children are like young seedlings, and to teach them the parshiyot of the *korbanot*. In this way, they will acquire the trait of dedication, which is a foundation of Jewish life.

I remember when we were young children, on the days prior to the Yamim Nora'im, when Selichot are said at sunrise, we would eagerly anticipate rising early in the morning to join the grown-ups in the Beit Hakeneset in their Selichot prayers. Likewise, on the eve of Hoshana Rabbah, when it is customary to remain awake the entire night, we felt proud to be staying up to learn Torah in the Beit Hakeneset like the older men. This illustrates how natural it is for children to happily sacrifice themselves for something that is important and worthwhile to them, to the extent that they are willing to overcome all hardships for this goal.

The parshiyot of the *korbanot* instill in them this appreciation for the concept of dedicating themselves to Hashem.

Upon reflection, the whole concept of bringing *korbanot* might seem difficult to understand. The Rambam explains that when Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, they were influenced by their masters, who idolized their cattle. Despite the fact that Bnei Yisrael truly resolved to follow in Hashem's ways and receive His Torah, they were still affected by the idolatry of the Egyptians. This is the reason that Hashem commanded them, prior to the Exodus from Egypt, to take a lamb, the idol of the Egyptians, and tie it to the foot of their bed for four days. Thereafter, they were to roast it over a fire and eat this *korban* Pesach in groups. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to actively destroy the lingering adulation for idolatry by slaughtering the sheep. This would entirely uproot from their hearts the reverence that they accorded to the Egyptian gods.

Similarly, Hashem commanded His sons to sacrifice for Him *korbanot* of sheep and cattle in order to train them and help them internalize that the idols of the Egyptians possessed neither power nor prominence; they could not support man in any way. During their sojourn in Egypt, the Jews witnessed their Egyptian masters turning toward their cattle in prayer whenever they were plagued with misfortune and suffering, trusting their animals to come to their aid. Being exposed to this behavior time and again made a deep impression on the Jewish slaves. The command to slaughter and sacrifice the gods of the Egyptians made it perfectly clear that the gods of Egypt were totally powerless. Only Hashem Himself is capable of providing for man and rescuing him from any danger.

Many times we meet people who publicly declare that they believe in Hashem with all their heart, yet continue to work on Shabbat, *rachmana litzlan*. How is it possible to resolve this profound contradiction in their behavior? It seems to me that these people really believe in Hashem, but in addition they retain a reverence for their money, which sometimes overpowers their feelings of belief. They become enslaved to their money, unable to cease their work even for a moment.

Since Hashem knows that it is the nature of people to believe both in Him and in other "powers," He instructed Bnei Yisrael to sacrifice the gods of the Egyptians. Even though Bnei Yisrael declared their allegiance and belief in Hashem and professed to wholeheartedly follow in His ways, nevertheless, Hashem suspected that they still harbored veneration for the Egyptian idols. This is what Hashem sought to uproot entirely.

The Ramban teaches (*Vayikra* 1:9) that if man sins before Hashem, fully aware that his act is forbidden, this signifies an inner corruption that must be uprooted. For example, when a person suffers from a toothache because the root of his tooth is decaying, he must extract the root in order for his pain to subside and his tooth to heal. If he were to leave the rotten root, his pain would not subside. Even if he were to feel some temporary relief, very soon after, the pain would resume in full force, and his condition would deteriorate. Likewise, if a person suffers from a "rotten root" caused by the degenerate influence of his environment, first he must uproot and remove the sin entirely in order that he should not repeat it.

As an illustration of this point, if a person accustomed to viewing forbidden sights would want to overcome his weakness in this matter, he should avoid walking in places that expose him to immorality and get rid of his television, the Internet, and newspapers and magazines which are replete with immorality. If he were to continue visiting places that expose him to immorality and continue watching programs full of depravity, how can he be saved from sin? He could not possibly guard his eyes from forbidden sights. This is what the Rambam explained: sacrificing a *korban* has the ability to totally uproot the cause for the sin. In Egypt, this was the influence of the Egyptian idols.

While in past generations, the *Yetzer Hara* was for idolatry, today the *Yetzer Hara* is expressed by the desire for physical gratification and immorality. He attempts to lure us into sin at every opportunity. Just as Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to sacrifice the Egyptian idols in order to eradicate their corrupt influence from the hearts of the Jewish people, so

too, it is incumbent upon us to uproot and entirely remove the passion for immorality and self-gratification that prevails today.

The pasuk (*Hoshea* 14:3) states, "And let our lips substitute for bulls." This indicates that since we no longer have *korbanot*, our prayers substitute for them. We observe that just as sacrificing a *korban* required self-sacrifice and resolve, so too, concentration in tefillah requires overwhelming strength. This is because the *Yetzer Hara* springs forth, disturbing a person just when he begins to pray. People joke that if you forgot something, just begin praying, and you will surely remember it. This jest is unfortunately very true. When we begin to pray, our thoughts tend to wander far away, crossing continents and oceans, leading us astray.

There is a story told about the Chafetz Chaim, who once noticed that during tefillah, many members of the minyan were not focused on their prayers, and their imagination was carrying them far away. At the end of the prayers, the Chafetz Chaim approached these people and shook their hands with the salutation, "*Shalom Aleichem* – Welcome back." They asked why he was welcoming them when they had not embarked on any journey. He explained that he noticed that during the prayers they had "wandered far away" in their thoughts. Therefore, at the conclusion of the tefillah, when they obviously "returned home" to reality, he welcomed them heartily.

This makes us aware how much effort and concentration our prayers require. Since the *Yetzer Hara* knows that prayers substitute for *korbanot*, he attempts to disturb and prevent man from completing his prayers with the appropriate concentration and thought.

I have noticed that whenever we begin to pray, we immediately begin to feel an inexplicable fatigue. We experience an overwhelming desire to shut our eyes and go to sleep. If someone would offer us a substantial sum of money if we would go to a certain place in the middle of the night, would we refuse to go, with the excuse that we are too tired and want to sleep? It is clear that we would overcome our fatigue and strengthen

ourselves like a lion to receive the money. Even if this opportunity would arise after many sleepless nights, when we were absolutely exhausted, we would not pay attention to our weariness, but would muster the stamina to meet the benefactor in order not to forfeit the opportunity to become wealthy. It is most painful to note that concerning spiritual matters, especially tefillah, we succumb to the ploys of the *Yetzer* instead of strengthening ourselves to pray to Hashem.

In parashat *Ki Teitzei* (25:17-18) the Torah warns, "Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way, when you were leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he killed among you all those who were weak at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear God." This reveals that the approach of Amalek is to convince Am Yisrael that they are fatigued and exhausted, thus obliterating their fear of Heaven. We can infer from this that the *Yetzer Hara*, who is compared to Amalek, also generates a feeling of extreme fatigue in order to weaken man's resolve in serving Hashem and in praying, which require strength and fortitude. Just as the mitzvah to erase the memory of Amalek is constant, so too, it is incumbent upon us to constantly combat the fatigue that accompanies all spiritual matters, especially concerning tefillah.

In Summary

- The Torah states, "When a person from among you will bring an offering." This teaches us that it is incumbent upon man to dedicate himself to Hashem. It is customary to first teach children the parshiyot concerning *korbanot*, because it instills in them the trait of dedication, which is an important foundation in Judaism. It trains them to dedicate themselves for the service of Hashem and for His Torah.
- Why did Hashem command us to sacrifice *korbanot*? The Rambam explains that even after the Exodus, the Jews revered the idols of the Egyptians and retained a belief in their power. Hashem commanded them to sacrifice sheep and cattle, which the Egyptians idolized, in order to entirely eradicate this belief.
- Likewise, the Rambam elucidates that sometimes man sins despite his

awareness that this act is devious, signifying corruption within. This corruption must be entirely uprooted. Hashem commanded us to sacrifice the gods of the Egyptians, in order to uproot from our hearts the corruption that led us to worship idols.

- Today our prayers substitute for the service of *korbanot*, as it states, "And let our lips substitute for bulls." Just as the *korbanot* required self-sacrifice, so too, tefillah requires much effort and concentration, to the point of self-sacrifice, in order to counteract the powerful *Yetzer Hara*, who attacks man precisely when he prays.
- The *Yetzer Hara* is compared to Amalek. Just as Amalek weakened Bnei Yisrael in their study of the holy Torah, by causing them to experience fatigue while learning, likewise, the *Yetzer Hara* generates a feeling of exhaustion, in order to prevent people from serving Hashem and praying to Him. Just as it is a mitzvah to erase the memory of Amalek, so too, it is a mitzvah to eliminate the weariness that accompanies us while praying or serving Hashem, which stems from Amalek.

The Lesson of Korbanot

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:1-2)

Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe Rabbeinu in the *Ohel Moed* and told him to command Bnei Yisrael concerning the *korbanot*, as it states, "אדם

כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring." This indicates that a person is meant to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake. Just as the animal is slaughtered and is offered to Hashem, so too, should man prepare to sacrifice himself as an offering for Hashem's sake.

This is not so simple. An animal is led to be slaughtered and sacrificed on the Altar against its will. This is not the case regarding man. It is not possible to force him to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake.

How then can man, through his own will, desire to sacrifice his life for Hashem's sake? According to the Ramban, the entire purpose of the *korbanot* was in order that man should contemplate that everything that was done to the animal was meant to be done to him. However, since Hashem is merciful and compassionate, He commanded man to sacrifice an offering instead, so that the sacrificed animal should atone for his sins. When man would witness the animal being slaughtered and its blood cast on the Altar, he would immediately be aroused to regret his sins and repent. He would begin to search for ways to appease Hashem, so that all that he witnessed being done to the animal would never be done to him.

Rabbi Akiva was one of the *assarah harugei malchut*. Before he was cruelly executed, his students noticed that he was in unusually high spirits. When they asked him why, he explained that all his life he had prayed for the opportunity to die *al kiddush Hashem* (see *Berachot* 61b). Now that his wish was being fulfilled, should he not rejoice?

In truth, Hashem does not want people to die. Instead, Hashem prefers that people should live *al kiddush Hashem* by controlling their lust for material acquisitions and dedicating themselves to the spiritual pursuits of learning Torah and keeping mitzvot. Many times I wish that at least once in my lifetime I would merit sacrificing myself for Hashem's sake in this way and performing a mitzvah totally for His sake, without any ulterior motives of honor or other such self-gratifying intentions.

Nowadays, since the Beit Hamikdash has been destroyed, we have a greater obligation to sacrifice our personal desires in order to fulfill Hashem's will. Since we do not have *korbanot* to atone for our sins, we

must train ourselves to fulfill mitzvot with their true intent, rather than by rote, investing thought in our Avodat Hashem. Unfortunately, we are so used to going through the motions that our mitzvot are devoid of zeal and fervor. Our mitzvot are incomplete and do not create the desired *korat ruach* for Hashem.

We can learn from the account of Pinchas the Kohen (*Sanhedrin* 82b), who took a sword in his hand and killed both Zimri ben Salu and Kozbi bat Tzur in one stroke, without considering the danger of his action. Since Pinchas had a fervent desire to defend Hashem's honor and to remove the disgrace from the Jewish people, he ignored the danger involved and committed himself entirely to sanctifying Hashem's Name in public.

His pure intentions were recognized by Heaven, and he was granted extraordinary Divine assistance, enabling him to kill them both in one stroke and to emerge unscathed (ibid). Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* 771) add that since Pinchas was a Kohen, and he was forbidden to be defiled by coming into contact with a corpse, he merited an additional miracle. Zimri and Kozbi continued to convulse, despite being fatally stabbed, until Pinchas removed them from the camp. They only died after Pinchas let go of the sword with its victims, so that he should not become *tamei l'met*.

This is an example of "In the path a man chooses to go, he is led with the aid of Heaven," and "A person who comes to purify himself receives Divine assistance" (*Shabbat* 104a). When Hashem recognizes a person's genuine desire to sacrifice himself for His sake and to devote himself to the study of Torah and fulfillment of its mitzvot, He grants him blessing in his efforts and helps him reach his goal.

It is customary that the first subject taught to children is parashat *Vayikra*, which deals with the subject of *korbanot* (*Tanchuma* 96:14). It is important to note why this is so, especially since it is a very complicated subject, involving many details. It may seem more appropriate to first teach children the parshiyot that deal with the Creation of the world and

with the description of our forefather's exalted accomplishments, and only thereafter teach the topic of *korbanot*.

However, young children possess an innocence and purity that diminish as they grow older. Owing to the pure innocence of the young child, he is capable of sacrificing his very life for a mere candy. Since small children exercise the trait of *mesirut nefesh* for things that are important to them, the *Chachamim* wanted to channel this trait for Hashem's service. Just as children are prepared to sacrifice themselves for a single candy, they should be prepared to live with the concept of dedicating themselves to fulfill Hashem's will. There is no other subject that arouses one to *mesirut nefesh* as does the subject of *korbanot*. It describes in detail what was done to the animal, indicating that the person bringing the *korban* was really the one deserving of this punishment. This lesson trains children to fulfill Hashem's will with dedication by teaching them that there are consequences for their actions.

The א' of ויקרא is written small to allude to the small children. Just as the youngsters, in their innocence, are ready to sacrifice themselves for sweets, likewise, we must train ourselves to sacrifice ourselves for the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot.

The Zohar (III, 4:2) explains that the small א' indicates that it is separate from the word ויקרא , creating the word ויקר (to respect). This signifies that man must honor and respect the ordinary mitzvot that seem insignificant to him, and not just invest efforts in keeping the more famous and infrequent mitzvot. By dedicating oneself to fulfilling even mundane and simple mitzvot, one shows his great love for Hashem. This can be compared to the way a mother exhibits her endless love for her son through addressing every little detail while tending to his needs.

Every person in the world was created with a specific purpose. Upon descending to this world, he must fulfill the assignment that he was created for. How is one to know for which mission his *neshamah* descended to this world? So many trials and tribulations constantly face

man during his lifetime. How should he know what to focus on, in order to complete his mission?

It seems that specifically the issue that is most difficult for him to tackle and presents the greatest obstacle in his service of Hashem is the task that he should invest his energies in perfecting. For example, if it is extremely difficult for a person to arise in the morning in order to pray Shacharit with a minyan, it is possible that he is being presented with this struggle from Heaven because his mission is to perfect this matter. By dedicating himself to pray Shacharit with a minyan, he will complete the mission for which he was created.

Life is full of sorrow and suffering. No one knows how long he will live, and no one is ensured that all will go well with him and his family. One does not know when tragedy will strike, *rachmana litzlan*. Therefore, each person should try to identify his specific weakness in serving Hashem. He should spare no effort in trying to correct this matter, to the point of self-sacrifice. When Hashem recognizes a person's efforts in striving to fulfill His will and thereby complete his mission, He will grant him special protection.

In Summary

- It states, "אדם כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring." From this we infer that just as an animal is sacrificed as an offering for Hashem, so too, man must be prepared to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake. The Ramban explains that a person can acquire this degree of *mesirut nefesh* by contemplating that all that was done to the animal was really meant to be done to him.
- We can learn from the account of Pinchas the Kohen, who risked his life to defend Hashem's honor, without considering his personal safety. Therefore, he was granted Divine assistance so that he should not be defiled by the dead. This is a fulfillment of the statement, "A person who comes to purify himself receives Divine assistance."

- It is customary to first begin teaching children the parshiyot concerning *korbanot*, because these parshiyot arouse young hearts to dedicate themselves to serve Hashem with *mesirut nefesh*, due to the untarnished innocence and purity they possess. Just as a child is ready to sacrifice himself for a trivial candy, likewise, he can be trained to channel this trait of *mesirut nefesh* toward fulfilling Hashem's will.
- The letter **א׳** that appears in small print in the word **ויקרא** hints at the small children, from whom we can learn self-sacrifice. It also signifies that man must honor and appreciate even ordinary mitzvot that seem insignificant to him, and not just invest in the more famous and infrequent mitzvot.
- Each person is obligated to fulfill his mission in this world and to sacrifice himself for the fulfillment of mitzvot that require extraordinary effort. In this way he will merit special protection from Hashem.

Self-sacrifice

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:1-2)

The Torah states, "אדם כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring." This indicates that it is incumbent upon a person to serve Hashem with *mesirut nefesh*. There are several types of sacrifices. For

example, a sin-offering was brought after a person sinned, and a voluntary offering was brought even without any prior sin. Hashem wishes us all to make a sacrifice for His sake.

The sacrifices were brought "from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks." There is a revealing insight contained in these words. The word "animals" hints at the bestial characteristics within man. This implies that we are obligated to sacrifice our bestial and physical inclinations in order to fulfill Hashem's will. In essence, every person from inception resembles an animal, as it says, (*Iyov* 11:12), "Let one who is [like] a wild ass be reborn as a man!" Just as the animal eats, drinks and sleeps, so does man. It is only through our power of speech, which Hashem bestowed upon us by blowing within us a living soul, that our elevated status is distinguished. By utilizing his ability to speak properly and sanctifying it through learning Torah, one sheds his resemblance to a beast. However, if he does not sanctify his speech through learning Torah, then his resemblance to the beast is heightened.

The pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:2) says, "You shall be holy, for holy am I." The Ramban explains that this means that a person has the obligation to "sanctify himself even in permitted behavior." Man must shed his bestial features by abstaining from excessive food, drink, sleep, and other forms of self-indulgence, even though they are permissible. Abstaining from such indulgence will elevate and sanctify him, differentiating him from the animal.

If so, self-sacrifice is not just defined as abstention from actual sin, but also by self-control, which serves to sanctify man and protect him from sin. For example, when a person wants to have some fun, but instead, strengthens himself to serve Hashem, this is considered a sacrifice. Likewise, if a person wishes to continue sleeping, but instead overcomes his fatigue and arises like a lion to serve Hashem, this too is a sacrifice. Such acts of self-control help a person tame the inner beast.

Sacrifices were brought "מן הבקר – from the cattle." The word בקר also means "morning." This indicates that upon arising in the morning, one

should begin to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake. If one desires to dedicate himself to Hashem's service, he must begin from the moment he opens his eyes. By starting the day with self-sacrifice, one will be drawn to act in this way for the remainder of the day, fulfilling the maxim: "One mitzvah brings another mitzvah in its path."

"מן הצאן – from the flocks" signifies a person's behavior throughout the entire day. One must be constantly on guard to dedicate himself to fulfilling Hashem's will. One should never assume that because he already acted with self-sacrifice by arising early, he is absolved of further effort. He must continue with his commitment for the rest of the day, and in this way he will merit Divine assistance.

In our days, since the service of *korbanot* has been abolished, one's self-sacrifice and dedication to mitzvot substitute for *korbanot*. When a person trains himself to sacrifice his base desires and perfect his character traits, he will certainly abstain from self-indulgence, which leads man to sin. In addition, if a person wants to dedicate himself entirely to the service of Hashem, he must first remove all doubts regarding Hashem from his mind, and infuse himself with *emunah*, which will enable him to dedicate himself to serving Hashem.

We learn this from the order of the *chagim*. Pesach, which is the *chag* instilling *emunah* within us, is celebrated immediately after Purim, whose message is to remove all the faltering doubt introduced by Amalek (see *Ye'arot Devash, drush* 3). In order to properly celebrate Pesach and become permeated with *emunah*, truly feeling as if we ourselves experienced the slavery in Egypt, we must first remove all doubt in our belief, which is cast by the influence of Amalek. Only thereafter do we celebrate Shavuot, which is the *chag* of *Matan Torah* – instructing us to lead a life which demands much self-sacrifice. This order of the celebration of these festivals teaches that the way to acquire Torah with absolute dedication is through the perfect *emunah* which results from removing all doubt in our belief.

I recall as a young child in Morocco, we were not taught much Torah, but we were instilled with a lot of *emunah*. Only after *emunah* had been deeply rooted within our hearts did we begin learning Torah, which demands complete dedication. If a person feels that he is not capable of sacrificing himself for Hashem's sake, then he should examine if his faith is lacking. Perhaps it is doubt in Hashem gnawing at him that is preventing him from bringing a wholehearted *korban* for Hashem.

In Summary

- There are different types of *korbanot*. The *korban* that is applicable to us today is *mesirut nefesh*. Sacrifices were brought "from the animals," signifying that man must sacrifice his physical and material pursuits for Hashem's sake. This does not only include abstention from sin, but also sanctifying oneself by setting restrictions regarding permitted matters, as we have been instructed to "sanctify yourself (even) in permitted behavior."
- Sacrifices were brought "מן הבקר – from the cattle." The word בקר also means "morning" indicating that immediately upon arising in the morning, one should begin to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake. By starting the day with self-sacrifice, one will be drawn to act in this way for the remainder of the day, fulfilling the maxim: "One mitzvah brings another mitzvah in its path." "מן הצאן – from the flocks" signifies how one should behave throughout the day. A person must remain committed to act with self-sacrifice all day, and not assume that since he already demonstrated self-sacrifice in the morning, he is absolved of further effort.
- In our days, *mesirut nefesh* substitutes for *korbanot*. The way to acquire *mesirut nefesh* for Hashem's sake is through perfect *emunah*. This is attained by removing all doubt in one's belief. The order of the *chagim* teaches us this process. First we celebrate Purim, which signifies removing any doubt in our belief. Then comes Pesach, which is the *chag* instilling

emunah. Finally, we have Shavuot, which celebrates receiving the Torah, which is acquired through self-sacrifice.

Torah Is Acquired through Humility

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying…"

(*Vayikra* 1:1)

When Hashem "called to Moshe" the word ויקרא is used. The letter א' at the end of the word is printed smaller than the other letters. Why is this so? It seems that there is an important lesson behind it.

Rashi explains (*Vayikra* 1:1) that the word ויקרא denotes affection, as indicated by the fact that the administering angels use this term, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 6:3), "ויקרא זה אל זה – One called to the other." This is the term that Hashem used when calling to Moshe. Conversely, when Hashem revealed Himself to gentile prophets, He used a language of coincidence and impurity, as it says, "God happened (ויקר) upon Bilaam." This term is derived from the word קרי which means "casualness." Only Jewish prophets merited being addressed by Hashem with a term that demonstrated their importance and lofty spiritual level.

However, owing to his extreme humility, Moshe Rabbeinu could not accept that Hashem addressed him in the same way as the angels. Because of his outstanding modesty, he could not bear the great honor that Hashem accorded him. Therefore, Moshe requested that the letter א' should be written in small print, so that future generations would not consider him worthy of such an honor. He preferred that the written text would imply that he too was encountered casually, by chance, and not

addressed in a direct and honorable way that would accord him distinction and worth.

It is difficult to understand how Hashem agreed to the request of Moshe and did not command him to write the word ויקרא properly. Changing the word reduces the honor of Moshe, spelling ויקר, which implies chance and *tumah*. Moshe's honor should have been especially protected, since the entire Torah is called in his name: "Torat Moshe." Chazal explain that "In the path a man chooses to go, he is led with the aid of Heaven." Since Moshe's approach was one of self-effacement and humility, Hashem granted him the right to continue behaving in this way, and even helped him along.

Hashem "called to Moshe" from the *Ohel Moed*. At first, Moshe thought that the voice was directed to the entire nation. However, when he perceived that only he heard the voice, he understood that it was explicitly addressing him. In my opinion, Hashem chose to call Moshe precisely from the *Ohel Moed* because of its symbolism. The *gematria* of the first letters of the words אהל מועד is the same as the *gematria* (adding one for the unit) of the word בם. The last letter of each word spells דל (pauper). בם alludes to the commandment to learn Torah: "ודברת בם", and דל signifies humility and submission. This corresponds to the lesson learned from the words (*Bamidbar* 19:14), "אדם כי ימות באהל – A man if he will die in a tent," teaching that man must be ready to "die" for Torah by subduing his personal will and desires in order to fulfill Hashem's will. The Torah is only acquired by one who lowers himself for it in humility.

The word "אהל – tent" denotes a temporary structure. Its advantage is that it is portable. Pirkei Avot (4:14) states, "Exile yourself to a place of Torah." This implies that in order to acquire Torah, if there is no Torah center in his surrounding area, one should travel from place to place in order to learn. Therefore, it was befitting that Moshe Rabbeinu, who personified the trait of humility and devoted himself entirely to learning Torah, travelling to the Heavens to attain it, merited having Hashem "call" to him specifically from the *Ohel Moed* in a term reserved for angels.

Moreover, when one calls to Hashem in order to connect to Him by cleaving to Torah and mitzvot, Hashem connects to him in return and even calls him to come join Him in learning Torah. As Chazal (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 13) teach that after 120 years, all the *neshamot* of the tzaddikim surround the Heavenly Throne of Hashem and learn Torah with Him. By joining Hashem in learning Torah, one implements the maxim (see Zohar II, 90:2; III, 4:2) "Am Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem are one."

In Summary

- Rashi explains that the word ויקרא denotes affection reserved for angels. However, it is printed with a small א' as if to denote chance and *tumah*. This is because Moshe Rabbeinu, the most humble of all men, did not want to be recorded for posterity in a way that denotes great honor.
- It is difficult to understand why Hashem agreed to Moshe's request, since this would seem to disgrace him. However, "In the path a man chooses to go, he is led with the aid of Heaven."
- Hashem "called to Moshe" specifically from the *Ohel Moed* since it is symbolic. The first letters of the words אהל מועד (adding one for the unit) have the same numerical value as בם, which hints at the Torah. The last letters of these words form the word דל (pauper), signifying that those who wish to acquire Torah must humble themselves.
- The word "אהל – tent" denotes temporariness and movement. This hints to the statement, "Exile yourself to a place of Torah."

Laxity in Torah

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying…"

(*Vayikra* 1:1)

What is unique in the term ויקרא (He called), as opposed to other terms used to denote communication? We find other words in the Torah used to convey when Hashem talked to Moshe, such as וידבר (He spoke) or ויאמר (He said). The word ויקרא is derived from the word קרא which means "to read." Thus, we can translate the phrase ויקרא ה' אל משה as "Hashem read with Moshe," as opposed to "talking to" or "telling" him. This suggests that Hashem read and learned Torah together with Moshe Rabbeinu, and His voice burst forth from the throat of Moshe. One who learns Torah must be aware that when he learns Torah, Hashem is learning together with him.

The word ויקרא is also an expression of affection, derived from the word יקר (precious.) However, it can also express the opposite sentiment derived from the root word קרי (chance). Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* 953) explain that the term ויקרא conveys praise for Moshe, since it signifies that Hashem "called" to him with affection. However, because of Moshe Rabbeinu's great humility, he considered it merely as a casual call, as implied by its letters that spell קרי, denoting "chance." He did not credit this call to his merit. In reality, Hashem used the word ויקרא to denote יקר (precious), implying that Moshe was precious and superior. Moshe was accorded this honor because of his complete involvement in the holy Torah.

I always wondered why Hashem did not transmit the whole Torah Himself to Am Yisrael. He only began Himself and had Moshe Rabbeinu continue. At the revelation on *Har Sinai*, Hashem uttered the first word "אנוכי," simultaneously saying the entire Torah in seventy languages. Hashem had no "difficulty" in transmitting the Torah. Why then did

Moshe have to repeat the Torah, teaching it in its entirety to Bnei Yisrael, instead of Hashem Himself doing so?

We can explain this with the following parable. Observing a train consisting of many cars, we perceive that even though it is the engine that pulls the other cars, the cars are capable of moving along only because they have wheels. Hashem can be compared to the engine that pulls everyone along. However, He desires us to be connected to Him and follow after Him, as do the cars of the train. It is our input and effort in expounding on the Torah that serves as wheels, enabling us to follow after Him. If Hashem Himself would have originally transmitted the entire Torah to Bnei Yisrael, we would have been unable to produce Torah insights on our own. By not transmitting the whole Torah to Bnei Yisrael Himself, Hashem was hinting that we must toil in Torah, exerting effort in figuring out our own innovative explanations, rather than remaining passive in our study of Torah. We must create our own wheels.

There is a famous saying among the Moroccan Jews, "Fortunate is he who will merit experiencing the *geulah*, and fortunate is he who will not merit experiencing the *geulah*." This is because the *geulah* will be a most difficult time. Not only will we experience the physical threat of being killed in the hazardous situation which will exist at the time of the redemption, but even worse, we will be at risk of eternal death from which there is no revival. We will be at risk of becoming distant from the concept of ויקרא – which implies attachment to Hashem and learning Torah with Him. One who is engaged in Torah is as if he is reading together with Hashem and connected to Him.

This is the reason that we commemorate Haman's downfall every year. He devised his evil plan as a result of the laxity of the Jews in learning Torah. This laxity fortified Haman with the audacity to carry out his wicked plan (*Megillah* 13b). Likewise, on Chanukah, because we refrained from toiling in Torah, we encountered hardship (see *Bach, Orach Chaim* 670). From these accounts of the physical and spiritual threats that we faced in the past, we see that laxity in Torah ultimately results in spiritual devastation and assimilation. Therefore, a person must constantly remain

attached to Hashem, Who calls to him every day to learn Torah with Him. The lesson of "ויקרא ה' אל משה – And Hashem called to Moshe" is meant for every person at all times, since each person contains a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu (see *Shelah, Assarah Ma'amarot*, *ma'amar* 2:3).

When Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael, the Torah states (*Devarim* 25:18), "אשר קרך בדרך – That he happened upon you on the way." The word קרך literally means "cooled." When Amalek hears the ויקרא or "call," which signifies Jews learning Torah together with Hashem in fulfillment of "While you sit in your home and while you walk on the way…" (*Devarim* 6:7), then he schemes to cool us off from heeding this call, preventing it from influencing us. Once, an important Rabbi happened to be sitting near a group of loafers. He commented, "There is a chill in the air." The Torah generates warmth; when this warmth is lacking, a chill automatically sets in.

The pace of learning usually slackens at the end of the semester. One should invest more effort in his learning in this weak period. A student who feels that he is not capable of concentrating seriously in his studies should preferably stay at home and not introduce laxity in Torah within the Beit Hamidrash. His negative influence will not only flaw his own *neshama*h, but may harm many additional *neshamot*. Who can take such awesome responsibility?

Once, at the beginning of his lecture, Rav Shach, zt"l, was asked a question by one of the students. His reaction was to close his *sefer* and cancel the lecture. The students were taken aback since the class had just begun. Rav Shach explained to them that although he could supply an answer to the question, since he was not completely sure that it was the correct answer, he refrained from responding. Rav Shach returned home to research the subject in depth, exerting much concentration and effort to prepare the lecture all over again. He did not rest, because he feared answering his student with an insufficient explanation.

This story teaches to what extent *gedolei Yisrael* exerted efforts in expounding Torah, never lessening their commitment. In his unswerving

integrity, Rav Shach was willing to forego his entire lecture at its start, in order to deliver a completely accurate lesson. Since the precision of the Torah is at stake, the moment *gedolei Yisrael* suspect that a concept is not fully correct, they abandon their supposition and plunge into the depths of the matter to arrive at the absolute truth.

The Mizbeach did not have steps leading up to it (*Shemot* 20:23), whereas the Menorah had three steps (*Menachot* 29a). There were no steps leading up to the Mizbeach, in order to avoid the Kohen exposing himself, thus creating a lack of modesty in such a sanctified place. How, then, could there be steps leading up to the holy Menorah?

I thought of an idea derived from the statement in the Zohar (see I, 51:2; II, 166:2) that when we light a candle for a mitzvah in this world, its light ascends to Heaven and creates an effect on High causing spiritual light to return to this world and illuminate it (see the *sefer Pituchei Chotam*, beginning of *Beha'alotcha*, which reveals fantastic insights about this). Certainly, when the Kohen Gadol lit the candles of the Menorah, he was very careful not to expose his nakedness while ascending the stairs, in order not to reduce the spiritual light descending from Heaven.

However, the purpose of bringing a sacrifice on the Mizbeach was to attain atonement, which was achieved by a feeling of humility and submission. It is likely that while experiencing extreme remorse over his sins, the Kohen Gadol would not pay adequate attention to his steps, and his nakedness may have been revealed. Consequently, his loss would have been greater than his reward, and he would have added iniquity to the existing sins of the nation. Therefore, the Mizbeach was built without stairs.

The difference between the two reflects what each one represents. The Menorah is compared to the Torah, which requires constant ascent, as it says (*Divrei Hayamim* II, 17:6), "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem." Therefore, there were stairs leading up to the Menorah. This indicates that man's mission in this world is to toil in Torah, constantly

rising to ever greater heights. Only then can he succeed in bringing the spiritual light from Above to illuminate the earth.

On the other hand, climbing stairs is not a suitable act for the Mizbeach, which symbolized humility and submission. Man is required to approach Hashem with his head bent in remorse, in order to merit atonement. The concept of rising in ascent was contrary to the essence of the Mizbeach.

On Purim we give *mishlo'ach manot* to one another and distribute charity to the poor. This is because in that period, prior to the miraculous deliverance of the Jews at Purim, there was a laxity in Torah, which caused negligence in the performance of interpersonal mitzvot. Through the many acts of giving to each other on Purim, we rectify this negligence. There is also a mitzvah to be in a state of joy so that we should not become sluggish, as we are admonished (*Devarim* 28:47), "Because you did not serve Hashem, your God, amid gladness."

It is a proven fact that if a childless person learns Torah diligently, he opens the gates of Heaven, and the merit of Torah stands in his stead. Those who already have children can merit through their diligent study of Torah that their children grow to be great Torah scholars.

It is interesting to note why we deliberately celebrate Purim before Pesach. Purim reminds us that our laxity in learning Torah caused Amalek to prevail upon us and lead us to sin (*Tanchuma, Beshalach* 25). Therefore, *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 6a) instruct us that thirty days prior to Pesach, one must begin reviewing the halachot regarding the festival. This is in order to rectify the laxity in Torah that occurred on Purim. The word הלכות (laws) shares the same root as הליכות (ways), as it says (*Chabakuk* 3:6), "הליכות עולם לו – For the ways of the world are His." This implies that by learning halachot, one is fulfilling the commandment (*Vayikra* 26:3), "**אם בחוקותי תלכו** – If you will follow (in the ways of) My decrees." This commandment instructs us to toil in Torah. Thus, the learning of halachah is connected to the requirement of toiling in Torah. When one

follows in this path, it is considered as if he is reading and learning Torah together with Hashem.

The laxity in Torah that caused Amalek's attack occurred when Am Yisrael became stationary, which is a direct contradiction to the concept of הליכה (going), as mentioned above. When one does not progress, he automatically regresses. Just as a person constantly progresses to more advanced stages in life, so too, must he progress in his faith. One is not allowed to remain stationary in his spiritual pursuits. When one is not actively improving, his commitment inevitably begins to decline.

It is difficult to understand why Am Yisrael were blamed for becoming lax in Torah in the Desert, when they had not yet received the Torah. However, Moshe and Aharon served as role models of *hod* (glory), accompanying Am Yisrael in the Desert. Bnei Yisrael should have observed the eminence of these tzaddikim, as it states (*Yeshayahu* 30:20), "And your eyes will behold your teacher." This would have prevented them from becoming lax in Torah. Focusing on tzaddikim serves to strengthen man in his Avodat Hashem. Since Bnei Yisrael did not do so, it was considered as if they had become lax in Torah.

I remember that the great *gaon*, Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, zt"l, son-in-law of the Saba Mi'Novhardok, the author of *Madreigat Ha'adam*, was expected to visit our yeshiva in Armentières. One could sense the anticipation; there was a palpable excitement in the air. This is the enthusiasm that should be felt regarding the Torah and those who represent it. This overwhelming emotion was lacking in Am Yisrael in the Desert. Therefore, Amalek came to war against them.

I advise those who are unable to concentrate in learning Torah to envision tzaddikim and their behavior. This would be considered as if they had engaged in Torah study themselves. This is because those who discuss the ways of the tzaddikim are compared to those engaged in *Ma'aseh merkavah*, which is *Torat Hashem* (see *Ketubot* 5a). In addition, one who beholds the countenance of the holy tzaddikim acquires fear of Hashem (see *Chessed L'Avraham* 2:33).

Once a man from Antwerp, Belgium, approached me and confided that his daughter was already older, but still had not merited finding her match. He agonized over his painful situation and even broke down, crying bitter tears. A short while later, he called to notify me that, at last, his daughter was getting engaged. When I heard the news, I told him that it was the heartbreaking tears that he shed while recounting his misery to me that had brought about the deliverance, and not my blessings. Had he cried with those very tears earlier, possibly his supplications would have been answered before.

Sometimes people are given the opportunity to achieve lofty heights in learning, but because of their inertia, they do not exert adequate efforts in concentrating and thus lose the opportunity for realizing their potential. Success in spiritual pursuits requires investing sincere efforts.

Noach is an example of this. After the *mabul* subsided, Noach exited the Ark and beheld the vast destruction of the world. He began to cry in anguish, shedding many tears (*Zohar Chadash, Midrash Hane'elam, Ma'amar Veyareach*). Hashem said to him, "Why did you not cry like this earlier? Had you cried previously, perhaps your tears would have succeeded in annulling the decree, and the *mabul* would have been averted. However, since you behaved in a passive manner, neglecting your duty of pleading for the world, your tears have no purpose anymore" (see *Pri Tzaddik, Noach* 4). Some commentaries explain that this is the reason that the *mabul* is referred to as "the waters of Noach," placing the blame of the *mabul* on him. Noach is ultimately held responsible for the Great Deluge, because he neglected his duty in actively arousing Heavenly mercy for his generation (*Zohar* I, 67:2).

A couple came to me for guidance before their impending divorce. I asked them why they wished to end their marriage. The woman explained that her husband never helped out at home. Even when he saw her collapsing from the burden of caring for the children and running the home, he stubbornly refused to lend his support. Upon hearing her accusations, the husband responded that because he is engaged in learning Torah, he does not have time to devote to helping his wife. I

questioned, is this man truly involved in studying Torah? It is impossible for one who truly plumbs the depths of Torah to behave in such a manner regarding his wife. Such negligent behavior is proof that he does not learn Torah properly, because the Torah instructs one how to behave toward his wife, honoring her more than himself and extending himself on her behalf.

I recall that my father, a"h, used to warm up the food every Friday in preparation for Shabbat. Once it happened that when he was heating up the water in honor of the Shabbat, it spilled on him, and he got badly burned; his very life was in danger. My father fervently prayed that this should not result in a *chillul Hashem*, since people might mistakenly conclude that this is the outcome in fulfilling the Torah, saying For he was afflicted with serious burns after helping his wife in the preparations in honor of the Shabbat instead of receiving great rewards for his exemplary deeds.

When the doctors examined his leg, they decided to amputate it. My father was worried that besides for the *chillul Hashem* involved, the amputation would indicate that he had failed to properly fulfill one of the 613 mitzvot, since each limb corresponds to a different mitzvah, and if the mitzvah is incomplete, then accordingly, the limb becomes flawed as well (see *Sha'arei Kedushah* Part I, *Sha'ar* 1 and *Sha'ar* 3). He feared facing the Heavenly Court in disgrace. He decided to do complete teshuvah in order to reverse this decree. When my father was taken to be operated on, the operation was cancelled, due to the fact that the surgeon had cut his hand. The operation was postponed time after time, until it was cancelled altogether. This created a great *kiddush Hashem*, just as my father had so strongly desired.

In Summary

- "ויקרא ה' אל משה – And Hashem called to Moshe" The term ויקרא can be literally understood as "reading with." This suggests that Hashem read and learned Torah together with Moshe Rabbeinu. It also teaches us that just as Hashem learned Torah with Moshe Rabbeinu, likewise, every Jew

engaged in Torah merits the *Shechinah* talking from within him and joining him in learning.

- Chazal add that the term **ויקרא** implies **קרי** (chance). Moshe did not wish to attribute greatness to himself by implying that Hashem specifically sought to speak to him. Therefore, because of Moshe's great humility the Torah makes it sound as if Hashem "chanced" to speak to him.
- Hashem did not teach the entire Torah to us Himself. Had He taught us the whole Torah, we would not have the opportunity to make our own contributions to it. Hashem desires that we exert effort in learning Torah by probing deeply into it and adding our own original insights.
- Amalek acquired their strength to battle and enact decrees against Am Yisrael as a result of laxity in Torah learning. Therefore, there is a strong connection between parashat *Vayikra* and the evil Haman and Amalek.
- Whenever there is not enough effort being invested to explore the depths of the Torah, causing the sound of Torah to be still, then a "coolness" sets in. As soon as there is laxity in Torah study, Amalek appears.
- Why did the Mizbeach not have steps leading up to it, whereas the Menorah did? This can be explained according to the Zohar: We light a candle for a mitzvah in this world; its light ascends to Heaven and creates an effect on High, causing spiritual light to return to the world and illuminates it. Certainly, when the Kohen Gadol lit the candles of the Menorah, he was very careful not to expose his nakedness while ascending the stairs, in order not to reduce the spiritual light descending from Heaven. On the other hand, when he sacrificed a *korban*, the Kohen was involved in atoning for the sins of the nation. While experiencing extreme remorse over these sins, he might not pay adequate attention to his steps, and his nakedness would be revealed. According to this, we can explain that the Menorah is compared to the Torah, which requires constant ascent, hence the stairs. On the other hand, climbing stairs was not suitable for the Mizbeach, which symbolizes humility and submission, causing man to approach Hashem with his head bent in remorse in order to merit atonement.

- Since Am Yisrael had not yet received the Torah in the Desert, how were they blamed for becoming lax in the study of Torah, causing Amalek to attack? They should have observed their leaders and learned from their behavior. Because they did not do so, it was considered as if they had become lax in learning Torah.
- The *mabul* is called "the waters of Noach" since Noach neglected his duty and did not arouse Heavenly mercy for the people of his generation. Had he not behaved in a passive manner, his generation could have been saved.

The Humility Required of the Nasi

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:1-2)

Chazal (*Berachot* 27b – 28a) relate that when Rabban Gamliel was removed from his position as *Nasi*, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah was chosen to serve as *Nasi* instead. Rabbi Elazar was comparatively young. He approached his wife to seek her advice, asking her if it was worthwhile for him to accept the offer. His wife had reservations about this appointment, because she feared that perhaps a short while later he would be removed from his position. Rabbi Elazar responded that it would be worthwhile for him to become *Nasi* even if he would retain the position only for one day, and he agreed to accept the offer. Hashem

performed a miracle for him on the day of his appointment, and he miraculously grew a white beard despite his young age. Therefore, he is quoted as saying, "Behold, I am as if seventy years old."

Rabbi Elazar's reasoning requires an explanation. What did he mean when he told his wife that even if he would be removed after one day of office, it was worthwhile for him to become *Nasi*? Did he seek leadership for his own gratification?

Maybe we can understand his thoughts according to the words of this pasuk. It says, "אדם כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring." This indicates that a person should bring himself as a *korban*. The *Nasi* was required to exhibit self-sacrifice in the same way as Moshe Rabbeinu. He led the nation with absolute devotion toward Bnei Yisrael, to the extent that when Hashem called him on the first day from the *Ohel Moed*, and only he merited hearing the call, he began to doubt if the call was intended for him or for a different person named Moshe. He was also bothered by the fact that only he was singled out to hear Hashem's call, and that all of Bnei Yisrael did not hear it as well. Therefore, the word ויקרא is printed in the Torah with a small א'. Reading אלף backwards spells the word פלא (wonder). This implies that because of his great humility, Moshe Rabbeinu wondered why it was that Hashem called only to him. In his heart he considered himself as a small *aleph*, less important than the other members of Am Yisrael.

It states, "אדם כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring." The word "מכם" can also signify "for your sake," which would then read, "When a person from among you will sacrifice himself for your sake." This implies that the *Nasi* had to be prepared to sacrifice himself for the Jewish people. How? The *Nasi's* self-sacrifice required that he be subordinate to the people and serve them by listening to their troubles and tending to their needs. He thus fulfilled Hashem's demand described in the Gemara (*Horayot* 9b-10a): "You think that it is leadership that I am granting you? Know that it is slavery that I am imposing upon you."

The Torah further describes the role of the *Nasi* in the pasuk (*Shemot* 30:11), "'כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקודיהם ונתנו איש כופר נפשו לה – When you will take a census of the Children of Israel according to their counts, every man shall give Hashem an atonement, for his soul." The words ראש בני ישראל literally "the heads of Bnei Yisrael" can be understood as referring to the leaders. This implies that the *Nasi*, who was the head of Bnei Yisrael, had to be willing to sacrifice himself to serve as an atonement "כופר נפש" for Bnei Yisrael. In addition, he had to perceive himself as small and insignificant as the half-*shekel* given as the כופר נפש in order to count the people, despite the fact that the *Nasi* was more wise, wealthy, and beautiful by far than all others. While standing and serving the nation, he had to feel as if he were standing before Hashem, reflecting that the *Shechinah* was residing among them.

Moshe Rabbeinu exemplified the traits of submission and humility. He offered himself as atonement for Am Yisrael. After Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf and Hashem wanted to destroy them, Moshe stated (*Shemot* 32:32), "Erase me now from Your book that You have written." He entreated, "If you will destroy all of Bnei Yisrael, then erase me from Your book, because I am not needed if there is no nation to lead." Similarly, we find that Moshe Rabbeinu said (*Bamidbar* 11:29), "Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets," not wishing to reserve this honor exclusively for himself. Even more astounding is that Moshe provided arguments on Am Yisrael's behalf despite the fact that the people caused him much suffering and hardship. He was entirely dedicated to the Jewish nation, testifying that he never took advantage of his position for his own personal needs. Moreover, he never requested favors from any Jew (ibid. 16:15).

We observe this same trait of modesty regarding Shaul Hamelech. He hid himself because he did not feel worthy of being king. Since he feared that rulership would cause him to feel haughty, he preferred to escape becoming king and instead went into hiding. When Shmuel Hanavi noticed Shaul's hesitation in being crowned as king, he turned to all the people and testified that Shaul was (*Shmuel* I, 10:24) "the one whom Hashem has

chosen." Because Hashem saw the inherent modesty of Shaul, He considered him most suited to rule over Am Yisrael. Modesty is the most essential trait of a king. This is because he does not seek honor for himself, but instead acts in the interests of the nation. He recognizes that it is not in his merit that he was appointed king, but it was the people who caused him to be elevated to this position. Therefore, there is no justification to behave arrogantly.

This same trait of modesty was also apparent in David Hamelech. He waived his own honor in order to bestow honor to the Torah, as it says (*Shmuel* II 6:14), "David danced with all his strength before Hashem" when he transported the Ark of Hashem. He leaped and danced and did not consider that his own honor may have been reduced by his zealous show of honor for Hashem. He said of himself (*Tehillim* 131:1), "My heart was not proud, and my eyes were not haughty, nor did I pursue matters too great and too wondrous for me." David Hamelech behaved all his life with complete submission and humility, to the extent that he was able to testify about himself that his heart was never proud, nor did he use his eyes to look haughtily at the people in his kingdom. All the more so, he never exhibited haughtiness in his service of Hashem. He would forsake his own safety for the safety of the nation in battle, preferring that he serve as atonement for the people, if need be. He embodied the virtues required for a leader of the nation.

In parashat *Vayikra* (6:2) it says, "זאת תורת העולה היא העולה על מוקדה על המזבח – This is the law of the burnt-offering: It is the burnt-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Altar." This verse hints to the message that the offering of the *Nasi* can only ascend on High if he humbles himself in complete submission. This is alluded to by the small print of the first letter מ' in the word מוקדה (flame). Only when the *Nasi* humbles himself, making himself small before the people, can his burnt-offering ascend on High, as a flame shooting up above.

Through this introduction, we can understand why Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah wanted to be appointed as *Nasi*. He wanted to acquire the necessary virtues of humility and submission. In addition, he wished to

attain the willingness to sacrifice his personal needs for the needs of Bnei Yisrael. Since he feared that the people would not give him the chance to sacrifice himself for their sake, and they would quickly remove him from his position, he asked his wife if he should accept the position.

His wife was hesitant, voicing her objection that he might be removed soon after his appointment. Rav Elazar concluded that it was worthwhile for him to become the *Nasi* even if only for one day, because on the day of his appointment he would acquire the virtues of humility and submission. After he would accept upon himself to behave in an exalted manner, acquiring the virtues necessary for a *Nasi*, these attributes would remain his spiritual acquisitions even after he would be removed from his position. This is described by the maxim (*Megillah* 21b): "One increases in spiritual level and does not decrease."

This also holds true in the secular world. Former presidents still remain influential after they finish serving their term and retire from service. The experience of having served as president enables them to share their acquired wisdom and give advice to those who seek it.

How much more so is this true of the *Nasi* of Am Yisrael, who continues to provide the people with advice and guidance. He also serves as a protector of the people due to his piety and greatness in Torah. Since the *Nasi* consciously works to improve his character, Hashem grants him Divine assistance in all his endeavors. He retains his honor even after he ends his formal service.

Chazal (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 30) state that when the Romans decreed death upon the *assarah harugei malchut*, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel asked Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol why they were being led as sheep to be slaughtered. Rabbi Yishmael answered him, "Is it possible to conceive that Hashem passes judgment unjustly and kills his sons for no reason? We must examine our deeds to understand why this has been decreed upon us."

Rabban Shimon decided to check his deeds for any flaw, in order to uncover the reason for the decree. After extensive self-examination,

Rabban Shimon concluded that perhaps he was deserving of this fate because he had once made a woman wait to see him until he had put on his shoes. Rabbi Yishmael agreed with this conclusion.

This is astounding. Was Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel cruelly murdered for such a trivial matter? Chazal (*Otzar Hamidrashim, "Eleh Ezkerah"* p. 440) relate that prior to this exchange, Rabbi Yishmael had uttered the *Shem Hameforash*, ascending to Heaven, where he was told that their sentence was a decree from Hashem. Therefore, why did Rabban Shimon ask Rabbi Yishmael for the reason for their being led as animals to slaughter? Did he doubt the justice of Hashem's decree, causing him to examine his deeds to check if there was another justified reason for the harsh sentence? Such a great man should have checked his deeds before questioning the reason for the decree. His question indicates that he did not accept that this was a decree from Heaven. This is compounded by the fact that he questioned the reason for the decree when he saw that Rabbi Yishmael accepted it without question.

In reality, Rabban Shimon had already accepted the decree as Hashem's will without question. He only posed his question for the benefit of others, in order that people should be aware of the enormous responsibility the *Nasi* carries and how careful he must be to honor the people. By examining his deeds in order to understand why he deserved such a harsh sentence, he taught all of Am Yisrael that a *Nasi* may not lord over the people and seek to promote his own honor. Every Jew is created in the image of Hashem. Therefore, acting arrogantly toward another Jew is considered as behaving arrogantly toward Hashem. The very reason that Hashem chose Moshe Rabbeinu and David Hamelech as leaders of Am Yisrael is because He observed their compassionate and sensitive attitude toward the flocks of sheep that they were tending. It followed that if they exhibited such dedication and sensitivity toward animals, all the more so would they lead the Jewish people with compassion and devotion (*Shemot Rabbah* 2:3).

Without doubt, it is sometimes necessary to exercise force when leading a nation, in order to stem corruption. However, a leader must

always be aware that he is acting for the benefit of the nation when ruling them forcefully and not attempt to manipulate them for his personal benefit. His intentions as a leader should be solely to protect the honor of Hashem and His Torah. If a leader manipulates people for his own purposes, then ultimately his honor will be diminished, and it will eventually elude him altogether. On the other hand, if a public figure acts solely to promote the honor of Hashem, in the end, he will become honored as well, and this will ultimately benefit him.

This is the lesson that Shmuel conveyed to Shaul Hamelech (*Shmuel* I, 15:17), "Is this not so? – Though you may be small in your own eyes, you are the head of the tribes of Israel." He explained to Shaul, "Since you were appointed to lead the nation, do not view yourself as insignificant and small when the honor of Heaven is at stake." The *Nasi* must know when to behave humbly and when to be assertive and rule with conviction. When it comes to maintaining the honor of Heaven, the leader must act with confidence and pride in order to set an example for the public of how one should behave regarding his service of Hashem.

There is a different opinion concerning the reason for the cruel sentence decreed upon the *assarah harugei malchut* (*Sefer Halikutim, Vayeishev* 37), which suggests that they were reincarnations of the Shevatim. They were condemned to death in order to atone for selling Yosef as a slave, thereby causing their father grief. Even so, Rabban Shimon, who was the *Nasi*, searched for an additional explanation as to why this misfortune had befallen him. Although he knew that it was a decree from Heaven, he persisted to examine his deeds, in order to teach the world that because of his lack of sensitivity in making a woman wait for him until he tied his shoes, he deserved this torturous death. This was a powerful lesson for Bnei Yisrael. They saw to what extent a *Nasi* must protect their honor and not abuse them for his own personal gains. He must regard his responsibility as seriously as if a rope was bound around his neck to hang him, and any wrong move could prove fatal.

The letter א' in the word ויקרא is printed small for this very reason. Moshe Rabbeinu did not want to be honored more than the rest of the

nation, and he wondered why Hashem called only to him from the *Ohel Moed*. Because of his great humility, he requested that Hashem reveal Himself to him in the same way as He appeared to Bilaam, amidst *tumah* and by coincidence. The word ויקרא without the letter א' forms the word קרי (coincidence), referring to Moshe's request that Hashem call to him as if by coincidence, and not accord him excessive honor by calling to him directly.

Another example of Moshe's great humility is expressed in *Pirkei Avot* (1:1): "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai." Moshe Rabbeinu is associated with Har Sinai, who regarded itself as small and insignificant in comparison to the other mountains and thus merited that Hashem reveal His Kingship and give the Torah to Bnei Yisrael specifically on it. Likewise, Moshe Rabbeinu humbled himself and therefore merited that Hashem chose to appoint him as the leader of His nation and to transmit the Torah through him to Bnei Yisrael.

The character-traits hinted to by the following *korbanot* should be exemplified by the *Nasi*. It says (*Vayikra* 7:37): "זאת התורה לעולה למנחה ולחטאת ולאשם ולמילואים ולזבח השלמים – This is the law of the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, the sin-offering, and the guilt-offering, and the inauguration-offerings, and the feast peace-offering." The words תורת המנחה (meal offering) suggest that when a person is נוח (pleasant), meaning both that Hashem is pleased with his pleasant conduct and he behaves pleasantly to his fellow man, this enables him to reach great heights in Torah. The words לעולה ולאשם (the burnt-offering and the guilt-offering) implies that when the *Nasi* would err and be guilty (אשם) regarding a certain matter, he should not be ashamed to admit his error. Through such behavior, he will rise (עולה) to greater heights. The words ולזבח השלמים (the feast peace-offering) hints that when the *Nasi* dedicates himself entirely to serving the public and behaves toward them in a self-effacing and humble manner, it is considered as if he sacrificed (זבח) himself and brought peace (שלום) to the world. In this way he reaches שלימות (perfection).

In Summary

- Rabbi Elazar responded to his wife's hesitation that he accept the position of *Nasi* that it would be worthwhile for him to become *Nasi*, even if he would retain this position only for one day. Did he seek leadership for self-gratification, wanting this position only for his personal enjoyment?
- We can resolve this question by analyzing the reason for the small letter **א׳** in the word **ויקרא.** This indicates Moshe's great humility. He thought that Hashem was calling to a different person named "Moshe." The word **אלף** spelled backwards is **פלא** (wonder). This implies that Moshe Rabbeinu wondered why Hashem accorded him such honor and called specifically to him. In addition, we can explain that word **ויקרא** is from the root word **קרי** (coincidence), implying that in his great humility, Moshe Rabbeinu requested that Hashem appear to him coincidentally as He appeared to the rasha, Bilaam.
- It states, "**אדם כי יקריב מכם** – When a person from among you will bring." This can be read as, "When a person will sacrifice himself for your sake," implying that the *Nasi* had to be prepared to sacrifice himself for the Jewish people. Likewise, the *Nasi* had to be willing to serve as atonement for Am Yisrael.
- The *Nasi* and leader of the Jewish people had to embody the two virtues of humility and submission. These traits were evident in Moshe Rabbeinu, Shaul Hamelech, and David Hamelech. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah wanted to be appointed *Nasi* in order to acquire these two virtues. Since he was comparatively young, he consulted with his wife as to whether he should accept the appointment. Despite her reservations, Rabbi Elazar decided that it was worthwhile for him to serve as a *Nasi* even if it would be for one day only, because he would then merit the acquisition of these important virtues. Even if he would be removed from his position, the two virtues of humility and submission would remain his forever.
- Chazal explain that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel asked Rabbi Yishmael what was the reason for their death sentence. After he scrutinized all his past deeds, he concluded that it was because he once made a woman wait

for him before he answered her. Is it conceivable that for such a trivial matter Rabban Shimon was sentenced to death? It is also difficult to understand why Rabban Shimon investigated the matter so extensively after he heard that it was a decree from Heaven. It might seem that he did not accept the justice of Heaven without question. Rabban Shimon did not investigate for his own purposes, but only in order to teach future generations how important it is for a *Nasi* to accord proper honor to the people.

The Severity of Dwelling on Impure Thoughts

"If one's offering is an olah-offering from the cattle, he shall bring a perfect male; he shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, in accordance with his will, before Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 1:3)

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 1:4) and the Kli Yakar (ibid. vs. 3) note that the *olah*-offering was brought to atone for the sin of dwelling on forbidden concepts, termed *hirhur ra*. The pasuk (*Devarim* 23:10) states, "And you shall guard yourself from all negative things." Chazal explain that this means that a person should not dwell on *hirhur ra* during the day, because this may cause *tumah* at night. The sin of dwelling on forbidden concepts needs atonement by bringing a sacrifice. There is an opinion (*Vayikra Rabbah* 7:3) that for such a sin, one must bring specifically an *olah*-offering. Chazal (*Kiddushin* 39b) say, "Hashem does not equate a sinful thought (*machshavah ra'ah*) with the action of doing that sin. However, Hashem does equate dwelling on (*hirhur ra*) *avodah zarah* to

doing the act itself." What is the difference between a sinful thought and dwelling on forbidden concepts?

When a person has a sinful thought, he knows that it is not reality and therefore does not derive real pleasure from it. For example, if a person would think that he is rich, he will not derive any pleasure from this thought, because ultimately he does not experience the feeling of wealth. However, when someone dwells on forbidden concepts, he gasps in satisfaction, emitting *hevel* – breath, which is actual air and is real. Since there is an actual outcome, it transforms imagination into reality. For example, when a person encountering misfortune sighs, he feels his sorrow more concretely. Likewise, when a person sees an improper scene or dwells on a sinful matter, he groans with pleasure. This is an actual expression of his gratification. Therefore, *hirhur ra* (dwelling on forbidden concepts) is an actual sin, as opposed to *machshavah* (thinking fleetingly), which is not accompanied by actual results. For this reason there is an obligation to bring a sacrifice as atonement specifically for *hirhur ra*.

A person possesses an aspect of godliness (*Pardes Rimonim* 32:1), and his entire body is holy on this account. This is why we do not cast away any component of our body, not even the fingernails that we trim. Every part of us must be disposed of with respect, in accordance to Jewish law. Likewise, the *hevel*, breath, that is issued from our mouths may not be wasted and must retain its holy status. We may not defile it through sin and *hirhur ra*. Conversely, there is *hevel kadosh*, the holy breath of children learning Torah in purity, without sin (see *Shabbat* 119b).

This concept that *hevel* is a concrete entity is supported by the following two examples:

My forefather, the Holy Rabbi, Rabbi Chaim Vital, ztk"l, wrote that in every particle of food there is holiness, because it was created from Hashem's utterance (see *Likutim Bereishit* 1). The rain falls as a result of His command, and the flowers were created when Hashem issued the

order. They continue to flourish due to His *hevel piv*: the breath of His mouth.

Just as we pray, "Blessed is He Who spoke and the world came into being," this *hevel* emanating from Hashem's utterance remains ingrained in the food, which too was created by His command. Therefore, all food consists of a spiritual component. [We may add that the blessing we recite on the food infuses it with spirituality.]

At first glance, it may seem that breath is not concrete since we cannot fashion anything from a gulp of air. We cannot buy a house or command a staff of workers by merely gasping. On the contrary, it would seem that speech is more concrete than a mere breath, because with speech we can communicate with others and complete transactions. However, from the words of Rabbi Chaim Vital, we see that breath is more real, and therefore food is ingrained with spirituality because it exists from the breath of Hashem.

From this we conclude that breath is a concrete entity. This proves the point that the breath of man is a real component of him, and thus he must guard its holiness.

Another proof of the importance of the breath of man is learned from the words of Chazal (*Shabbat* 119b): "The world cannot exist if not for the breath (issued) from the mouths of children in their Rebbe's class." Chazal do not specify that the world exists from the words of Torah uttered by the children while studying with their Rebbe. They cite that the mere "breath of their mouths" is what sustains the world. If their very breath ensures the existence of the world, how much more so does their actual learning of Torah.

When Bnei Yisrael sang the Song of the Sea upon their Exodus from Egypt, they merited an exalted level of prophecy that even the prophet Yechezkel ben Buzi did not merit (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 144). This was because of the holy breath that emanated from their mouths while singing the praises of Hashem. This is indicated by the words (*Shemot* 15:1): "אז ישיר משה – Then Moshe (and the Children of Israel) sang." The word אז

has the numerical value of eight, which denotes that which is beyond nature (*Maharal, Chiddushei Aggadot, Nedarim* 31:2). Similarly, Rashi explains (*Shemot* 15:1) the word אז (then) signifies the period in the future when Mashiach will arrive. This may hint at the importance of utilizing our breath in holiness. Those who guard their breath, utilizing it solely for holy purposes, will remain holy. A person that does not flaw his speech or his breath is considered as having attained the exalted level of the future days of Mashiach, which is a supernatural level. He is termed "holy," as were Bnei Yisrael upon singing *shirah* at the *Yam Suf*.

Chazal expound on this concept by stating (*Yevamot* 61a), "You are called Man and the nations of the world are not called Man." Jews who do not keep Torah and mitzvot are considered as part of the nations of the world, who are not considered Man. The reason for this is rooted in the difference between man and animal. What is the advantage of man over animals? The animals also emit breath. Certainly, it is only when man utilizes the breath of his mouth for Torah and *kedushah* that he is superior to the animals. Only then is he worthy of being termed Man. Therefore, precisely those who adhere to Torah and mitzvot are called Man. Those who do not adhere to the Torah are not categorized as Man but are considered as animals.

In Summary

- One must bring an *olah*-offering as atonement for sinning through *hirhur ra* (dwelling on forbidden concepts). Hashem does not consider a person who has a *machshavah ra'ah* (improper thought) as having committed the sin that he thought to do. However, a *hirhur ra* requires atonement through bringing a sacrifice. What is the difference between them?
- It seems that *hirhur* implies dwelling on forbidden concepts, causing one to gasp, emitting a gulp of air from his mouth. This gasp gives expression to the *hirhur* in a concrete way, creating a sense of gratification. Therefore, *hirhur* is unlike a fleeting thought.
- The breath of man is also a part of his Godly component and must be guarded with *kedushah*.

- Rabbi Chaim Vital taught that every particle of food contains an aspect of spirituality because it exists by the breath of Hashem. This indicates that breath is a concrete thing. Therefore, it is incumbent upon man to utilize his breath only for holy purposes.
- Chazal teach: "The world cannot exist if not for the breath of the mouths of children in their Rebbe's class." This, too, proves that breath alone is real. We see that the entire world exists because of it.
- "**אז ישיר משה** – Then Moshe (and the Children of Israel) sang." The word **אז** has the numerical value of eight. The number eight denotes supernatural concepts. Similarly, Rashi explains that the word **אז** (then) signifies the period in the future when Mashiach will arrive. This implies that those who guard the breath issued from their mouth live on a supernatural level; a level associated with the period of Mashiach. They are termed "holy."
- Chazal expound on the words "You are called Man." Through keeping Torah and mitzvot and utilizing the breath issued from our mouths properly, we are elevated above the animals. Those who do not keep the Torah are not called Man, because there is no difference between them and the animals.

Gems on Parashat Vayikra

Teaching Children Self-sacrifice

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying…"

(*Vayikra* 1:1)

Chazal (*Tanchuma* 96:14) suggest that we first begin teaching children Chumash *Vayikra* because it discusses the subjects of *korbanot*, the laws of kosher food, the mitzvah of *shemittah*, etc. These mitzvot require self-sacrifice, as we note that the word קרבן (offering) has the same root as הקרבה (self-sacrifice). A person must be willing to sacrifice himself and his money in order to bring a *korban*. He accomplishes this by first buying the offering to be sacrificed and thereafter laying his hands on it and admitting his sins. Likewise, the mitzvah of *shemittah* requires great self-sacrifice, since in the seventh year one must let his land lay fallow and allow the public to freely enter his territory and help themselves to his crops. In this way he demonstrates that he depends solely on Hashem and believes that the Creator, Who sustained him in the past, will continue to provide for him even in the seventh year.

This Chumash is intentionally taught first, in order to introduce to children from a young age the concept that the existence of the Jewish nation is dependent on *mesirut nefesh*. It is only the *mesirut nefesh* of Am

Yisrael for Hashem throughout the generations that grants them the title of *Am Segulah*, The Chosen Nation. Their undying dedication guards them from assimilating among the nations. This behavior was already evident in Reuven, the oldest of the Shevatim, who went to pick the *dudaim* for his mother, Leah (*Bereishit* 30:14). Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 99b) relate that he was careful when picking them, not to transgress by stealing. How did Reuven know to avoid stealing, by collecting flowers only from abandoned fields? He had been introduced to this important concept from a very young age. Therefore, when he grew up, this pure *chinuch* that he absorbed from home prevented him from stealing.

Reuven's act reinforced the awareness for generations to come that this world is not a free-for-all. Even before simply smelling a scent, one must make the blessing "בורא מיני בשמים – Who creates species of fragrance." By pausing before partaking of a pleasure in order to bless Hashem, a person learns to control his passions and exercise the awareness that the world belongs to Him. The blessing recited after eating is Biblical in nature, whereas the blessing before eating is rabbinically ordained, as is explained by the Maharal (*Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha'avodah* 18). Accordingly, it seems that the blessing said after the consumption of food is even more important than the blessing said prior to eating.

We can derive many important lessons from the word ויקרא itself. The letter *aleph* at the end of the word is printed small which hints at the *aleph-bet* that we begin teaching small children. Moreover, the word ויקרא is from the same root as the word קריאה (reading), which is acquired through mastering the *aleph-bet*. We specifically begin to initiate children to learn how to read the *aleph-bet* through Chumash *Vayikra*, because it is permeated with the concept of self-sacrifice. By beginning this education at an early age, we ensure that it will bear fruit and enable each individual child to be able to dedicate himself to Hashem and His Torah when he grows older.

The word ויקרא also hints to Shabbat. The first and last letters of the word (ו' and א') have the *gematria* of seven, hinting to the Shabbat, the seventh day of the week. The remaining letters spell the word יקר

(precious), indicating that one must value Shabbat and sacrifice himself in keeping it. Throughout the generations, there were many dedicated Jews who sacrificed their lives in order to uphold the sanctity of Shabbat. Likewise, we are told that Hillel and Shammai greatly valued and honored Shabbat. Shammai would put aside a delicacy served during the week for Shabbat. He would exchange it if necessary for something even better later on in the week, in honor of the Shabbat. Thus, he anticipated Shabbat from the beginning of the week (*Beitzah* 16a), demonstrating the importance of Shabbat and the obligation to sacrifice for it.

Whoever dedicates himself to serving Hashem will be rewarded accordingly, and Hashem will grant him special protection.

The Obligation to Review

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:1-2)

The pasuk states, "אדם כי יקריב מכם," which can mean, "one who will sacrifice of himself." This teaches an important lesson. The word מכם has the *gematria* of 101 (including one for the word itself). This indicates that aside from the offerings that our ancestors sacrificed on the Altar, one must also sacrifice of himself (מכם) for Hashem's sake. How does one do so?

Our *Chachamim* state (*Chagigah* 9b) that we cannot compare one who reviews his Torah studies 100 times to one who reviews it 101 times. The first pasuk in *Vayikra* bears proof to this. It describes the obligation of every man to offer a sacrifice for Hashem. This does not refer only to literal sacrifices of animals, but also to personal self-sacrifice, which can be accomplished by reviewing and memorizing his Torah studies again and again, even 101 times.

The extra sum of one in addition to the complete sum of 100, totaling 101, indicates that the study of Torah is never completed. There is no specific point of beginning or end. One must continue his studies further, as the additional number one implies, through reviewing and memorizing. This is incumbent upon every Jew, each according to his ability.

In our days, since the practice of bringing sacrifices on the Altar has been abolished, and we cannot atone for our misdeeds in this way, the obligation to dedicate oneself to reviewing Torah constantly is even greater. To the extent that one accustoms himself to reviewing his Torah studies, he will be rewarded accordingly from Heaven.

Once a man asked me why we are obligated to review and memorize the Talmud again and again. At that time, I did not answer him. He later participated in one of my lectures and approached me afterwards to express his pleasure in hearing the insight that I had offered regarding one of the pesukim. I reminded him of the question that he had asked me concerning the reason for reviewing Talmud many times. I told him that just the day before I had delivered a lecture concerning the very same pasuk, but I had explained it in a different way. However, after reviewing it the following day, I discovered new and deeper insights, leading me to search in various *sefarim* that dealt with the topic. In this merit, I formulated the novel explanation that he so much enjoyed.

Your Clothing Shall Be Spotless at All Times

"Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying…"

(*Vayikra* 1:1)

The Seforno comments regarding Hashem's call to Moshe that "one should never enter the *Ohel Moed* without permission." Therefore, Hashem called to him and told him to enter the *Ohel Moed*.

Even after Moshe Rabbeinu finished erecting the Mishkan, he did not enter without permission, but only approached after Hashem called to him. Moshe sanctified himself properly and was prepared and ready at all times to speak with Hashem. In the event that Hashem would call him from the *Ohel Moed*, he would be prepared to enter immediately.

This sets the example of how a person should constantly sanctify himself in preparation of the event that Hashem will at some time call to him, heralding his death. A short while ago, a Jew died suddenly from a heart attack while he was in a nightclub. It is a disgrace to arrive in the World of Truth from a center of defilement and impurity. On the other hand, a few years ago, the *gaon*, Rav Shimshon Pincus, ztk"l, died in a car accident upon his return from delivering a Torah lecture. Fortunate is he, and fortunate is his lot, that he arrived to the World of Truth while involved in a mitzvah.

Reasons for the Korbanot

"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering"

(*Vayikra* 1:2)

The *korbanot* can be explained as follows:

קרבן עולה – The olah-offering was burned entirely on the Altar. The fact that the entire animal was burned helps a person realize that all his money and possessions come from Hashem. At His will He provides for us, and at His will He withholds from us.

קרבן פסח – The Pesach-offering instilled *emunah* in those who offered it, by recalling how our forefathers in Egypt risked their lives by slaughtering the lamb, which was the idol of the Egyptians, before their eyes.

קרבן חטאת – The chatat-offering's implications are disputed among our Rabbis:

The Ramban explains (*Vayikra* 1:9) that the reason for the *chatat*-offering was to arouse the sinner to teshuvah. When he would witness the animal being placed on the Altar, he would reflect that due to his sins he himself deserved to be slaughtered on the Altar. This would cause him to repent.

On the other hand, the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* III, 46) proposes that in Egypt, Bnei Yisrael got used to seeing how the Egyptians slaughtered animals for their idols in order to atone for their sins. Hashem commanded that *korbanot* should be brought for His sake so that Bnei Yisrael would know that atonement can only be obtained from Hashem.

The gaon in *mussar*, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, zt"l, adds (see *Lev Eliyahu, Vayikra*, pg. 13) that the pleasant aroma of the *korbanot* was in accordance with the person's intentions while engaged in bringing the sacrifice. He caused Hashem to enjoy its pleasant scent. This was especially true regarding one who had committed a crime and now did complete teshuvah for his sins through his sacrifice.

We may add, according to what Chazal teach (see *Lev Eliyahu Vayikra* 36, in the name of the *Zohar*), that when a person sins, a terrible odor issues from the same limb with which he sinned. It ascends to Heaven and bothers the administering angels in the middle of their service. Ultimately, the angels come to dispel this odor with the fire from the river Dinur, where angels are burned for Hashem's sake while reciting "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*." At the time that the sacrifice is brought, it creates a pleasant scent for Hashem, which remedies the terrible odor caused by the sin.

Admitting One's Error

"When a ruler sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done – unintentionally – and becomes guilty"

(*Vayikra* 4:22)

The pasuk says, "אשר נשיא יחטא – When a ruler sins." Rashi explains that the word אשר is related to the word אשרי (fortunate). This suggests that fortunate is the generation whose leader confesses his error and seeks to atone for it. He does not persist in his mistake by denying his error. Among our contemporary Rabbis, the true test to their greatness

is their ability to admit their mistakes. This indicates their true fear of Heaven. It proves that their sole intention is to clarify the Torah laws. When a Rabbi persists with his mistaken belief, it indicates that it is not the honor of the Torah that he is pursuing, but his own. Such a Rabbi is not a worthy leader.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81a) relates the following incident concerning Rabbi Amram Chassida. He was well-known for his devotion in performing the mitzvah of redeeming captives. One day, Rabbi Amram redeemed a group of girls and provided shelter for them in his loft. When one of the girls passed by the entrance, her face was lit up, and Rabbi Amram ran toward her. He dragged a heavy ladder, which ten men would not be able to move, and began to climb the stairs. Suddenly, he shouted, "There's a fire in the house of Amram!" The talmidei chachamim came and saw him in this position. They said to him, "You should be ashamed of yourself." He replied, "It is preferable for me to be ashamed in this world, than in the Next." Similarly, the Torah praises the *Nasi,* or leader, who forfeits his honor in order to admit his error. His dominant fear is the fear of Heaven.

When discussing the obligations of the leaders, the Torah seems to distinguish between the *Nasi* and the Sanhedrin. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 4:13) states, “If the entire assembly of Israel shall err, and a matter became obscured from the eyes of the congregation.” Rashi specifies that “the entire assembly of Israel” refers to the Sanhedrin. We must clarify why regarding the *Nasi* the word אשר is used, hinting how fortunate the generation is to have such a leader who confesses in public, whereas regarding the Sanhedrin, there is no praise lavished on them for confessing their oversights. Is the Sanhedrin inferior to the *Nasi* that its members are not praised in this way?

The difference between the Sanhedrin and the *Nasi* is not in their status, but in their responsibility. There were seventy members of the Sanhedrin, and there was only one *Nasi* for each *shevet.* Although there was a total of twelve *Nesi’im*, each one was a leader of his tribe and had to singularly shoulder the responsibility for his decisions. This was not the case regarding the Sanhedrin, who shared the responsibility of their decisions

amongst each other. If the Sanhedrin were to blunder and come to a wrong conclusion then the responsibility of the error would be shared amongst them all. Therefore, the humiliation stemming from the error would likewise be shared. However, the disgrace of a *Nasi* remained his alone when he erred. He took sole responsibility for his judgment. For a *Nasi* to confess is a far greater challenge than that of the Sanhedrin, who collectively shared their blame. It is for this reason that the *Nasi* is so greatly praised when he overcomes his subjectivity and acts solely for the sake of Hashem. Admitting his error in public required so much more self-sacrifice than that of the Sanhedrin. The Torah emphasizes that when a *Nasi* behaves in this way, despite his intense humiliation, he exemplifies the pasuk (*Mishlei* 28:13), "He who confesses and forsakes them will be granted mercy."

The Additional One-fifth

"For what he has deprived the Sanctuary he shall make restitution, and add a fifth to it, and he shall give it to the Kohen; then the Kohen shall provide him atonement with the ram of the guilt-offering, and it shall be forgiven him"

(*Vayikra* 5:16)

A person who sinned by using something belonging to the Beit Hamikdash for his own personal use had to refund the item itself, and add a fifth as a fine for stealing. The Ben Ish Chai (*Shanah Sheniyah, Vayikra*) explains this pasuk in a mystical way. He reveals that every positive commandment and every negative prohibition are intertwined with the twenty-two letters of the Torah. By performing a mitzvah, a person makes

a specific combination of the twenty-two letters. On the other hand, when a person sins and transgresses a prohibition, he creates a schism among the twenty-two letters of the Torah, causing them to scatter.

According to the Ben Ish Chai, a person must mend his misdeed by repairing the damage caused in the disbanding of the twenty-two letters of the Torah as a result of his sin. He can accomplish this by reciting the *viduy*, which is composed of the twenty-two letters of the Torah, thereby perfecting them. This concept is hinted to in the pasuk which states, "ואת אשר חטא – For what he has deprived." The word את alludes to the Hebrew letters ranging from א' to ת'. This indicates that one who sinned is obligated to say the *viduy* that includes words of repentance beginning with the letter א' and finishing with the letter ת'. In this way, he will unify the twenty-two letters, repairing the schism created by his sin.

Furthermore, the word חמישיתו (a fifth) hints to the five final letters ך ם, ן, ף, ץ which must also be repaired [see in depth *Ben Ish Chai, Parashat Vayikra*].

The total number of letters in the Torah, including the five final letters, totals twenty-seven, which is the *gematria* of זך (pure). At the conclusion of Pirkei Avot it says, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon Israel; therefore he gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance." The Torah and mitzvot are composed of the letters of the Torah, which serve to purify us. Thus, a person who wishes to achieve perfection in Avodat Hashem must strictly adhere to fulfilling the positive commandments and avoid transgressing the negative prohibitions.

In the beginning of *masechet Pesachim* it states that in order to destroy the chametz as mandated by the Torah, it is enough to state that it is annulled by word of mouth. However, Chazal instituted the obligation to physically check for chametz in addition to the verbal annulment. Ultimately, they ruled (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 434b) that one must do both *bedikat chametz*, by physically searching for the chametz, and also *bitul chametz* through a verbal statement. Why do we need both?

The actual search for chametz hints to the effort one must invest in the fulfillment of mitzvot. This can be compared to a man who is involved in business in order to earn an income. It is insufficient to merely cover his expenses; he must actively labor in order to earn profits so that he will have money to live in an honorable fashion.

The word חמישיתו (the additional fifth) hints to the effort and labor required of a person in addition to the basic fulfillment of each mitzvah. It is not sufficient to fulfill only the basic minimum in Torah and mitzvot. When learning Torah, there is the mandatory study, which we are commanded to do, as well as the additional effort that one must expend in his studies. A person should attempt to enhance and improve his Avodat Hashem, by exerting effort in his Torah studies. It is this increase in effort that protects him from sin. Chazal (*Ketubot* 59b) state, "Idleness leads to sin." If one wishes to avoid sinning, he should put extra effort into his learning. Through his hard work and concentration, he will be saved from the cunning of the *Yetzer Hara*, who seeks to destroy him.

When a person misappropriated property belonging to the Beit Hamikdash, he was required to repay both the principle (what he took) and a supplement (an additional one-fifth). This teaches that it is only the additional effort that we expend in learning that ensures us protection against sin and misappropriating that which is holy.

Tzav

The Olah-offering

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame on it"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Parashat *Tzav* begins with the subject of *korbanot*. The first commandment describes the *olah*-offering. It is termed עולה (rising) because the entire animal was burned as a sacrifice, its complete content rising to Heaven. The Kohen did not receive any part of this sacrifice as priestly gifts. This custom of sacrificing *korbanot* existed in the times of the Beit Hamikdash. However, after the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, the *korbanot* were abolished. Today the tefillot that we pray three times a day substitute for the *korbanot* (*Berachot* 26b), as it says (*Hoshea* 14:3), "Let our lips substitute for bulls."

The main purpose of a *korban* was to achieve atonement for sin. According to the Ramban (*Vayikra* 1:9), when a person would observe

what was being done to the animal brought as a *korban*, he would become aware that this procedure was actually meant to be done to him. However, since Hashem is a merciful and compassionate God, He granted him an opportunity to repent through bringing a *korban*. By observing what transpired with the animal, he would be aroused to complete teshuvah, and he would not easily repeat his error.

Apart from the purpose of achieving atonement, one would also bring a *korban* when he wished to express his overflowing gratitude to Hashem in return for His many favors and kindnesses toward him.

As mentioned, the *korban olah* was different from other *korbanot* in that it was totally consecrated to Hashem, without the Kohen gaining any share in it. This teaches that there are situations in which one must dedicate himself entirely to Hashem without considering himself. One example of this is tefillah, praying to Hashem. In essence, it is a practice which should be totally consecrated to Hashem. When a person stands in prayer before his Creator, he should imagine that he is standing before the Master of the Universe. Unfortunately, only few exceptional individuals truly feel the fear of facing the Al-mighty. Most people divide their prayers: one-half of their attention is devoted to Hashem, while the other half is reserved for their own interests. This has given rise to the joke: "If something slipped your mind, just begin praying and you'll surely remember it."

Another example of implementing the concept taught by the *olah*-offering is during one's set times for Torah study. One should be aware that this time is consecrated totally for Hashem's sake. One should not engage in idle chatter at this time, speak on his cell phone, or consider other irrelevant issues. This behavior distracts one from the true purpose for which he came to the Beit Hamidrash. Instead of immersing himself entirely in the study of Torah, he engages in worthless matters. In the end, his visit to the Beit Hamidrash becomes a social event, causing *bitul* Torah, *rachmana litzlan*.

The *korban olah* trains a person to give wholeheartedly to Hashem, without ulterior motives. This is the ultimate form of giving, since a person gives without expecting anything in return. His entire purpose is only to express his gratitude to Hashem. Ultimately, the *korban olah* trains a person to express gratitude to Hashem for all the kindness and compassion that He bestows upon him constantly without expecting to receive anything in return.

The word עולה has the same root as עליה (ascent). Just as ascending a steep mountain requires undivided attention, lest one slip and fall over the edge, so too, the *korban olah* must be offered with undivided interests. Its contents may not be shared with anyone other than Hashem. Since this gift is consecrated entirely for Hashem, the elevation and exultation experienced when offering it is unparalleled.

It is the accepted custom to first begin teaching children the parshiyot that deal with sacrifices (*Tanchuma* 96:14). Why is this so? After all, these are the most complicated and involved parshiyot of the Torah. It would seem more appropriate to begin with simpler topics.

The word קרבן (sacrifice) is related to the word הקרבה (self-sacrifice). This implies that when one brings a *korban,* he actually sacrifices and relinquishes a part of himself for Hashem's sake. He also gives of himself to the Kohen, who benefits from the priestly gifts that he receives from the *korban*. Thus a *korban* trains a person to share his possessions with others and overcome his inherent selfish interests. We begin a child's education with the parshiyot that deal with *korbanot*, since it is essential to imbue them with the virtues of benevolence, self-sacrifice, and concession, which are the foundations of the Jewish nation.

The life of a Jew is replete with self-sacrifice and concessions for Hashem's sake and for the sake of his fellow Jew. By training a child from a young age to be benevolent and submissive, later on he will find it easy to incorporate these virtues into his being, in order to become a true servant of Hashem.

The first *olah*-offering was Yitzchak Avinu himself, as it states in the parashah of the *Akeidah* (*Bereishit* 22:2), "And He said, 'Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak – go to the Har Hamoriah, and bring him up there as an *olah*-offering upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you.'" Hashem requested from Avraham Avinu that he sacrifice his only son as an *olah*-offering. Avraham Avinu hurried to fulfill Hashem's will and immediately saddled his donkey to perform His command. He did not know that Hashem would ultimately order a ram to be sacrificed instead. His swiftness in fulfilling Hashem's will demonstrated his great faith and devotion to Him.

When Hashem requested of Avraham to sacrifice his son, Avraham turned to Sarah and told her that he was taking Yitzchak to a yeshiva (*Tanchuma, Vayeira* 22). He did not tell her where he was really going. At first glance this may seem like a lie, since he knew the true purpose of his trip. However, when one fulfills Hashem's will, it is considered as if he is learning Torah. Just as the study of Torah creates *nachat ruach* for Hashem, so too, does the fulfillment of His will.

This idea can be seen in the word מצוה itself. It is comprised of the word צו (command) and the letters מ"ה. The numerical value of the letters מ"ה is identical to that of אדם (man). This signifies that the purpose of the creation of man is in order to command him regarding the mitzvot. When a person performs the commandments, fulfilling Hashem's will, he realizes the purpose of his creation.

Ultimately, Hashem prevented Avraham from sacrificing his son Yitzchak, not allowing him even to leave the slightest mark on his body (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56:7). Hashem's intention was to teach all future generations that a person must always be prepared to sacrifice himself entirely for Hashem's sake. One can achieve self-sacrifice by surrendering one's personal ambitions in order to fulfill Hashem's will.

This concept is the foundation of the Jewish nation. Only when one is prepared to utilize all his abilities and talents in the service of Hashem, does he merit realizing the purpose of man's creation.

Avraham understood this message, and he proved to Hashem that he was prepared to execute anything that was required of him for Hashem's sake. He epitomized self-sacrifice and total submission to Hashem. Therefore, Hashem ultimately prevented him from sacrificing his son and arranged for a ram to substitute as an offering.

The Torah teaches that on the way to the *Akeidah* "the two of them went together." Chazal (*Tanchuma, Vayeira* 23; *Rashi* 22:8) comment that this phrase teaches us that just as Avraham was prepared to sacrifice his only son, who was born to him at the age of one hundred, likewise Yitzchak was equally willing to be brought as an *olah*-offering for Hashem. This was despite his relatively young age of thirty-seven, and despite the fact that he had not yet married, and had no children to perpetuate his memory.

Upon reading this account, we may wonder how we, on our less exalted level, can emulate our forefathers through acting with self-sacrifice for Hashem's sake, bringing a *korban olah* in our days. However, I believe that our lives are replete with opportunities to make sacrifices for Hashem. For example, when one shuts his ears in order not to listen to derogatory gossip, even though it sounds immensely interesting, he is truly sacrificing a *korban* for Hashem's sake. Likewise, when one engages in the study of Torah and does not lift his head out of the *sefer*, but instead involves himself entirely in the Torah discourse, this too is considered as a *korban olah* for Hashem. Also, when one concedes his will to the will of Hashem, overcoming his passion in order to fulfill Hashem's bidding, then this is considered as if he brought a *korban olah* for Hashem.

I personally witnessed that when one sacrifices himself for Hashem's sake, then he merits extraordinary *siyata di'Shemaya.* When I was flying on a plane, I suddenly had a flash of inspiration regarding a concept in Torah. In order not to forget it, I immediately began to record my thoughts. Later, I noticed that I had succeeded in explaining the concept in the same way as the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, to whom we cannot be compared.

On a different occasion, when I was involved in recording my novel insights during a plane ride, a stewardess approached my seat and placed my meal in front of me. Since I was busy writing, I had not yet tasted my food when I noticed the stewardess approaching again. Before I had a chance to figure out the reason for this, she exchanged the portion of food that she had originally placed in front of me with a different one. She apologized profusely, explaining that by mistake she had originally given me a non-kosher meal.

Upon witnessing this, I was filled with joy at having been saved from eating prohibited foods. I attributed my good fortune to my complete involvement in Torah, to the extent that I overcame my desire for food in order to finish recording my novel insight. When Hashem observed my efforts in expounding His Torah, He immediately came to my aid, protecting me from eating non-kosher food. This was a literal fulfillment of the maxim "A person who comes to purify himself receives Divine assistance" (*Shabbat* 104a).

In Summary

- In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, Bnei Yisrael used to sacrifice the *korban olah*. All other *korbanot* were shared with the Kohen, whereas the *korban olah* was consecrated entirely for Hashem.
- One reason for this may be in order to teach us that there are some issues in the course of our lives that require complete dedication to Hashem. Regarding these issues, we may not seek to take a share in them for ourselves.
- The *korban olah* trains us to express gratitude to Hashem wholeheartedly without seeking to receive anything in return.
- It is customary to first begin teaching children the parshiyot of *korbanot* despite their complexity, in order to train them from youth to be benevolent, submissive, and to express gratitude. These are the foundations of the Jewish nation.

- Avraham Avinu hurried to fulfill Hashem's command to sacrifice his son. When Hashem observed his immense joy in fulfilling His will, He ordered a ram to be brought as an *olah*-offering instead of Yitzchak. It states, "And the two of them went together." This implies that Yitzchak was just as willing and joyful to fulfill Hashem's command as his father.
- The word מצוה is comprised of the word צו (command) and the letters מ"ה, which have the same numerical value as אדם – man. This signifies that the purpose of the creation of man is to perform mitzvot swiftly and with joy.
- By overcoming one's passions in order to fulfill Hashem's bidding, one is in essence sacrificing a *korban olah* for Hashem. The greater the difficulty, the more worthy is his sacrifice. Those who endeavor to succeed amidst adversity will realize that "a person who comes to purify himself receives Divine assistance."

Enthusiastically Fulfilling Hashem's Will

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame on it"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Rashi explains this pasuk in the following way: "Command" expresses urging on, for the immediate moment, and for future generations. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "Scripture must especially urge in a situation where there is loss of money." Normally a Kohen would receive

substantial portions of the sacrifice which provided him with his livelihood. Conversely, the *korban olah* was completely burned and thus considered to be a loss for him, since he did not receive the food he would otherwise have gained.

The explanation of Rashi raises a question. Is it possible that the Kohen would neglect the *korban* from which he derived no benefit and therefore need to be urged to sacrifice it? The Kohanim were elevated individuals and were aware of their unique privilege to serve in the Beit Hamikdash sacrificing the *korbanot*. How can we assume that the Kohen would shirk his duty toward a *korban* because it did not yield him any personal gain?

It seems that this behavior is characteristic of human nature, which applies to the exalted Kohanim as well. When one is obligated to fulfill a task that is entirely altruistic, deriving no personal benefit from it, he finds it objectionable. We must be aware that since the sin of Adam, the power of the Satan has strengthened significantly, and he seeks every opportunity to disturb those involved in Avodat Hashem, especially in matters which are performed for the sake of Heaven. The *Yetzer Hara* redoubles his efforts to thwart the spiritual advance of a person who is involved in an act that is termed an *olah*. This is because it is a completely selfless act, whereby one is entirely dedicated to fulfilling Hashem's will without personal gains. Therefore, a person should strengthen himself constantly to withstand the ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, who attempts to lower his spiritual standards.

After Adam Harishon sinned, the world was desolate until Am Yisrael filled the spiritual void by accepting the Torah and proclaiming (*Shemot* 24:7), "We will do and we will obey!" However, this exalted state was marred by the sin of the Golden Calf. As a result of the sin, the world returned to desolation. The sin was the result of man's *Yetzer Hara*, which draws him toward material and physical pleasures. A person weighs his actions in accordance with the benefits that he will derive from them. Rabbeinu Bachya writes about this phenomenon in *Chovot Halevavot* (*Sha'ar Avodat Elokim, Perek* 6): "The Understanding (says)… all this is occasioned by three dispositions: The first is your excessive self-love, and

desire to gain for yourself every gratification. You do not move a step in the service of the Al-mighty or for any other purpose without the intent to enjoy pleasures."

There is a story told about Rabbi Yisrael of Salant, zy"a, who once travelled on a train going to Vilna. During his journey, a young Jewish student came to sit next to him. He turned to Rabbi Yisrael, who was smoking a cigarette, and asked him to stop smoking. Rabbi Yisrael proceeded to fulfill the student's demand, despite the fact that he was sitting in the smoking section of the train. A short while later, the student demanded that Rabbi Yisrael close the window, saying that he was cold. Rabbi Yisrael, once more, did as requested and closed the window, ignoring the scornful tone of the student, and despite the fact that it was not he who had opened the window.

When the train reached its destination, there were crowds of admirers and followers waiting on the platform to greet the famed Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. Upon realizing the identity of the person whom he had criticized, the student was aghast that he had dared show contempt to such an esteemed Rabbi. Immediately, he ran to the lodging of Rabbi Yisrael and begged his forgiveness. Rabbi Yisrael forgave him and asked him for what reason he had come to Vilna. The student answered that the purpose of his visit was in order to obtain rabbinical ordination to be a recognized *shochet*. Rabbi Yisrael immediately arranged for someone to teach him the subject thoroughly in order to prepare him for his exam. However, the student failed his initial exam. Thereafter, Rabbi Yisrael himself patiently reviewed the subject with him until he was successfully ordained.

When this student saw the outstanding treatment that Rabbi Yisrael accorded him, he asked how Rabbi Yisrael could behave in such an exceptional manner, especially after suffering his scorn. Rabbi Yisrael told him, "You should know that in order for me to be able to forgive you completely, I first had to do a favor for you to ensure that I had gotten rid of all my hard feelings." We are amazed at the lofty level Rabbi Yisrael attained. Clearly, this is not characteristic of most people.

We are well aware that man's nature is to be exceedingly cautious in matters pertaining to his own well-being. However, in matters that are entirely for the sake of Heaven, or for the benefit of fellow Jews, frequently one slackens in his commitment. Therefore, the Torah urges even the outstanding Kohanim with a command to correct this inherent flaw of dawdling in matters which are entirely spiritual. In order for a person to perfect his attitude, he must make great efforts, just as Rabbi Yisrael did to overcome his natural tendencies to harbor hate. We should strive to emulate Rav Yisrael, who succeeded in reaching an elevated level of behavior whereby he was capable of extending himself in favor of one who mocked him in public.

The Rambam writes (*Issurei Hamizbeach* 7:11) that one must give to the poor more than one allots for himself. It is very difficult to practice this halachah. The nature of a person is such that one tends to favor himself more than his fellow man. Man needs to be urged to perform deeds that require effort, whether extending physical effort, or extending honor to another. However, when it comes to extending financial aid or spending money in order to fulfill a mitzvah, one needs even more prompting, since it is natural for a person to be attached to his possessions and pursue wealth.

It says in parashat *Emor* (*Vayikra* 21:1), "Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people." Rashi comments on these words, "The Torah uses the redundant wording of 'say' followed by 'and you shall say' in order 'to enjoin adults with regard to minors - להזהיר גדולים על קטנים.'" This teaches that when a person is meticulous and conscientious in performing lofty mitzvot (גדולים) for the sake of Heaven, one will eventually exercise caution in fulfilling even the routine mitzvot (קטנים), which most people neglect.

In parashat *Tzav* (ibid. 6:3-4) it states, "The Kohen shall don his fitted linen Tunic, and he shall don linen Breeches on his flesh; he shall raise the ashes which the fire will consume… He shall remove his garments, and he shall wear other garments." Rashi expounds on the words "he

shall remove his garments" that it is not an obligation, but rather, proper conduct, so that he should not dirty the garments which he serves in constantly, through taking out the ashes. Rashi gives the example that a servant should not pour a cup of wine for his master while wearing the same garments in which he was dressed when he cooked a pot of food for his master. Therefore the Kohen "shall wear other garments," superior to them.

Rashi's description of the Kohen's conduct raises a question. Couldn't the Kohen be careful not to dirty his clothes during his priestly service? Why was it necessary to change his clothes completely? This teaches us that it is not proper for the Kohen to continue his service even if only a minute speck of ashes fell on his clothes. This is because even a minute speck might distract the Kohen from his service, which is of an utmost holy nature.

The great caution displayed by the Kohen teaches how careful we should be in our service of Hashem. Our Avodat Hashem should be immaculate. No idleness or lethargy should accompany the performance of mitzvot, despite the inherent laziness of man's nature regarding spiritual achievements. One should overcome this nature and make an effort to be enthusiastic and swift in his service of Hashem.

In Summary

- It is difficult to understand why Hashem had to exhort the Kohanim, urging them regarding the *korban olah*, when their sole ambition was to serve Hashem fervently and swiftly. However, this indicates that the inherent nature of man is to be negligent in matters that are done entirely for the sake of Heaven, from which he gains no personal benefit.
- Since the sin of Adam Harishon, the *Yetzer Hara* has intensified, especially regarding matters performed entirely for the sake of Heaven. Because of man's inherent nature to pursue material and physical gratification, a person tends to weigh his actions in accordance with the pleasures he will derive by doing them.

- The command of the Torah regarding the *korban olah*, urging the Kohanim on in their service, despite the fact that they were elevated individuals, teaches us about the nature of man. It emphasizes that man tends to be slack and negligent in matters regarding his fellow man, as opposed to expending energetic efforts in matters that will bring him personal gain. One is wary of extending himself to others when it entails effort, all the more so when it comes to extending financial aid.

- "Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them." According to Rashi, the Torah uses the redundant wording of "say" followed by "and you shall say" in order "to enjoin adults with regard to minors" להזהיר גדולים על קטנים. By exercising care in performing the lofty mitzvot (גדולים) that are entirely for the sake of Heaven, one will eventually exercise caution in fulfilling even the routine mitzvot (קטנים), which most people neglect.

- The Torah commands the Kohen to change his clothes when removing the ashes. This teaches us a lesson. If the Kohen would not change his clothes, even though he would exercise caution when bringing the *korbanot*, there would probably still be a trace of ashes on his clothes, which would distract him from his holy service. The need for the Kohen to entirely change his clothes, so that he should not be even minimally distracted while serving Hashem, hints to the importance of being enthusiastic and swift in our Avodat Hashem.

Giving Precedence to the Olah-offering

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame on it"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Rashi explains this pasuk in the following way: "Command" can only be meant to express urging on, for the immediate moment, and for future generations. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: "Scripture must especially urge one on in a situation where there is loss of money." This seems to indicate that since the *korban olah* was burnt entirely as a sacrifice for Hashem, without allotting any portion of it for the priestly gifts, the Torah had to urge the Kohen in this service so that he should not neglect it. The Torah exhorts him to hasten in this service even though he does not receive any personal benefit from it.

It is difficult to understand how we can suspect the Kohen of neglecting the service of sacrificing the *korban olah*. The Kohanim were exceptionally righteous and pious, because they were constantly surrounded by the holy environment of the Beit Hamikdash. Why did the Torah specifically urge the Kohanim regarding this sacrifice when it seems that they would have been meticulous in its execution on their own accord? Would we ever think that servants of the king would neglect their duties? Their appointment indicates that they are completely devoted to the king.

Likewise, we may assume that since the Kohanim were chosen to serve in the House of Hashem, they were wholly devoted to Him, and would seek with all their might to fulfill His will. This would include meticulously sacrificing the *korban olah*. Even though the Kohanim did

not personally gain anything from this *korban*, it should not have deterred them from their dedication in its execution. Why then did the Torah specifically urge them in this service?

The *korban olah* was brought to atone for the sin of הרהור רע (dwelling on sinful thoughts). When a person would actively commit a sin, he would be required to bring a *korban chatat* and to confess his sin before the Kohen. This is not the case regarding הרהורים רעים – *hirhurim ra'im*. One who violated this type of prohibition would bring an *olah*-offering before the Kohen, without confessing verbally. The Kohen would not be aware for which evil thoughts the person was bringing his *korban*. He would not be aware of the sin's severity and the importance of bringing the *korban*. For this reason, he might not have hastened to sacrifice the *olah*-offering, thinking that it could be postponed.

Similarly, the Kohen might have been inclined to exhibit preference for the *korban chatat*, which may have seemed more important to him because it atoned for sins that had been actively committed, as opposed to a *hirhur ra* that remained in the realm of thought.

It is important to be aware that contemplating sin may be considered more severe than actually committing a sin. This is because when a person actively commits a sin his conscience gives him no rest, and this will eventually lead him to do complete teshuvah. This is not so regarding a sinful thought. When a person dwells on *hirhurim ra'im* without actually implementing them, he may not realize the severity of his transgression, since he did not take any action. He does not experience the same remorse as he would after actively transgressing. This may prevent him from doing teshuvah and correcting his fault. Moreover, since he feels no remorse, he will probably continue to dwell on these sinful thoughts, persisting in his corrupt behavior.

Therefore, the Kohen is obligated to hasten to bring the *korban olah*. It has the ability to remove the sinful thoughts from one's mind and to permeate a person with a pure spirit, replacing the *kelippah* which overcame him. Moreover, when a person would observe how the Kohen

hurried to sacrifice the *korban olah*, he would realize the severity of dwelling on sinful thoughts. This would bring him to do complete teshuvah. On the other hand, if a person would observe a laxity regarding the sacrifice of the *korban olah*, he would conclude that sinful thoughts that did not result in an active transgression are not so terrible. Thereafter, he would not vigilantly guard himself against such thoughts and would not seek atonement through the *korban olah*.

Hence, the Kohanim shouldered great responsibility in their obligation to sacrifice the *korban olah* swiftly. They were urged to do so, despite the fact that they did not derive personal pleasure from it. Handling the *korban* with utmost urgency emphasized the severity of sinful thoughts. The person became aware how vigilant he must be to guard himself from continuing in his errant behavior. The Torah specifically used the word "command" regarding the *korban olah* to imply swiftness. This served to make the Kohanim aware of their immense responsibility.

The Kohen did not gain any material profit from the *korban olah*. However, he gained a tremendous spiritual profit, since he served as an agent to bring his fellow Jews to complete teshuvah. Through sacrificing the *korban* swiftly, the Kohen aroused the person to the severity of the *hirhurim ra'im* that had overcome him. Any future precaution the person would take against entertaining *hirhurim ra'im* would serve as a merit for the Kohen. By treating the *korban* with urgency, the Kohen demonstrated how severe the corruption of *hirhurim ra'im* was and how careful one must be to guard himself from this serious matter.

Parashat *Tzav* is often the portion of the Torah that is read on Shabbat Hagadol. There is a connection between the two which we can fully understand only after exploring their background. Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Shabbat) is called by this name because of the great miracle that Hashem wrought for our forefathers in Egypt on that day. The Egyptians were furious when they witnessed the Jews sacrificing their sheep, since it was their idol. They saw the Jews tying the sheep to the foot of their beds for four days and then roasting it over a fire and eating it in groups. Chazal say (see *Tur Orach Chaim* 430; *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 5:17(55);

Shemot Rabbah 16:3) that when the Egyptians observed the Jews roasting their idol, they gnashed their teeth in anger, yet they were unable to harm them.

Why did Hashem instruct the Jews to slaughter the deity of the Egyptians and roast it over a fire and eat it? Would it not have sufficed for Hashem to perform miracles in order for the Jews to realize His great power and supremacy? Clearly, Hashem could have instilled Am Yisrael's belief in Him through His wondrous acts even if the Jews had not slaughtered the idols of the Egyptians.

Am Yisrael required a specific act that would leave an indelible impression upon their hearts in order to completely remove their belief in the Egyptian idols. It was true that the amazing miracles that they witnessed would bring them to serve Hashem and loyally fulfill his commandments. However, they might continue to revere the idols of the Egyptians and simultaneously believe in their powers, as well. Even had the Jews not actively worshipped the idols, they might have reserved an admiration for them, creating a *hirhur* for idolatry in the recesses of their minds. This was a result of having been influenced by the idol worship of the Egyptians for so many years. It was inevitable that some impression of idol worship would remain etched in their hearts.

In essence, the Egyptians also believed in a higher power, but they thought that the sheep was an agent to the higher power and had to be served as well, *rachmana litzlan*. Since Bnei Yisrael had been influenced by the idol worship of the Egyptians for so long, it would follow that they would believe in the Creator of the World, but might simultaneously revere the sheep, attributing power to it also. Through slaughtering the sheep upon Hashem's command, Am Yisrael completely eradicated the belief in the power of the Egyptian idols. This enabled them to believe in Hashem wholeheartedly, excluding the concepts of agents or other powers.

This important lesson is the connection between parashat *Tzav* and Shabbat Hagadol. As we explained, parashat *Tzav* teaches us about the

severity of *hirhur ra*, which is not accompanied by an action. Shabbat Hagadol teaches the same lesson. Hashem considered the *hirhur ra* for idolatry so hazardous that He instructed Am Yisrael to slaughter the sheep, even though this entailed placing Bnei Yisrael in great danger. This ensured that no corrupt thought regarding this idol would ever enter their minds, minimizing their belief in Hashem's supremacy. It was worth placing them in danger and having to perform a miracle to protect them, in order to eradicate any negative thoughts that would prevent them from serving Hashem wholeheartedly.

In Summary

- It is difficult to understand why the Kohanim needed urging to sacrifice the *korban olah* even though they did not gain any priestly gifts from it, as they did with the other *korbanot*, since it was burned entirely. It would not occur to us that the Kohanim would neglect their service. The explanation is that since the Kohanim did not know the reason that the person had for bringing the *korban*, because there was no verbal confession during this sacrifice, he might therefore assume that the other *korbanot* were more important and thus took precedence. This might cause him to delay the sacrifice of the *olah*.
- We should be aware that having *hirhurim ra'im* is worse than actively committing a transgression. This is because after actively committing a sin, one suffers from a guilty conscience, which eventually leads him to repent. However, a person who had a *hirhur ra*, without actively committing a sin, might remain corrupt because he would not feel the necessity to repent. Therefore, the Torah urged the Kohen not to delay bringing the *korban olah*, because of its importance. The *korban olah* had the potential to remove corrupt thoughts from a person and help him do complete teshuvah.
- Often the portion of parashat *Tzav* is read on Shabbat Hagadol. Hashem performed a great miracle on that day: The Egyptians could not harm the Jews despite the fact that they took the sheep, the idol of the Egyptians, and tied it to the foot of their beds, preparing it to be slaughtered. Why

did Hashem command the Jews to slaughter the sheep, which placed them in great danger? Could He not have instilled belief in Him in the hearts of the Jewish nation through wondrous miracles? Hashem wanted Am Yisrael to do a memorable act that would serve to eradicate from their hearts any reverence they harbored for the Egyptian idols. It was of paramount importance to eliminate even a *hirhur* for idolatry. This justified placing the Jews in mortal danger and thereafter performing a miracle to protect them.

- Had Hashem relied solely on the performance of miracles, Bnei Yisrael would have believed in Him. But they might very well have simultaneously continued to attribute power to the idols of the Egyptians, even though they would not have actively worshipped them. This was a danger that threatened their wholehearted service of Hashem. Therefore, the connection between parashat *Tzav* and Shabbat Hagadol is that they both teach us the severity of harboring corrupt thoughts. Hashem instructed Bnei Yisrael to slaughter the idol of the Egyptians and likewise urged on the Kohanim in executing the *korban olah*, which rectifies sinful thoughts.

Bringing Merit to the Public

"Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame on it"

(*Vayikra* 6:2)

The pasuk states, "This is the law of the *olah*-offering: It is the *olah*-offering [that stays] on the flame." What is the reason for the double mention of the word *olah* (ascent)? This signifies two types of ascent. One

is the ascent of a person himself in the service of Hashem, and the second refers to the ascent of his fellow man. This teaches us that it is not sufficient for a person to pursue his own spiritual growth, but he must also be concerned with the spiritual state of his friends. From here we learn the importance of being *mezakeh harabim*. One may not assume that by pursuing his own spiritual growth he is exempt from helping others. He should also attempt to raise their spiritual level.

There is no need to fear that if one dedicates his time to helping others, his own Torah knowledge will be reduced. On the contrary, he should realize that the more he devotes his time to helping others grow in Torah, the more he will merit *siyata di'Shemaya* to retain his own knowledge of Torah, and he will inexplicably discover more time for his own personal growth.

I experience this myself. Because I dedicate my time for bringing merit to the public and strengthening their appreciation for Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, Hashem bestows upon me extraordinary *siyata di'Shemaya* to achieve greater depth in my understanding of Torah concepts. I recognize that this scope is beyond my natural level. It is only in the merit of helping others that I am granted the ability to grasp the true meaning of the text with such ease.

The parashah begins with the words (6:2) "Command Aharon." Rashi explains this in the following way: "Command" always means "urging on," for the immediate moment, and for future generations. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says, "Scripture must especially urge one on in a situation where there is loss of money." According to our line of thought, the Torah is teaching us that a person should not fear a loss by dedicating his time for helping others. He is assured that he will warrant Heavenly assistance to compensate for his deficiency. When Hashem observes someone being *mezakeh harabim*, he bestows upon him extra *siyata di'Shemaya* to achieve greatness in his Torah learning within a short time. This is above and beyond the level that he would have reached had he not extended his help toward his fellow.

Those who are *mezakeh harabim* raise the spiritual level of others. This is hinted to in the words "היא העולה – It is the *olah*-offering." The word עולה literally means ascent. One who causes another to ascend in his Avodat Hashem emulates Hashem. We find that Hashem Himself taught Moshe Rabbeinu Torah for forty days and forty nights. He did not delegate angels to teach Moshe, but devoted His own time in order to teach him. We should learn from Hashem's example. He did not consider it beyond His dignity to personally instruct Moshe. Likewise, we should devote our time to instruct others how to follow in the ways of the Torah.

The Torah states (*Vayikra* 6:2), "היא העולה על מוקדה – It is the *olah*-offering [that stays] on the flame." The word מוקדה (flame) is printed with a small מ'. This hints to Moshe Rabbeinu, who conducted himself with humility, and whose name begins with the letter מ'. Moreover, the *gematria* of מ' is forty, which hints to the forty days and nights that Moshe learned Torah directly from Hashem. Just as he dedicated his life to teaching Am Yisrael, so too should we devote our time to educating others.

Rabbeinu Bachya writes (*Sha'ar Ahavat Hashem*, *Perek* 6), "It is proper, my brother, that you should know that even if a believer attained the utmost limit in the improvement of his soul in its devotion to Hashem… his merits are not like those of one who leads men to the good path and turns the wicked to the right way to serve Hashem. For the merits of such a man are multiplied every day and at all seasons by the merits of those [whom he has improved]." Rabbeinu Bachya teaches that through serving Hashem, a person can become greatly elevated. Even so, he does not reach the heights of those who are *mezakeh harabim*, because their merits are multiplied constantly through those whom they influenced.

We are told (*Pirkei Avot* 5:18), "Whoever influences the masses to become meritorious shall not be the cause of sin." This is a Divine guarantee that whoever is *mezakeh harabim* will merit special protection, preventing him from sinning. He is also guaranteed that he will not cause others to sin.

Chazal (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 8) say that Elkanah used to ascend four times a year to Shiloh. He went three times prior to the three festivals and an additional time in order to keep a promise that he had made. Chazal relate that when Elkanah would be *oleh l'regel*, he would sleep in public thoroughfares in order to arouse the people about the importance of this mitzvah. At first, Elkanah succeeded in influencing only a few families. However, from year to year, he merited influencing more and more people to be *oleh l'regel*, until eventually all of Am Yisrael learned from his good example and joined him in his pilgrimage.

Because Elkanah was *mezakeh harabim*, he merited having an exceptional son, Shmuel Hanavi, who was equal to both Moshe and Aharon, as it says (*Tehillim* 99:6), "Moshe and Aharon were among His priests, and Shmuel among those who invoke His Name." Likewise it states (*Tanchuma, Tetzaveh* 8) that Shaul Hamelech deserved to be king in the merit of his father, who would light candles in the dark alleys so that people would be able to find their way easily to the Beit Hamidrash at night. Since he brought merit to the masses, he was granted a son who became king over the Jewish nation.

We all invest much effort and shed many tears in prayer for the successful *chinuch* of our children. We seek many different methods to ensure that they grow to be upright Jews, serving and fearing Hashem. Yet, there is a proven method of achieving success in raising children to fear Hashem, which is *zikuy harabim*. Each person should consider how he can help elevate other people's service of Hashem. Perhaps he is a proficient speaker, or easily makes others happy. One may discover that he excels in hosting guests. Accordingly, he should make this his mission. He could host ignorant Jews in order to demonstrate to them the beauty of Jewish life and keeping Shabbat.

I once asked a Torah scholar if he would agree to devote some of his time in order to educate unaffiliated Jews. He refused my request, claiming that it would hinder his own spiritual growth. This man met an unfortunate fate. His son eventually married a non-Jew, *rachmana litzlan*. Maybe, if he would have been prepared to contribute some of his time to

educating his ignorant brethren, Hashem would have protected his own sons from straying from the proper path. Therefore, those who desire their children to continue in the Jewish tradition should be aware that engaging in *zikuy harabim* is a proven guarantee for success.

The *Kedushat Levi* states (*Shir Hashirim*) in the name of the Maggid of Mezeritch, zy"a, "This is what the Ba'al Shem Tov, z"l, said and also my teacher, the tzaddik, Moreinu Dov Ber (the Maggid of Mezeritch) that as a result of the decline of a tzaddik from his elevated status (in order to benefit others), and his consequent efforts in returning to his lofty state, *neshamot* are created. This can be compared to one who attempts to extract his friend from mud and slime. He must first descend deep in the mud in order to lift his friend out. Likewise, when a tzaddik descends from his elevated state and thereafter exerts himself to return to his exalted status, *neshamot* of *geirim* are created. This concept is also hinted at in the writings of the Arizal."

To illustrate this point, imagine the following. A person passes by a muddy area. Suddenly, he sees a diamond sparkling through the grime. Would this person not immediately proceed to seize the diamond, even at the expense of muddying his suit? He wouldn't even think about ruining his suit! He would grab the diamond! Only a fool would worry about his suit.

We should relate to every Jewish soul in this manner. Every *neshamah* is compared to a precious diamond. Sometimes its shine is obvious, but sometimes it is hidden under a mound of mud and slime created by the *Yetzer Hara*. Should we not attempt to "jump into the filth" to save the precious diamond of a *neshamah* in order to purify and polish it, even when this does not "suit" our personal agenda and we feel it may hinder our own spiritual growth?

In this vein, we can explain the pasuk (*Vayikra* 6:4) "He (the Kohen) shall remove his garments, and he shall wear other garments, and he shall remove the ashes to the outside of the camp, to a pure place." One should

be willing to shed his own garments, impeding his personal growth, in order to ultimately purify others.

He should remove his garments and wear other garments; his sole purpose being to remove the "dirty ashes." The dirty ashes correspond to the Jewish *neshamot* steeped in sin. He should dedicate himself to removing errant Jews from their corruptive lifestyle and elevating them to live in purity. This is indicated by the continuation of the pasuk, which states that he should "remove the ashes outside the camp to a pure place." As we explained, it is insufficient for man to invest only in his own spiritual ascent.

Chazal (*Avot* 6:2) say, "Every single day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Har Chorev, proclaiming, 'Woe to them, to the people, because of [their] insult to the Torah!'" It is interesting to note that the mountain is referred to as Har Chorev rather than Har Sinai. The word חורב (Chorev) is similar to רחוב (street). There are many lost souls wandering in the street leading a lawless lifestyle. When Hashem sees these lost souls, He proclaims, "Woe to the people because of their insult to the Torah!" Hashem blames Am Yisrael for not attempting to save them. This is an affront to the Torah, whose study they neglect. It is incumbent upon us all to gather the lost souls and draw them into the Batei Midrashot, in order to envelope them with the holiness and purity existing within.

The pasuk in this parashah continues with the words (*Vayikra* 6:6) "A fire, continually, shall remain aflame on the Mizbeach; you shall not extinguish it." Rashi comments, "A fire about which 'continually' has been stated. It is the one with which they light the lamps of the Menorah, about which it says, 'to light a lamp continually.'" The *neshamah* is compared to a candle. The Torah hints that a person's heart should constantly be aflame with the burning desire to learn Torah. However, this passion should not be utilized for his own personal growth alone, but should also influence others. One should utilize the "continual" fiery love of Torah that burns within him to benefit others, in order to allow them to enjoy the warmth of a Torah environment as well.

One should not despair of any lost *neshamah*, thinking he is too far gone, since one does not know when a person is ripe for teshuvah. Hashem desires to dwell among the mortals below (*Tanchuma, Naso*16) as it states (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell among them" – among each and every member of Am Yisrael (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4). This is surprising. It would seem more fitting for Hashem, Who is like a consuming fire and is entirely Holy, to dwell amongst the celestial angels, who are holy and spiritual as well. Why, then does He desire to reside specifically in this world, where both the material and spiritual co-exist?

Hashem takes pleasure in the *mesirut nefesh* that His children demonstrate in their service of Him. They overcome their selfish tendencies and defeat the *Yetzer Hara* with great strength, in order that Hashem should reign supreme over the universe. Hashem seeks to dwell among his children despite the fact that the *Yetzer Hara* often conquers them. Just as Hashem descends to the lowly depths of this world and comes close to us in order to assist us in our spiritual ascent, likewise we should seek connection with errant Jews and elevate them, bringing them to dwell under the Canopy of the *Shechinah*. By drawing them close to Hashem and to His Torah, we will emulate Hashem, as we are taught (*Shabbat* 133b), "Just as He is merciful, so too should you be merciful."

It is possible that if one would attempt to influence an errant Jew who is far from Torah and mitzvot to return, this Jew may eventually acquire the courage to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake and accept the yoke of Torah and mitzvot. This would make it possible for Hashem to dwell within him. When a *neshamah* is returned to its source, it is as if a Mishkan has been built for Hashem. The Torah commends Moshe that (*Shemot* 40:18) "Moshe erected the Mishkan." This commendation will likewise be recorded by Hashem about those who are *mezakeh harabim*. Hashem will testify, "See how many Mishkanot you merited to erect because of your involvement in *zikuy harabim*. You managed to restore many broken and devastated Mishkanot with your *mesirut nefesh* in guiding them. Therefore, the credit is all yours."

This assignment is not easy at all. It is clear that *zikuy harabim* requires much effort, as it says (*Pirkei Avot* 5:24), "The reward is in proportion to the exertion." The more man labors and suffers from his task, the more his reward will be increased in *Olam Haba*. This is illustrated by the following account (*Eiruvin* 54b). Rabbi Preida had a student for whom he needed to repeat the lesson four hundred times. Once, this student did not comprehend the lesson even after learning it four hundred times. Rabbi Preida did not get angry or impatient. Instead, he taught it to him another four hundred times, exhibiting great self-sacrifice. When Hashem saw Rabbi Preida's dedication to his student, he asked him which reward he would prefer for his extraordinary efforts: long life, or that his entire generation would merit Gan Eden. Since Rabbi Preida was entirely selfless, he chose the latter. Upon hearing his choice, Hashem ordered that he be granted both rewards. How great is the reward for those who teach Torah to others, engaging in *zikuy harabim*!

However, it must be clear that investing in the education of one's own children takes precedence, and only thereafter should one undertake *zikuy harabim*. Once, a religious looking couple and their daughter came to see me. The moment the door closed behind them, the parents broke down crying about their daughter, who had become affiliated with a black non-Jew. As much as they tried separating the two, she stubbornly insisted on continuing the relationship. Upon hearing this, I was horrified. How did this young girl standing before me have the audacity to befriend a non-Jew, especially one from the descendants of Kush, who are a cursed nation? In spite of the long line of people waiting outside to see me, I devoted a whole hour convincing her to discontinue her relationship with him.

Since such incidents occur in our communities, we are obligated to pay extra attention to the *chinuch* of our children. Only after investing time in them can we devote ourselves to influencing others, as well. If one fulfills his obligation by educating his children properly, and in addition devotes time for *zikuy harabim*, then he will be granted Heavenly assistance in

reaping satisfaction from his own children. His children will continue to go in the path of our righteous ancestors. Their commendable progress will be considered a fulfillment of the underlying lesson implied by the repetition of the command regarding the *korban olah*, as mentioned, "This is the law of the *olah*-offering: It is the *olah*-offering [that stays] on the flame." By aiding in the spiritual ascent of others, one's personal spiritual ascent will be advanced.

In Summary

- The Torah repeats the word עולה (*olah*) to hint to the two forms of ascent that one should accomplish. He should both ascend in his own spiritual pursuits, as well as raise the spiritual level of his fellow man. It is not sufficient for a person to pursue his personal growth; he must also devote himself to *zikuy harabim*.
- One who dedicates his time to helping others merits accomplishing a lot in a short time and experiences much success in his Torah studies. The words of the pasuk, "צו את אהרן – Command Aharon" hints to this fact, since the word צו implies urging on. This signifies that Hashem compels man to contribute time to help others ascend spiritually, and promises that through this he will merit much benefit and blessing.
- We should learn from Hashem's example. He gave of His own time to personally teach Moshe Torah for forty days and nights. Furthermore, the small letter מ' in the word מוקדה alludes to Moshe Rabbeinu, whose name begins with the letter מ'. He selflessly dedicated himself to the Jewish nation and taught them Torah.
- The Torah states, "He shall remove his garments." This teaches us that a person should be willing to surrender his own ambitious pursuits in order to save lost souls. This is compared to the Kohen, who removed his priestly garments in order to clean the ashes. Likewise, one should involve himself in purifying straying souls from their spiritual pollution. This corresponds to the injunction, "When there is a need to act for the sake of Hashem, one should adjourn his Torah studies."

- The pasuk points out, "A fire, continually, shall remain aflame on the Mizbeach." This is the fire with which we light the Menorah. It implies that Hashem desires that our *neshamot*, which are compared to burning candles, should burn constantly with a passion for Torah. This fervor should not be limited to one's personal Torah growth, but also utilized to help others progress.

- The Torah commands: "They shall make Me a sanctuary – so that I may dwell among them." Hashem revealed His desire to reside amongst His children, despite the fact that it would seem more fitting for Him to dwell with the celestial hosts. The reason for His preference is because Bnei Yisrael demonstrate self-sacrifice, in spite of the persuasions of the *Yetzer Hara*, who attempts to lure them to engage in material and physical pursuits. They overcome temptations, enthusiastically cleaving to Hashem. Since Hashem gives His children a chance to draw near to Him and serve Him, we too must emulate this behavior and provide errant souls with an opportunity to draw near to Hashem. Moreover, each *neshamah* is compared to a Mishkan. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu is commended for erecting the Mishkan in his days, one who leads errant souls to do teshuvah is considered to be building many Mishkanot for Hashem and will be commended for doing so.

- Engaging in *zikuy harabim* is a proven *segulah* for the successful *chinuch* of one's children. However, one must first contribute time to his own children and only thereafter concern himself with the spiritual needs of his community. When one does so, he will be blessed by Heaven. His children will successfully progress in spiritual growth, as implied by the repetition of the word עולה, signifying a continual ascent.

The Importance of Showing Gratitude

"If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving-offering, with the sacrifice of the thanksgiving offering shall he offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of scalded fine flour mixed with oil"

(*Vayikra* 7:12)

This *korban* described in this pasuk is the *korban todah*. A person would bring this *korban* as a token of gratitude for a miracle that was wrought for him. For example, the following people would bring it: A sailor who arrived safely at shore, a traveler who crossed a desert, one who was healed from a fatal illness, and a prisoner who was released from prison (see *Rashi* on *Zevachim* 7a). This *korban* trains a person to show gratitude to Hashem for the kindnesses that He bestows on him.

The Seder night is an outstanding example of showing gratitude. The entire nation joins in praise and thanksgiving to Hashem, Who performed miraculous wonders and redeemed us from enslavement by the Egyptians. The Zohar (II, 40b) relates that when Am Yisrael praise Hashem and thank Him for the miracles performed at the Exodus, Hashem gathers the celestial hosts and tells them to go to the Jewish homes and listen to the praises of Hashem that they are joyously recounting in His honor. After descending to listen to the accounts of the Jewish people, the angels return to Hashem and praise Him. They thank Him for the holy nation that He founded on earth. Through this, Hashem's glory is magnified in the Upper Worlds. This indicates that the main element of the Seder Night is the expression of gratitude to Hashem for the kindnesses that He exhibited when redeeming us from Egypt.

The extent of our obligation to express our gratitude to Hashem is taught by the following Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 95b). Sancheirev, the King of Ashur, set out with his enormous army of 185,000 divisions to capture

Yerushalayim, in the days of Chizkiyahu the King of Yehudah. To illustrate the great danger facing the Jews living in Yerushalayim, Chazal tell us that there were millions of soldiers in Sancheirev's army. *Targum Yonatan* (*Yeshayahu* 10:32) describes how there were over 2.5 billion soldiers. The *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Melachim* 140) tells that there were many more than 370 million. The *Tanchuma* (*Beshalach* 2) and *Mechilta Parashat Shirah* concurs with this view.

That night, which was Seder Night, an angel was sent to destroy Sancheirev's soldiers. They all fell dead, except for Sancheirev and his two sons, Nevuchadnezzar and Nevuzaradan. These three were left alive in order to publicize the great miracle that Hashem performed for the Jewish people. At that time, Hashem wanted to appoint King Chizkiyahu as Mashiach; the battle with Sancheirev would have been considered the final war of *Gog u'Magog*. However, because Chizkiyahu did not say *shirah* in appreciation of the great miracle that was done for him, there was Heavenly opposition regarding his appointment, and he ultimately did not merit being the Mashiach. As a result, the exile was lengthened.

It is unlikely that Chizkiyahu did not say *shirah* at all that night. He must have at least joined Klal Yisrael in singing Hashem's praises for the miracles wrought at the Exodus, since it was Seder Night. It is most probable that he also added thanksgiving for the personal miracle that Hashem wrought for him and his nation, destroying the enormous army of Sancheirev. It is difficult to understand why Hashem accused him of not saying *shirah* and therefore denied him the privilege of being Mashiach.

It seems that the accusation against Chizkiyahu was that he did not say a fitting *shirah* in proportion to the great miracle that was done for him. He should have been beside himself with joy and fervently thanked Hashem for saving Am Yisrael from absolute destruction. Without Hashem's miraculous intervention, the Jews would have been lying dead, instead of Sancheirev's soldiers. It appears that Chizkiyahu was lacking the appropriate depth of gratitude that would have moved him to enthusiastically say *shirah* from the bottom of his heart. For this reason he was ultimately denied being Mashiach.

We can learn from this the great obligation we have in contemplating Hashem's constant kindness and favors. He continually provides us with life and lavishes endless goodness upon us throughout the day. We enjoy His benevolence from the moment we wake up, until we go to sleep. Upon arising each morning, most certainly all of us say "מודה אני... שהחזרת נשמתי בחמלה רבה אמונתך – I gratefully thank You… for You have returned my soul within me with compassion – abundant is Your faithfulness!" The question is: How much do we truly feel gratitude while saying these words? Are we really imbued with a deep appreciation for the enormous miracle that Hashem did with us? One should not take it for granted that he wakes up every morning in good health. Such a thought is rooted in a lack of appreciation for Hashem's benevolence and from becoming accustomed to constantly receiving favors from Hashem.

If we would pause to think, we would realize that there are many incidents of people who went to sleep at night strong and healthy but did not get up in the morning. Similarly, there are many who went to sleep convinced that they were healthy only to find out upon rising that a deadly disease had struck them. Waking up healthy should be a cause for great excitement. This should inspire a person to exclaim *Modeh ani* with immense joy.

Chazal (*Tanchuma, Emor* 14) reveal that all *korbanot* will be abolished in the future except for the *korban todah*. Why? We might assume that the *korban todah* will be necessary in the future so that we will be able to offer it in order to express our gratitude to Hashem for the final redemption. However, in that case, one *korban* would suffice. Why is it imperative that this *korban* exist forever, as Chazal state?

Most people are accustomed to the miracles that Hashem performs for them. As a result, one does not feel the need to thank Hashem. It seems entirely natural that things should go well with him. One's senses are so dulled by routine that he is like "dead meat that does not feel the blade piercing it" (*Shabbat* 13b). In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, the *korban todah* aroused a person to renew and deepen his appreciation for

Hashem's constant Divine intervention, wholeheartedly thanking Hashem for His miracles.

In our days, the *bircat hagomel* substitutes for the *korban*. This *berachah* expresses our gratitude to Hashem for the miracles that He performs for us. However, we should examine if we genuinely bless *bircat hagomel* with the utmost appreciation and joy, or if we recite the words dryly through habit. Since the *korban todah* serves to arouse emotions of sincere gratitude to Hashem for His miracles and wonders, it will endure forever, in order to arouse a person to be grateful each time anew for His continuous supervision.

Once I noticed the blaring headlines of a newspaper publicizing a miraculous event that occurred on a passenger airplane. After the plane took off, the pilot discovered a severe technical failure. It was only through an absolute miracle that the plane was able to make a safe emergency landing. Clearly the technical failure had already existed at take-off and had placed everyone in mortal danger. Who knows what could have happened if Hashem had not protected the passengers. Of course, on landing, everybody expressed thanksgiving to Hashem, praising Him for saving their lives. However, the next day, when everyone returned to their mundane activities, they forgot the tremendous miracle that had been done for them.

Chazal (*Sukkah* 52a) say that in the future Hashem will slaughter the *Yetzer Hara*. Once the *Yetzer Hara* is uprooted from his heart, each person will be able to adequately appreciate all the kindnesses that Hashem has done throughout the generations. Moreover, since the *Yetzer Hara* will no longer distract him, he will experience such unrestrained gratitude for the tremendous favors that Hashem has done for him personally that he will feel that any blessing of *bircat hagomel* that he made in the past was insufficient. He will desire to show further gratitude for all the myriad miracles that Hashem did for him, but this time with appropriate thanks from the depths of his heart. The *korban olah* will exist for this purpose.

This Gemara illustrates how important it is to show heartfelt gratitude to Hashem. It will save us from shame in the future. How can one accustom himself to whole-heartedly expressing appreciation? In our days we see people seeking instant gratification and looking to acquire whichever material acquisition that they may desire. However, they forget to express gratitude to Hashem, Who provides them with their every wish.

The key to acquiring this virtue is hinted in the following verse (*Vayikra* 6:2): "Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the *olah*-offering." Rashi explains that the word "command" always means to "urge on," for the immediate moment, and for future generations. The Kohen needed to be "urged on" since he did not receive any portion of this offering. Since the *korban* was consecrated entirely for Hashem, the Kohen might neglect sacrificing it, since he did not gain any benefit from doing so.

However, this is difficult to understand. The Kohen received valuable gifts from other *korbanot*, which were more than enough to sustain him. How can we suggest that he would delay bringing this particular *korban*, because he did not gain any profit from it? This would seem like petty behavior on his part.

This is an example of how discerning the Torah is in understanding the psyche of the human mind. Even the righteous and holy Kohen was liable to neglect sacrificing this *korban*, since he did not personally benefit from it. Therefore, he was "urged" to sacrifice this *korban*, just as he would rush to process those *korbanot* from which he would gain a substantial profit.

Acting with alacrity and diligence is the way to combat laziness. This bad *middah* is rooted in lack of gratitude. A lazy person will fail to recognize the Source of all the good that he is blessed with. Conversely, a diligent person will appreciate the blessings that he receives, both from his fellow man and from the Great Benefactor Himself, Who has granted him the wisdom to do so.

My father, the tzaddik, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto, zt"l, instilled in us the importance of training ourselves to conduct ourselves with alacrity. He taught that acting swiftly plays a major role in a person's ultimate success. This fact is supported by the pasuk in Mishlei (22:29), "Have you seen a man with alacrity in his work? He will stand before kings." This implies that alacrity is the tool with which to acquire all good things. The lazy person loses out on all the good in store for him because he neglects fulfilling the requirements necessary to become a recipient for them.

When one is careful to contemplate the kindnesses done to him by Hashem, he will express his gratitude to Him appropriately. To emphasize this point, the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 1:1) instructs: "He should strengthen himself like a lion to arise in the morning to serve Hashem." When one arises with zest and vigor and recites *Modeh ani* with joy, he thereby becomes worthy of receiving an abundance of good throughout the day.

May it be Hashem's will that we always merit to adequately acknowledge His bounty and thank Him appropriately for His benevolence, as it says (*Tehillim* 92:2), "It is good to thank Hashem and to sing praise to Your Name, O Exalted One."

In Summary

- The *korban todah* was sacrificed on the Altar as a token of appreciation for the miracles that Hashem did with His people. For example, this *korban* was brought by a sailor who arrived safely at shore, a traveler who crossed a desert, etc. In our days, since the service of *korbanot* was abolished, we recite *bircat hagomel* instead.
- The main point in recounting the Exodus on Seder Night is in order to praise and thank Hashem for the wondrous miracles He performed for us.
- King Chizkiyahu was not appointed as Mashiach because he did not adequately thank Hashem for the great miracle that He performed for him. Certainly, Chizkiyahu did say *shirah* to thank Hashem. However,

his *shirah* was not said with the fervent emotion befitting such a great miracle, which would be expected from one of his stature. From this account we learn how important it is to fully express gratitude to Hashem.

- In the future, all *korbanot* will be abolished except for the *korban todah*. It would seem that a one-time *korban* as a token of gratitude to thank Hashem for bringing the final redemption would suffice. Why then will the sacrifice of this *korban* continue ceaselessly? This is because the *korban todah* arouses feelings of awe for Hashem's miracles. Therefore there is a need to sacrifice a *korban todah* each time we experience Hashem's benevolence. This will arouse us to adequately express our gratitude for Hashem's continuous supervision.

- We must learn how to acquire the virtue of adequately acknowledging favors. The words "Command Aharon," which imply urging on to sacrifice the *korban olah* without delay, teach us an important lesson. The Torah understands the psyche of man and acknowledges that although the Kohen received priestly gifts from other *korbanot*, he might nevertheless have neglected to sacrifice this *korban* because it did not gain him any profit. Therefore, the Torah urged him to sacrifice it immediately. From this we learn that acting with alacrity counters laziness, which is rooted in lack of gratitude.

Acquiring Spiritual Garments

"Moshe brought Aharon and his sons forward and he immersed them in water. He placed the Tunic upon him and girdled him with the Sash; he dressed him in the Robe and placed the Ephod on him"

(*Vayikra* 8:6-7)

The previous pesukim relate how Hashem commanded Moshe to gather all of Bnei Yisrael at the entrance of the *Ohel Moed*. This was in order that the entire nation would behold how Moshe washed and dressed the Kohanim in their priestly garments. Rashi explains that this large gathering at a relatively small entrance is one of the places mentioned in Scripture "where the little miraculously held the many." This emphasizes how important the occasion of Moshe washing and dressing the Kohanim was. Hashem performed a miracle so that all the Jews should be able to witness it.

It is surprising why Moshe was required to wash and dress the Kohanim. Could Aharon and his sons not have washed themselves? Why was it necessary for Moshe to do it for them? Moreover, why did it have to be done in front of the entire nation?

From this account we learn the importance the Torah attributes to clothing. This is because one's external garments reflect the internal constitution of man. The message of this pasuk is that just as man must obtain garments for his body, so too, must he acquire spiritual garments for his *neshamah*. Moreover, just as the quality of the material enhances the beauty of the garment, likewise the quality of one's spiritual garments is dependent on the perfection and beauty of the "material" woven by his mitzvot.

We learn the concept of how garments reveal one's internal spiritual essence from Chazal. The *Navi* Zechariah, states, "But Yehoshua (the

Kohen Gadol) was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel." Chazal explain that the filthy garments refer to his sons, who married women who were prohibited to marry Kohanim. Bnei Yisrael in Egypt are similarly described (*Yechezkel* 16:7) as being "naked and bare," implying that they were devoid of mitzvot. They lacked the spiritual clothing of sanctity and purity and thus were rendered spiritually naked and bare (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 27). Similarly, the Gemara (*Menachot* 43b) relates that when King David was in the bath house and saw himself naked, he despaired that he would remain eternally bare from mitzvot as well. However, when he noticed the *oht brit kodesh* on his body, he was relieved that in the merit of his *brit* he was clothed in spiritual garments and was not entirely bare of mitzvot.

Since clothing symbolizes the inner, spiritual constitution of a person, Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher of the entire Jewish nation, was the one who clothed Aharon and his sons. The ceremony described uncovers an important lesson. Aharon and his sons were entirely subservient to Moshe, who washed their bodies with water. Water symbolizes Torah, since both are life-sustaining. Learning Torah from his Rabbi will serve to purify a person, cleansing him with its holy waters. A person who wishes to merit spiritual garments should be completely subservient to his Rabbis, who symbolize Torah knowledge.

In the beginning of Chumash *Vayikra* it states (*Vayikra* 1:1), "And Hashem called (ויקרא) to Moshe." The letter א' in the word ויקרא is written small. When it is read phonetically as *aleph*, it alludes to the *Alupho Shel Olam* (the Commander of the World). The word ויקרא can denote calling someone in a way that shows endearment. The letter א' is written small to indicate that Moshe Rabbeinu felt uncomfortable acknowledging that Hashem called to him with extraordinary affection. He preferred relating to the call as a coincidental call, implied by the word ויקר. He felt it was as if Hashem turned by coincidence to him and not because he was exceptionally worthy.

There is a similar idea written in one of the *sefarim* of the holy Grand Rabbi of Alexander, zy"a, (*Emunat Moshe*, *Chukat* 10), which states that

the more a person humbles himself and views himself as insignificant, the more he will perceive the greatness of Hashem and merit witnessing the revelation of His *Shechinah*. On the other hand, the more a person views himself as important and feels haughty, to this degree the honor of Hashem and His *Shechinah* will be lowered in his eyes. This is because a haughty person is completely wrapped up with his personal honor, preventing him from acknowledging the greatness of Hashem. In order to merit spiritual garments of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, one must humble himself entirely before the Commander of the World, and likewise before Rabbis and leaders of the generation, who represent Torah knowledge.

The Torah continues (*Vayikra* 1:2): "אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה', מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן תקריבו את קרבנכם – When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem: from the animals – from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering." The main sacrifice should be מכם – from you. This implies that a person should sacrifice himself as a *korban* for Hashem's sake and be willing to forfeit all his personal belongings in His honor.

The words מן הבהמה (from the animals) indicate that a person should sacrifice all his physical desires and personal ambitions on the Altar.

The words מן הבקר (from the cattle) can also be read as מן הבוקר (from the morning). This teaches that immediately upon arising in the morning, one should sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake and not involve himself in personal matters. First he should go to the Beit Hakeneset and stand in prayer facing Hashem. Only thereafter should he engage in his own business.

This is referred to by the Ba'al Shem Tov, who says that sometimes a person may learn Torah and fulfill mitzvot but find that *yirat Shamayim* eludes him. He does not experience sublimity in his Avodat Hashem. The Ba'al Shem Tov blamed the person's deficiency on his morning routine. Obviously, upon arising, he places his own interests before the service of Hashem. Since he gives precedence to his material aspect, he lacks the ability to clothe himself with the spiritual garments of *yirat Shamayim*.

Regarding this, David Hamelech says in Tehillim (73:28), "But as for me, Hashem's nearness is my good." I recall the explanation of this verse that my esteemed teacher, Rabbi Massoud Zohar, zt"l, taught me when I was only twelve years old, while studying in his yeshiva in Fublaines, France. He emphasized that David Hamelech did not ask Hashem for anything. He did not request honor, greatness, or kingship. His only appeal was for Hashem's closeness. This was his heart's desire. My teacher inspired us with these words. How does one acquire closeness to Hashem and clothe himself in spiritual garments? By surrendering his personal ambitions and desires for the sake of Hashem.

It is interesting to note that the word קרבת (nearness) has the same root as the word קרבן. This hints that closeness to Hashem is acquired through self-sacrifice.

To conclude, we should learn from the example of the Kohanim. Just as the Kohanim humbled themselves before Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the messenger of Hashem, and thereby merited being clothed in spiritual garments, likewise, in order to merit spiritual garments, we should humble ourselves before Hashem through self-sacrifice.

In Summary

- Why did Moshe wash and dress the Kohanim in their priestly garments in front of the entire Jewish nation? The Kohanim were perfectly capable of doing it themselves. This teaches the true importance of clothing. One's external clothes testify to his inner, spiritual attire. Just as it is necessary to obtain clothing for the body, so too, is it necessary to clothe the *neshamah*. Just as the quality of the material enhances the beauty of the garment, likewise the quality of one's spiritual garments is dependent on the perfection and beauty of the "material" woven by his mitzvot. The garments with which Moshe Rabbeinu dressed the Kohanim represented the inner spiritual garments of the *neshamah*. Moshe specifically dressed the Kohanim in order to teach the entire Jewish nation the significance of obtaining spiritual garments.

- The Kohanim humbled themselves entirely before Moshe. Before he dressed them, he washed their bodies with water, which symbolizes the Torah. This implies that in order to clothe oneself in spiritual garments, one must humble himself before Hashem. The waters of the Torah enable a person to clothe himself in spiritual garments.

- The word ויקרא appears in the Torah with a small *aleph*. This teaches that even Moshe humbled himself before the *Alupho shel Olam* – the Commander of the World. He made it seem as if Hashem called to him in a coincidental manner from the entrance to the *Ohel Moed*.

- It states, "אדם כי יקריב מכם – When a person from among you will bring an offering." This teaches that each person is required to sacrifice himself for Hashem's sake. The word מכם (from you) implies that one should literally sacrifice of himself, consecrating his ambitions and desires to the service of Hashem. The words מן הבהמה (from the animals) hint to the physical and material elements that one must elevate by using them for Hashem's sake. The words מן הבקר (from the cattle) can also be read as מן הבוקר (from the morning), indicating that upon arising early in the morning one should begin his day by serving Hashem.

- David Hamelech expressed his outlook with the words "ואני קרבת אלוקים לי טוב – But as for me, Hashem's nearness is my good." The word קרבת (nearness) has the same root as the word קרבן (*korban*). This indicates that closeness to Hashem is acquired through self-sacrifice.

Gems on Parashat Tzav

Missing the Boat

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Rashi explains that the word צו (command) is used to denote "urging on." The Gemara (*Makkot* 23a) states, "One only urges those who act with enthusiasm."

Once I saw a bus transporting avrechim to many different kollelim. It was pulling into the station and an avrech, who was still quite a distance away, began running toward it. He raced with all his might to catch the bus, but to his chagrin, the bus pulled out of the station seconds before he reached it. His expression showed how devastated he was to have missed the bus. I thought to myself, perhaps this avrech missed the bus just so that I can learn an important lesson which I could share with others.

This incident reflects our behavior. People run to accomplish as much as possible in order to merit reward in *Olam Haba*. However, upon arriving there, they may discover that their race was in vain. The reward that they hoped for eludes them because they missed their opportunity. This is because they did not run quickly enough to seek to fulfill mitzvot. The expression on their faces will resemble the misery of the avrech who missed his bus. Therefore, the Torah specifically commands us with the word צו which implies urging on. One should rush to fulfill mitzvot while he has the opportunity.

The Constant Fire

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

One of the ten miracles that occurred daily in the Beit Hamikdash was that (*Avot* 5:5) "the rains did not extinguish the fire on the altar-pyre," and it constantly burned day and night. When the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, the Mizbeach was destroyed as well, extinguishing its constant fire. Yirmeyahu Hanavi preserved some of its fire and saved it for the future (*Josephus* 3). When Eliyahu Hanavi will appear, Am Yisrael will ask him to exhibit three signs to validate his identity. The signs that Eliyahu Hanavi will produce are the following: The staff of Moshe Rabbeinu, the jar containing a sample of the manna that had been stored in the Aron,

and in addition, he will restore the constant fire on the Altar. It is remarkable that these three signs were the very artifacts that Yirmeyahu Hanavi hid for the future. Only upon the arrival of Eliyahu Hanavi, heralding the Mashiach, will they be revealed.

I suspect that these objects are hidden under the mosque built on the Har Habayit. The reason for this is because Hashem knew that Am Yisrael would eventually dig all over Yerushalayim in order to uncover archaeological artifacts. If these items would not have been hidden beneath the Har Habayit, then most certainly Am Yisrael would have uncovered them. Hashem did not want these objects to be found until Mashiach's arrival. Therefore, He instructed Yirmeyahu Hanavi to hide them under the Har Habayit, which the Jews are prohibited from approaching. In the course of the years, a mosque was built there so that even the most unaffiliated Jews would not be allowed to go there, and in this way they would not find the hidden objects that Yirmeyahu concealed. Only upon the arrival of Mashiach will these artifacts be revealed, proving the authenticity of Eliyahu Hanavi.

Revealing the Secret

"Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:2)

The letter מ' of the word מוקדה (flame) is smaller than the rest of the letters. Why? The letter מ' has the *gematria* of forty, hinting to the forty

days and nights in which Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah. At that time, the administering angels sought to burn him with their breath. They argued, "What is the son of a woman doing among us?" Only after Moshe Rabbeinu grasped the Heavenly Throne for protection and reasoned with the angels, did they let him go. They not only agreed to his presence in Heaven, but also lavished him with gifts and revealed to him many secrets. Even the Angel of Death disclosed the secret of the *ketoret*, which possessed the ability to ward off death and stem a plague (*Shabbat* 89a).

Moshe Rabbeinu's spiritual achievements rendered him as holy as an angel. He succeeded in overcoming the angels who wished to burn him, and even came away with gifts from them, including their secrets. However, all these outstanding accomplishments did not cause him to become haughty. In fact, he remained exceedingly humble. The Torah testifies to this by printing the letter מ small. It hints to Moshe Rabbeinu, who considered himself small and never sought to dominate Am Yisrael, even while leading them. He remained humble in spite of his ascent to Heaven and victory over the angels, when he extracted their secrets, including the antidote to death.

It is surprising why the Angel of Death revealed to Moshe the secret formula of the *ketoret*, which wards off death. Why did he provide Moshe with the ability to thwart his efforts? This is compared to a person who possesses the winning numbers to a lottery ticket. However, instead of using them himself, he reveals the winning numbers to his friend.

The reason that the Angel of Death disclosed his secret was because Moshe argued with him. He told the Angel of Death that if he would not reveal the secret of how to stop a deathly plague, then all the inhabitants of the world would die from it. There would be no one left for him to kill. Since he would no longer have a mission in this world, Hashem would destroy him. This prompted the Angel of Death to reveal his secret to Moshe.

Following the example of the Angel of Death, all the other angels also proceeded to divulge their secrets, according to their mission. For example, the Angel Refael revealed to Moshe the secrets of various remedies. One of the revelations that are attributed to the Angel Refael is placing a tendon on the eyes of a dying man in order to dispel the evil eye affecting him. During the days of Shlomo Hamelech, there was a book of remedies recording all illnesses and the method of healing them. Whoever was sick would simply open this book and uncover the remedy to his malady, helping him recover. However, Chizkiyahu Hamelech hid this book in order that people should be aroused to teshuvah upon being struck with an illness (*Pesachim* 56a, see *Rashi*). Hashem brings sickness upon a person in order that he should seek closeness with Hashem. If people would find a solution by merely looking in a book, then this would defeat the purpose of the illness, which is to cause one to mend his ways and do complete teshuvah.

The Desire to Improve

"Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:2)

It states in the pasuk, "זאת תורת העולה." Translated literally, this means, "This is the Torah of ascent." These words suggest that in order to be elevated through Torah, one must constantly seek to rise to greater

heights. One who does not honestly seek to be elevated through pursuing truth will ultimately remain with falsehood. Sometimes the truth is found within arm's reach. However, in order to attain truth and be elevated through it, he must first reach out to grasp it. If a person does not actively reach for it, he will remain buried in deception. The elevated status is hinted to in the word מוקדה (flame) that shoots upward. It appears in the pasuk with a small מ' to teach that despite one's elevated status, one should remain humble and never boast about himself to others.

The Connection between Tzav and Shemini

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Parashat *Tzav* begins by discussing the *korban olah*. Concerning it, the Torah specifically uses the word צו (command) which connotes urgency. Rashi explains that the word "command" is always used to express "urging on," for the immediate moment, and for future generations. Why does the Torah particularly prompt the Kohanim regarding this *korban*? The simple explanation is because the *olah* was consecrated entirely for Hashem. Neither the Kohen nor the person offering the *korban* received any portion of it. Therefore, the Kohen may have felt that he was "losing

out" by sacrificing it, necessitating the Torah to prompt them about sacrificing it nevertheless.

According to halachah, the *korban olah* must be sacrificed before any other *korbanot* in the morning (*Rambam, Temidin u'Mussafin* 1:3). If, by mistake, another *korban* was sacrificed before the *korban olah*, the other *korban* was invalid and one was prohibited from eating or benefitting from it (see *Tosafot, Yoma* 29a). Since it was consecrated entirely for Hashem's sake, through sacrificing it a person is trained to sacrifice himself entirely for Hashem's sake.

The Ba'al Shem Tov questions why there are many Jews who on the outside seem pious and God-fearing, sporting a full beard and long *pe'ot*, but in reality are empty inside and lack *yirat Shamayim*. Chazal (*Avot* 4:20) teach, "Do not look at the vessel, but what is in it." This implies that the outward appearance does not necessarily reflect the essence of a person. Despite the exterior impression of *yirat Shamayim*, one cannot be certain that this is a reflection of his actual conduct. How can one truly acquire *yirat Shamayim*? Through training oneself to place Hashem's honor and will before his own, as it states in Tehillim (16:8), "I have set Hashem before me always" (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 1:1).

The exclusive priority given to the *korban olah* to be sacrificed first teaches us that we too should give priority to all matters pertaining to the service of Hashem. When a person gives precedence to fulfilling Hashem's will before engaging in other matters, he acquires true *yirat Shamayim*, which trains him to fulfill the words, "I have set Hashem before me always" in every situation.

In our times, we can apply this lesson by giving priority to spiritual matters. Just as the *korban olah* was consecrated entirely for Hashem, so too, should we give of ourselves to Hashem. How can one consecrate himself entirely for Hashem? Through submitting his will to the will of Hashem. For example, even though he may want to divulge a sensational piece of gossip, he will steadfastly overcome his urge and guard his

mouth from evil instead. Likewise, if he desires to look at a forbidden scene, he will look away instead, keeping his gaze fixed downward. This commendable behavior, requiring much fortitude, is considered as if one sacrificed a *korban olah*.

This lesson leads us to the connection between parashat *Tzav* and the following parashah, *Shemini*. Parashat *Tzav* begins with the *korban olah*, and parashat *Shemini* begins with the pasuk (*Vayikra* 9:1) "It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel." The number seven alludes to the seven days of Creation. The following number, eight, alludes to that which is above nature (*Maharal, Chidushei Aggadot, Nedarim* 31:2). The "eighth world" refers to the eternal world, the permanent residence of the tzaddikim. The contiguous order of the parshiyot indicates the following connection. When a person hurries to fulfill Hashem's command, as in the example of the *korban olah* discussed in parashat *Tzav*, by submitting his will in order to first carry out Hashem's will, he merits inheriting the eighth world, as hinted to in the name of parashat *Shemini*. The eighth world is the eternal world preserved for those who fulfill Hashem's will and sacrifice the *korban olah* through their good deeds.

Parashat *Shemini* describes how on the eighth day the *Shechinah* descended upon Am Yisrael. Therefore, it is fitting to add that a person who dedicates himself entirely to serving Hashem merits that Hashem's *Shechinah* will preside over him.

The Need for Urgency

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Rashi explains this pasuk in the following way: "Command" always expresses "urging on," for the immediate moment, and for future generations. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: "Scripture must especially urge one on in a situation where there is loss of money." Since the *korban olah* was burnt entirely as a sacrifice for Hashem, without allotting any portion of it for the priestly gifts, the Torah had to urge the Kohen in this service so that he should not neglect it. The Torah exhorts him to hasten doing this service even though he does not receive any personal benefit from it.

How could we suspect the Kohen of neglecting the service of sacrificing the *korban olah*? It is clear that if Hashem commanded the Kohanim to sacrifice *korbanot*, including the *korban olah*, then in spite of receiving no personal benefit from this *korban*, they would have hurried to perform their duty without Hashem especially urging them on.

We can explain the reason for this in the following way. The *korban olah* was brought to atone for the sin of הרהור רע (dwelling on sinful thoughts). Even though the person did not actually carry out his evil intention, he is obligated to sacrifice a *korban olah* for Hashem in order to remove the sinful thought from his mind and thus be saved from actually sinning.

We are taught (*Kiddushin* 40a) that if a person considers doing a good deed, but ultimately is prevented from carrying out his intentions,

Hashem considers it as if he accomplished the deed and rewards him for it. However, this is not true of a bad intention. The intention to sin is not considered as if one actually committed the sin, and a person will not be punished accordingly.

Therefore, the Kohanim may conclude that if Hashem does not consider an evil thought as if one actually committed an evil act, sacrificing a *korban olah* to atone for the sinful thought is not particularly urgent. After all, the person did not actually commit any sin. The Kohanim may therefore assume that the other *korbanot* should take precedence, thereby neglecting the *korban olah*.

Since Hashem has compassion for His sons and seeks to prevent them from incurring punishment, He urged the Kohanim to promptly sacrifice the *korban olah*. In this way the merit of the sacrifice would serve to protect Am Yisrael and remove from them all sinful thoughts. It would consequently prevent them from actually transgressing.

Learning Torah at Night

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the olah-offering: It is the olah-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame"

(*Vayikra* 6:1-2)

Chazal (*Eiruvin* 65a) say that night was created for the purpose of learning Torah. Although a person may become elevated through learning Torah throughout the day, one who learns Torah at night merits that

Hashem graces him with special favor (*Chagigah* 12b). He also remains connected to Hashem throughout the twenty-four hour period. By learning Torah at night, one weakens the power of the *kelippah*, which prevails throughout the night. The Zohar (III, 23:1) lengthily praises those who engage in Torah study at night.

The pasuk in *Vayikra* (6:2) can be explained supporting this view, as it states, "This is the law of the *olah*-offering: It is the *olah*-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning." The words "זאת תורת העולה – This is the law of the *olah*-offering" hints to a person who learns Torah throughout the day. However, the continuation, "היא העולה – It is the *olah*-offering" refers to learning Torah at night.

From the words of the pasuk we can infer that learning Torah by night is more praiseworthy, because through such conduct one can reach higher levels of Torah wisdom. This is suggested by the continuation of the pasuk, "It is the *olah*-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Mizbeach, all night until the morning and the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame." It implies that one who remains awake learning Torah all night will merit that the Torah will burn constantly within him.

Moshe Rabbeinu became greatly elevated through learning Torah with devotion throughout the night, when no one was watching to notice his diligence. When a person learns Torah during the day, people may notice his diligence and praise him for his efforts. However, in order that he should remain unaffected by the praise, he must learn Torah also at night, when no one is watching him. When a person learns at night, he merits Divine grace, which accompanies him even during the day (*Chagigah* 12b). This Divine grace prevents him from becoming haughty about his exalted level of Torah study.

Hashem commanded Moshe to tell Aharon that the flame must burn on the Mizbeach constantly, from morning till night. The Mizbeach may never be left without a fire burning on it. The fire was lit with coals, whose source is in the earth. Sometimes, a person can resemble coals. This is true when a Torah scholar utilizes the honor of the Torah for his own

interests, as "a spade with which to dig." He exhibits total submission to the Torah in front of others, however, in his heart, the flame of arrogance burns instead of the flame of Torah. He learns diligently in order to impress others, rather than for the sake of Heaven. He resembles the earthly aspect of the coals, rather than the holy fire that they produce. Therefore, the Torah warns (*Vayikra* 6:2) "And the fire of the Mizbeach shall be kept aflame," implying that he should act for the sake of Heaven and for the honor of the Torah. He should not seek personal honor by studying Torah.

Accepting the Divine words of the Torah in humility and without question is what enables him to succeed in his studies. Moshe Rabbeinu was only called upon with affection by Hashem because he humbled himself completely before Him and His Torah. When Yaakov Avinu traveled from his father's home to Charan, he intended to return to the place where his fathers had prayed. Hashem halted his efforts by bringing Har Hamoriah – that very place – under his feet (*Rashi*, *Bereishit* 28:17). Why only when Yaakov reached Charan did it occur to him to pray in the place that his forefathers had prayed? Why did he not do so beforehand?

Perhaps we can say that when he arrived there, Yaakov humbled himself greatly. Instead of viewing himself as יעקב (denoting his full name), taking pride in his unique capabilities and perfect character traits, he considered himself just as an עקב (heel), which is the lowest point of a person's body. He said to himself: "Who am I that I should be worthy to stand in prayer in the place that my forefathers prayed?" He was so humble that he did not consider himself worthy of standing on Har Hamoriah, where his fathers had prayed.

After Yaakov had traveled the entire distance to Charan, he began to deliberate that certainly he was not worthy enough to stand on the same place and add to its *kedushah*. However, he realized that it was surely worthwhile for him to go there in order to be inspired by the holiness of the location. The positive influence of its *kedushah* would help him withstand the trials facing him in dealing with the people of Charan. Since Yaakov humbled himself before his forefathers and felt that he could not

possibly add any *kedushah* to the place where his ancestors had prayed, but could only be inspired by it, he merited that Hashem uprooted the mountain from its location and placed it beneath his feet.

It is possible that Yaakov would not have merited all the revelations that Hashem revealed to him that night had he stopped to pray on Har Hamoriah at the beginning of his journey. Only because he first humbled himself entirely, considering himself unworthy as compared to his forefathers, did he merit that Hashem brought Har Hamoriah to him and revealed to him awesome revelations there. The greater one's humility, the greater is he considered by Hashem. Ultimately, the perfection of man is dependent on his humility.

Shemini

Why Moshe Erected and Dismantled the Mishkan Each Day

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

The Torah relates how Moshe erected the Mishkan during each of the first seven days of the inauguration. However, each evening when the sun began to set, and Hashem had not yet rested his *Shechinah* upon Bnei Yisrael, Moshe dismantled the Mishkan (*Yalkut Shimoni Vayikra* 518). This procedure continued for seven full days; Moshe erected and dismantled the Mishkan while praying and hoping that Hashem would have mercy on His nation and rest His *Shechinah* upon them.

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu dismantle the Mishkan each evening during the first seven days of the inauguration? Why didn't he leave it erected until Hashem would rest his *Shechinah* upon it?

We can compare this to a contractor of a building upon completing his structure. Even if he were to notice after erecting the building that there was a fault in his plan, e.g., insufficient sunlight, he would certainly not

destroy the entire building because of it. He would try to find a solution while allowing the existing structure to remain. He may either try to create another window, or perhaps break down a wall. Since much planning went into designing the building, he would certainly not rush to tear it down entirely upon encountering a flaw. He would rather invest effort in repairing the existing building.

Thus, it is perplexing why Moshe Rabbeinu dismantled the Mishkan each evening and did not instead leave it standing and pray to Hashem that through His great compassion He rest His *Shechinah* among them. What was the point in Moshe dismantling the Mishkan seven times, day after day? The complicated task of erecting and dismantling the Mishkan required great physical and mental energy. Chazal (see *Tanchuma, Pekudei* 11) relate that there were many miracles involved each time that the Mishkan was erected.

The Mishkan can be compared to the heart of a man's body. Just as the heart circulates blood throughout all the arteries of the body, infusing life into it, the Mishkan was the source of spirituality for the Jewish people. In order for Am Yisrael to merit residing with the *Shechinah*, which is like the oxygen that keeps a person alive, they had to demonstrate that they truly desired Hashem's Presence among them.

As an example, imagine a king who desires to bestow upon his faithful servant all his royal treasures. However, upon approaching his faithful servant to hand him the key to his treasure house, he notices that his servant is not eager to receive it. The servant half-heartedly reaches to receive the key as if he is being forced to do so. Understandably, when the king perceives his servant's apathy and lack of appreciation for the great gift he is about to bestow upon him, his own goodwill lessens as well, and he does not hurry to transfer the key to him. The king only desires to bequeath his riches to one who appreciates their magnitude and enthusiastically aspires to attain them, not to one who feels as if he is being coerced to receive them.

After the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem rested His *Shechinah* among His children and led them through the Desert with wondrous miracles. However, when Am Yisrael fashioned the idol of the Golden Calf, Hashem removed His *Shechinah* from them in His anger. He saw that they did not appreciate their good fortune of having the *Shechinah* reside among them. After Moshe Rabbeinu beseeched Hashem with many prayers, Hashem agreed to restore His *Shechinah* to reside among His people once more. However, before doing so, He wanted to behold how Bnei Yisrael truly yearned once again for His Presence to rest among them. This was especially important, since just beforehand Bnei Yisrael had rejected the *Shechinah* and caused its departure by serving the Golden Calf.

Moshe Rabbeinu understood Hashem's prerequisite for the establishment of the Mishkan and intentionally erected and dismantled the Mishkan each day in order to provoke Bnei Yisrael to do teshuvah. He was demonstrating to Bnei Yisrael that Hashem had not yet acquiesced to reside among them. When Bnei Yisrael saw during the seven days of the inauguration that Hashem had not restored His *Shechinah* to reside among them, compelling Moshe to dismantle the Mishkan at the end of the day, they were immediately aroused to do complete teshuvah. They examined their deeds for any flaws to probe the reason for the delay of the *Shechinah's* appearance.

Bnei Yisrael were moved to the extent that they began to cry and beg Hashem to have mercy on them and forgive them completely for sinning with the Golden Calf. They prayed that every trace of the sin should be removed, so that it should not prevent the *Shechinah* from descending upon them. In this manner, during the first seven days of the inauguration, Bnei Yisrael purified themselves by doing wholehearted teshuvah and perfecting their *yirat Shamayim*. With each passing day, as they observed that Hashem's *Shechinah* had not yet descended upon them, and Moshe was forced to dismantle the Mishkan once again, they increased their efforts to do complete teshuvah in order to merit having the *Shechinah* reside among them.

In the end, on the eighth day, when Hashem observed how Bnei Yisrael had done complete teshuvah for the sin of the Golden Calf and wholeheartedly yearned for the *Shechinah* to reside among them once again, Hashem answered their prayers and His *Shechinah* descended to reside in His dwelling.

In a similar vein, the Gemara relates (*Sanhedrin* 98a) how Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him when Mashiach will arrive. Eliyahu Hanavi told him to go to Rome where Mashiach is found and ask him. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi traveled to Rome and met the Mashiach. He asked him when he planned to reveal himself and redeem the Jewish people from their suffering. The Mashiach answered, "Today I am ready to come and redeem Am Yisrael forever." Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yehoshua rejoiced wholeheartedly. However, at nightfall, when the Mashiach had not yet appeared to Am Yisrael, Rabbi Yehoshua returned to Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him why the Mashiach had deviated from the truth by saying that he would appear on that day, when he had not intended to do so.

Eliyahu Hanavi explained the Mashiach's response according to the words (*Tehillim* 95:7) "Even today, if we but heed His call!" Mashiach had indicated that he was ready to appear to Bnei Yisrael on that day, "today." However, it was only on condition that Am Yisrael would fulfill the second part of the pasuk: "Even today, if we but heed His call!" Since Am Yisrael did not heed Hashem's commandments and continued in their sinful ways, Mashiach could not appear on that day, despite the fact that he was ready to do so.

Mashiach constantly waits for the time when Am Yisrael will ultimately fulfill what is stated "Even today, if we but heed His call!" and will immediately appear when this condition is fulfilled.

When Hashem commanded Moshe to erect the Mishkan, most certainly He intended to rest His *Shechinah* upon it. However, the appearance of the *Shechinah* was dependent upon Bnei Yisrael's yearning for the privilege. Therefore, Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to erect and

dismantle the Mishkan each day. Upon beholding the disturbing sight of the Mishkan being dismantled, Bnei Yisrael would be greatly disappointed. It would cause them to redouble their efforts in doing teshuvah. Through this they would merit experiencing the *Shechinah* descending upon the Mishkan. Had Moshe Rabbeinu left the Mishkan standing throughout the days of inauguration and not dismantled it at the end of each successive day, Bnei Yisrael would not have been inspired to do complete teshuvah. It was specifically the sight of the dismantling that shocked them into awareness of their deficiency and aroused them to perceive in a concrete manner their defective position. This ultimately brought them to fully repent and thereby merit the appearance of the *Shechinah* descending upon the Mishkan on the eighth and final day of the inauguration.

In Summary

- Why did Moshe Rabbeinu erect and dismantle the Mishkan anew during each of the first seven days of the inauguration? Why did he not leave it standing and wait until Hashem would rest His *Shechinah* upon it? This is because Moshe knew that Hashem desired to rest His *Shechinah* among His children on condition that they clearly yearned for His Presence. Therefore, Moshe dismantled the Mishkan every evening, in order to arouse Am Yisrael to do complete teshuvah, demonstrating their yearning for Hashem's Presence. In this way they would merit having the *Shechinah* reside amongst them.
- Similarly, Eliyahu Hanavi told Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that Mashiach is ready to arrive each day. However, his arrival is on condition that Am Yisrael fulfill the words "Even today, if we but heed His call!" This implies that on the day that Hashem's call to fulfill His mitzvot is heeded, we will merit the everlasting redemption, since the Mashiach is already prepared and waiting to appear.

The Eighth Day

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

For the first seven days upon the completion of the building of the Mishkan, Moshe Rabbeinu served as the Kohen Gadol, initiating Aharon and his sons into the service of *korbanot*. These seven days are referred to as the seven days of *miluim*. The entire ceremony of the inauguration lasted eight days. On the eighth day, Aharon and his sons performed the service. This day is referred to as the *Chanukat Hamishkan*.

This parashah was said on the *Chanukat Hamishkan* that was celebrated on Rosh Chodesh Nisan by Moshe, Aharon, and Bnei Yisrael. Why was the dedication of the Mishkan not celebrated on the first day of the seven days of *miluim*, or after the *korbanot* of the *Nesi'im* were sacrificed on the 12th day of Nisan? Why did Hashem choose to dedicate the Mishkan specifically on the eighth day of the *miluim*?

In addition, why was the manner in which Aharon and his sons initiated accompanied by tragedy, since on that day the two sons of Aharon died? The Torah testifies that they were great tzaddikim, even greater than Moshe and Aharon. Therefore, they were the ones selected by Hashem to sanctify His Name. After their sudden death, Moshe proclaimed (*Vayikra* 10:6), "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." They died through a Heavenly fire that descended from Heaven and struck them. It is difficult to understand why Hashem did not wait to execute their punishment after the celebration of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. The celebration was so joyous; it is compared to the joy of the days of Creation. Why did Hashem choose to disrupt the joyous festivities of Am Yisrael on such a holy day?

Let us imagine a great king who invites all his close, beloved ministers to inaugurate his new palace and display to them his vast riches. In the midst of the joyous festivities, he suddenly rises and kills his two closest ministers. Understandably, such an incident would cause everyone to wonder. All would ask why he did not wait until after the celebration to execute his ministers, even if they deserved the death sentence. Similarly, Hashem chose to sanctify His Name through two of his favorite sons, Nadav and Avihu, by executing them specifically on the holy day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, in the presence of all the Jews.

In order to explain, let us first provide some background information. Hashem specifically chose to dedicate the Mishkan on the eighth day of the inauguration and neither on the first day, nor on the 12th day of Nisan, when the *Nesi'im* finished bringing their respective *korbanot*. Hashem chose this day because the number eight denotes the supernatural and hints to the Upper Worlds, which are above nature. This is a lesson for man. Just as Hashem preferred the eighth day, which hints to that which is above nature, so too, should man aspire to elevate himself and cling to the Upper Worlds that are above this "natural" world. It is possible for man to do so in spite of being a physical creation, because he was given a spiritual soul from Above. The soul enables a person to rise above the material and physical realm in order to cling to the Upper Worlds that are above nature.

We are instructed by the Torah (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make Me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell among them." Through building a Sanctuary, Hashem will dwell "among them" and not "within it" (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 1:4). This implies that Hashem is prepared to rest His *Shechinah* among each and every Jew. However, it is on condition that man prepares his body and soul in order that should be an appropriate vessel to contain the Divine Presence. One should elevate his 248 limbs and 365 sinews by using them exclusively to serve Hashem. All his actions should be for the sake of Heaven, in order to glorify His Name. In this way he will merit to have Hashem's spirit rest upon him, elevating him to the eighth world, which is above nature.

Just as the *Shechinah*, which resided in the Mishkan and resides within every Jew, is from the Upper Worlds (referred to as number eight because of their supernatural essence), so too man, who contains within him an aspect of Godliness, must strive to cling to the Upper Worlds. This is because the Divine Presence resides within him. The number eight is also synonymous with *brit milah*, which is performed on the eighth day after birth. Through removing the *orlah*, which represents physical pursuits, man acquires the ability to overcome his passions and conquer his evil inclinations. He acquires the capacity to dedicate his life to the service of Hashem in order to merit that the *Shechinah* will reside within him. Removing the *orlah* also serves to elevate him to the eighth world, which is above nature.

Therefore, Hashem chose to dedicate the Mishkan specifically on the eighth day of the *miluim*. This was in order to teach man about his true essence and purpose in the world, and about his mission in life, which is to aspire to cleave to Hashem's ways, as it states (*Shabbat* 133b), "Just as He is merciful, so too should you be merciful, etc." In this way, a person can merit to get a glimpse of the sublime Upper Worlds, which are referred to as eight, denoting the supernatural.

In the Upper Worlds, there are angels whose task is to sacrifice the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael in order to atone for the sins of the generation (*Tosafot, Menachot* 110a). Since Hashem desires that the Upper Worlds should resemble the world below, He chose to sanctify His Name through the death of the two sons of Aharon, who were the most righteous members of their generation. Chazal explain that despite being struck by a Heavenly fire, their bodies and clothes did not get burned (*Shabbat* 113b). Only their *neshamot* were consumed by the fire. This was a wondrous miracle. It teaches us that Hashem only desired their *neshamot* in order to bring *Olam Haba*, which is the world of *neshamot*, closer to this world.

Hashem was imparting an important lesson to Bnei Yisrael. From the time that Hashem established His dwelling in this world, His proximity to Bnei Yisrael would not only be a privilege, it would also obligate them

to live with utmost sanctity. Moreover, since Hashem would dwell within every Jew, it would obligate them to purify themselves even more and elevate themselves spiritually. This is because Hashem would hereafter not remove His *Shechinah* from them if they sinned, as He did after they fashioned the Golden Calf. Instead, Am Yisrael would be held accountable for their misdeeds. Through Hashem's retribution, their sins would be atoned. In this way they would remain worthy of the *Shechinah* dwelling among them.

Hashem wanted to impart this message in a tangible manner. Therefore, He immediately struck the two sons of Aharon when they offered to light a "strange fire" during their service. Since Hashem had not commanded them to do so, lighting this fire made them liable for capital punishment. Hashem did not wait to execute their sentence until after the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. It was specifically the elevation that Bnei Yisrael experienced at the dedication of the Mishkan that would enable them to absorb the lesson of their great obligation. They had to be especially cautious in their deeds as a result of their rise in status. By reinforcing prudence regarding the service of Hashem at this most opportune moment, Bnei Yisrael would internalize this message, and in this way, the *Shechinah* would be able to continue dwelling among them.

This parashah reveals to us the ability of man to purify himself to a high degree. While living in this world, he can experience a taste of *Olam Haba*. This is only possible because Hashem established His dwelling within him. However, a person should be aware that to the degree of his closeness to Hashem, to that extent Hashem demands of him perfection in his deeds, even to a hairsbreadth. The *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 49:3) says, "Yisrael, in whom I take glory" (literally, "Yisrael, through you I am glorified"). The Yalkut Shimoni (*Tehillim* 741) explains that from this pasuk we learn that the Name of Hashem is hinted at in the name of Bnei Yisrael. This signifies the connection and closeness that exists between Am Yisrael and Hashem. Because of their lofty status, the gravity of their actions is judged accordingly.

A person who merits to sanctify himself and become a dwelling place for Hashem is depicted as (*Mishlei* 10:25) "a righteous one is the foundation of the world." In the future, Hashem will bequeath him 310 worlds (*Uktzin* 3:12) and feed him the manna (*Chagigah* 12b), which is the food of the angels (*Yoma* 75b). In addition, the ten *sefirot* will be unified through him, thus perpetuating the entire Creation. He will ultimately be credited with the existence of the world; it will be considered as if for his sake the heavens and earth were created with the Name י-ה. All these qualities are alluded to in the word שמיני (the eighth day), which is comprised of the words שי - י-ה - מן (310 – the Name י-ה – manna). The word *Shemini* hints to the concepts of 310 worlds that the righteous will merit, the manna which he will consume just like the angels, and the Name י-ה with which the heavens and earth were created.

Parashat Shemini begins with the word "ויהי – It was." This language denotes anguish. Had Am Yisrael not sinned with the Golden Calf, they would have merited receiving the Torah immediately upon Moshe's descent from the mountain. Chazal (see *Eiruvin* 54a) say that the holiness of the second *luchot*, which Moshe Rabbeinu carved, did not compare to that of the first *luchot*, which Hashem Himself fashioned. According to this, we may assume that had Bnei Yisrael received the first *luchot*, they would have avoided the sin of the Spies, which resulted in their being sentenced to forty years of traveling in the desert. Had they not sinned, Bnei Yisrael would have continued under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu and entered Eretz Yisrael immediately after receiving the Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu would have then built the Beit Hamikdash. In this way, the worlds that Hashem created with the Name י-ה would have been perfected forever. Hashem would have reigned supreme, as it states, "On that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One." Every Jew experiencing this would have ultimately inherited 310 worlds and would have been sustained by the manna, which was an entirely spiritual food.

However, since Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem had to remove His *Shechinah* from dwelling among them. Upon restoring it, Hashem had to resort to connecting with them through the sanctification

of His Name – through taking the holy *neshamot* of Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, the parashah begins with the word ויהי, denoting the anguish of Hashem, Moshe Rabbeinu, and Am Yisrael. This was because the method in which Hashem could rest His *Shechinah* on Am Yisrael was accompanied by sorrow and pain. It was necessary to transmit to Bnei Yisrael the lesson of uncompromising sanctity. Had Bnei Yisrael not sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem would not have required the sanctification of His Name in such a painful manner, through the demise of Nadav and Avihu, who were the select of Hashem.

In the continuation of the parashah, it states, "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, to say to them. Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: These are the life forms that you may eat from among all the animals that are upon the earth." The *Kedushat Levi* asks why the Torah repeats itself with the words "to say to them." It seems that it would have been sufficient to write "Hashem told Moshe and Aharon: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying" The *Kedushat Levi* explains "to say to them" hints to the future. Hashem is destined to speak with each and every Jew, as it says (*Yoel* 3:1), "And your sons and daughters will prophesy." Because Hashem will "say to them these words of prophecy," it is not appropriate for a mouth that is destined to speak with the *Shechinah* to consume impure animals, which defile his body and soul.

These words hint to the reason why Bnei Yisrael were prohibited from eating non-kosher foods. It is in order to guard the sanctity of their mouths, which were in the future destined to speak with the *Shechinah*. Similarly, we learn regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, that when Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, found him in the Nile, she first wanted him to nurse from an Egyptian woman, but Moshe refused because he knew that he was destined to speak with the *Shechinah*. Therefore, he could not defile his mouth with the milk from an impure source (*Sotah* 12b).

Parashat *Shemini* hints to *Olam Haba*, and to *brit milah*, which are all connected to the number eight (*shemonah*). It is also connected to the prohibition of eating non-kosher animals, which is written in this

parashah as well. We learn from this parashah that despite the fact that in our days we do not have the Beit Hamikdash, Kohanim, the Red Heifer, or *korbanot* to atone for our sins, we still have the Torah through which we can merit that the *Shechinah* will dwell within us. Learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvot can serve to atone for our sins, and thus sanctify us.

In addition, when one guards his *oht brit kodesh* from immorality, he is called a "*tzaddik yesod olam* – tzaddik, the foundation of the world" (see *Zohar* I, 59a) and the entire generation exists in his merit. Through him the simple people learn to fear Hashem. In a time when the world lacks justification to continue, Hashem chooses to take away the *neshamah* of a tzaddik in order to arouse the people to do teshuvah and atone for their sins (*Shabbat* 33b). Therefore, the death of Nadav and Avihu are mentioned on Yom Kippur. This is to teach us that just as the Mishkan atones for the sins of the Jews through the sacrifices offered, which arouse man to teshuvah, likewise the death of tzaddikim is an atonement, since it arouses people to do teshuvah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 20:12). This is especially true in our generation, since we have neither the Mishkan nor the Beit Hamikdash to attain atonement; it is through our tzaddikim that we achieve it.

As an appendage to the insight of the *Kedushat Levi*, it is interesting to note that the word in the pasuk commanding us not to eat non-kosher animals: "to say to them – אלהם" contains within it the Name of Hashem, אלהי-ם that denotes the Attribute of Justice. When a person eats food that is prohibited, he attaches himself to the *kelippah*, the source of impurity. In this way he causes himself to be judged with the Attribute of strict Justice. This is hinted to by the fact that the word אלהם lacks the letter י' of the word אלהי-ם. The letter י' alludes to the *neshamah* of a person, since its source is from the Upper Worlds, which were created with the letter י' (see *Menachot* 29b). Therefore, one who blemishes his *neshamah* is considered as if he obliterated the letter י' from the Name of Hashem. He is thereafter judged harshly through the Attribute of Justice, as implied by the Name אלהי-ם. Moreover, he loses the privilege of Hashem dwelling within him. He neither merits the 310 worlds, nor to be

considered from those that connect the four worlds of *Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah* through the ten *sefirot.*

In Summary

- Why was the Mishkan not dedicated on the first day of the seven days of *miluim*, or after the *korbanot* of the *Nesi'im* were sacrificed on the 12th day of Nisan? Why did Hashem choose to dedicate the Mishkan specifically on the eighth day of the inauguration? Moreover, why did Hashem choose to take the *neshamot* of Nadav and Avihu specifically on this holy day, disrupting the joyous celebration?
- The reason is because the eighth day symbolizes the eighth *sefirah*, which is above nature. This teaches that on the day that Hashem chose to rest His *Shechinah* in this world, it was incumbent upon man to rise above nature and cleave to the Upper Worlds. Similarly, *brit milah* is done on the eighth day after birth. From the moment that the symbol of the *kelippah* and lust is removed from man, by removing his *orlah*, he is capable of becoming sanctified and exalted.
- Hashem took the *neshamot* of the sons of Aharon specifically on the eighth day of the inauguration in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that they should be careful to conduct themselves with *kedushah* according to Hashem's will. Hashem wanted to impart the lesson that He would not remove His *Shechinah* from among Bnei Yisrael anymore, but instead would avenge transgressions with strict judgment in order that they should achieve atonement. In this way, Hashem could continue to dwell among His people. It was specifically on this exalted occasion that Bnei Yisrael were capable of internalizing Hashem's lesson taught through the death of the two sons of Aharon.
- Similarly, through resting His *Shechinah* in this lowly world, Hashem joined His dwelling in the Upper Worlds with the world below. This proximity is not only a privilege; it is also an obligation. According to the degree of closeness achieved, so too, is the exactitude of judgment.

- The word **שמיני** hints to the **שי** (130) worlds reserved for the righteous, the Name **י-ה** of Hashem, and the **מן** (manna), which is the food of the angels. A person who prepares himself to be a worthy vessel containing the *Shechinah* merits all these rewards.
- The parashah begins with the word **ויהי**, which denotes anguish. This is because Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, and therefore the *Shechinah* departed. When Hashem once again brought back His *Shechinah* to reside among His people, it was necessary to take the *neshamot* of the two tzaddikim, Nadav and Avihu, in order to impart to them the lesson of strictly adhering to *kedushah*. Had Am Yisrael not sinned, they would have entered Eretz Yisrael right away, and Moshe Rabbeinu would have built them the Beit Hamikdash. All the pain and anguish would have been averted.
- The pasuk says, "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, to say to them. Speak to the Children of Israel, saying." The *Kedushat Levi* explains the repetitive words "to say to them," indicating that this is an allusion to the future, when Hashem will speak with each and every Jew. We may not eat impure animals, since it is inappropriate for mouths that are destined to speak with Hashem to become defiled. This lesson is similarly learned from Moshe, who did not want to nurse from an Egyptian woman.
- In addition, the word **אלהם** (to them) hints to the Name of **אלהי-ם**, which denotes the Attribute of Justice. A person who defiles himself through eating forbidden foods is judged harshly and loses the privilege of housing Hashem's *Shechinah*. Likewise, he causes the letter **'י** to be removed from the Name of **אלהי-ם**. The letter **'י** alludes to the *neshamah* of a person, since its source is from the Upper Worlds, which were created with the letter **'י**. Since he blemishes his *neshamah*, the word of the pasuk is written without the additional **'י** as **אלהם**.

The Secret in Assembling the Mishkan

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

This pasuk implies that during the seven days of *miluim*, Moshe Rabbeinu served as the Kohen Gadol and only on the eighth day he called to Aharon, his brother, to begin officiating. The Chatam Sofer (*Ohr Penei Moshe*) asks: If Aharon was destined to serve as the Kohen Gadol, then why was this duty transferred to him only on the eighth day?

Moreover, why did Moshe Rabbeinu call the sons of Aharon on the eighth day? It is not clear from the pasuk why it was necessary for them to be summoned. The Chatam Sofer also quotes a *Midrash Peliah* (70) regarding the pasuk (*Vayikra* 10:3) "And Aharon fell silent." He asks, if Aharon had not remained silent, what could he have said? The answer he supplies is that Aharon could have said to Moshe "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (*Vayikra* 12:3). This is surprising. How is circumcision relevant to the death of his two sons?

The Chatam Sofer expounds on these points lengthily in his brilliant manner. In my humble opinion, I will offer some of my own insights.

Just as we can ask why Aharon did not serve as Kohen Gadol for the first seven days, we can ask why Moshe did not serve as Kohen Gadol on the eighth. (*Tosafot Yom Tov, Vayikra* 9:1) [There is a dispute whether he continued to officiate on the eighth day, see *Rashi*, *Shemot* 40:29. Also see *Ha'amek Davar, Shemot* 40:23; *Zevachim* 101b-102a]. It is possible that if he would have officiated on the eighth day, then the sons of Aharon would not have offered an "alien fire" of their own, since Moshe Rabbeinu would have been officiating by himself, as he had done during the previous seven days of the *miluim*. Afterwards, he could have transferred the task of the Kohen Gadol to Aharon.

This would have prevented Nadav and Avihu from the various transgressions that they committed. They were faulted for deciding the law in front of their Rav (See *Tanchuma Acharei Mot* 6), for entering the Mishkan inebriated (ibid.), and for offering an "alien fire" on their own. They would not have been able to do any of these things had they been absent. It is also possible that perhaps they would have gotten married in the interim, since remaining unmarried was also held against them.

This also raises a question. If it is prohibited for a Kohen to serve in the Mishkan while unmarried, then why did Moshe Rabbeinu not admonish them about their status? He should have warned them that their lives were at stake by serving in the Mishkan unmarried. Moshe's warning would have been sufficient to prevent them from transgressing in this manner.

There is another difficulty that needs to be resolved. The day that the Mishkan was inaugurated was considered a day of unparalleled joy, just like the day the heavens and earth were created, prior to the sin of Adam Harishon, when the world was in a pristine state (*Megillah* 10b). Why did Hashem ruin the festive celebrations with the death of Nadav and Avihu? Notwithstanding that Hashem is sanctified through his close ones, as it states (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me," why did Hashem not postpone their punishment for a different day?

When the construction of the Mishkan was complete, Hashem did not immediately rest His *Shechinah* upon it. Moshe erected the Mishkan in the morning, but in the evening, when he saw that the *Shechinah* had not descended on the Mishkan, he dismantled it because of its holy status. In this manner, Moshe erected the Mishkan each morning and dismantled it in the evening during each of the seven days of the *miluim* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 518). We cannot fathom how much toil and labor Moshe invested in the task of erecting and dismantling the Mishkan during those seven days, and how exhausting it was. We do not find any reference in the Torah that Moshe was pained by the fact that Hashem had not yet rested His *Shechinah* among Bnei Yisrael. This is because despite his exhausting task of erecting and dismantling the Mishkan during the first

seven days, he was busy rectifying vital matters by doing it specifically for seven full days.

The reason for this is that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to repair the destruction that Adam Harishon caused through his sin and that was caused by the sin of the Golden Calf. He wanted to illuminate the world as it had been during the seven days of Creation before Adam sinned, bringing it to a state of complete sanctity and purity. The first seven days of the *miluim* symbolize the sum of the six days of Creation plus the seventh day of Shabbat Kodesh, which resembles *Olam Haba* (Zohar I, 2).

After the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael counted seven full weeks prior to receiving the Torah, with the intention of repairing the damage that Adam's sin caused to the world, which was created during seven days. Through his sin, the entire world was plunged into spiritual darkness. This is because Adam was given only one mitzvah in order to maintain the world; by transgressing it, he ruined the entire Creation (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 21:7). Each week that Bnei Yisrael counted before *Matan Torah* was meant to repair another full day of Creation that was damaged by the sin. In this manner, they succeeded in repairing the world from the impurity that the Snake introduced and removed the *kelippah* entirely.

When Am Yisrael completed the count of seven weeks with absolute faith in Hashem, perfecting the original seven days of the Creation of the world, Hashem descended on Har Sinai and revealed Himself to His children, giving them His Torah. Chazal (*Shir Hashirim* 1:15) say that at *Matan Torah* the *Yetzer Hara* was uprooted from each Jew's heart, and Bnei Yisrael succeeded in getting rid of the impurity that the Snake had introduced within them (*Shabbat* 146a). Not only did they become spiritually flawless and pure, they also became physically perfect. Everyone who had been crippled during the slavery in Egypt became completely healed (*Tanchuma, Yitro* 8).

Hashem honored Bnei Yisrael greatly by descending to rest His *Shechinah* among them. Hashem was so close to Bnei Yisrael, to the extent that they were able to see their Creator on eye level. Hashem

brought dew to revive them (*Shabbat* 88b), and they were even able to see the sounds (*Midrash Shmuel* 9). This state totally opposed the laws of nature, whereby one can only hear sounds and not see them. However, since Bnei Yisrael sanctified themselves to such an extent during the seven week count of Sefirat Haomer, they merited reaching a lofty level, above nature, whereby they saw the sounds.

Specifically at this time of elevation and sanctification, Moshe ascended to Heaven for forty days in order to learn the Torah and bring it to Am Yisrael. The Satan realized that his days were numbered, and he would cease to exist the moment Moshe Rabbeinu descended with the *luchot* in his hands. This is because after the world would reach perfection, he would no longer serve any purpose.

Since the Satan did not want to die, he sought a chance for survival. He incited the *Eirev Rav* by confusing them in their count of the days till Moshe's return (*Shabbat* 89a; see Rashi *Shemot* 32:1) until they were convinced that Moshe had died and would never descend from Heaven. Therefore, they felt it was necessary to appoint a substitute leader to lead them in the Desert and usher them into Eretz Yisrael. The ploys of the *Yetzer* succeeded and through his scheme they decided upon fashioning a Golden Calf. The perfection of the seven days of Creation was once again ruined, and the spiritual "light" that Bnei Yisrael had succeeded in repairing during their seven week count following the Exodus was once again eliminated.

The entire purpose of erecting the Mishkan was in order to rectify the sin of man, who resembles a miniature Mishkan. The method in which a person could merit Hashem's closeness was to go to the Mishkan and purify himself from his sins. When he was entirely cleansed, Hashem would be able to once again rest His *Shechinah* upon him. The Mishkan was like a miniature world. Betzalel ben Uri assembled the Mishkan with the same Holy Names with which Hashem created the world (*Berachot* 55a). Since it was no longer possible to easily repair the damage to Creation because of the sin of Adam and thereafter the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem ordered the construction of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan is considered to be a miniature world because of the holy Names found in it, which were used to create the world. Because a person is like a miniature Mishkan and he is the purpose for Creation, Hashem rests His *Shechinah* also within man's body. When a person defiles his spirit through sinning, he must go to the Mishkan and sacrifice a *korban* in order to purify himself. In this way he can remain worthy of having Hashem's *Shechinah* continually reside within him.

Moshe Rabbeinu had ascended to Heaven, the sphere which is completely good; a world that constantly possesses the status of Shabbat. In the Upper Worlds, there is only a spiritual existence, with no eating, drinking, or sleeping (*Bereishit Rabbah* 48:14). Since Moshe's sole intention was to bring Hashem to lead Am Yisrael and reside among them, he was selected to erect the Mishkan during the seven days of *miluim*. It was in order to make preparations for the *Shechinah* to reside there at the end of the seven days. During these seven days, Moshe would erect the Mishkan in the morning and dismantle it in the evening (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 518) similar to what is stated regarding the days of Creation (*Bereishit* 1:5), "And there was evening and there was morning, one day."

After the work of the first day in the Mishkan, which corresponded to the first day of the Creation of the world, Moshe dismantled the Mishkan in the evening, in order to signify that he had succeeded in rectifying the spiritual component of the first day that had been damaged through the sin of the Golden Calf. In this manner, Moshe erected and dismantled the Mishkan each day until the end of the seventh day, in which he restored the tranquility that Hashem had intended for the seventh day. This was necessary since Adam Harishon had marred the day of rest when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. If Adam had not eaten from the Tree, the other six days of Creation would have retained their sanctity and been considered as Shabbat and *Olam Haba*.

Only Moshe Rabbeinu, who had ascended to the Heavens for a total of 120 days, corresponding to the 120 years of his life, knew the way to usher the *Shechinah* into the Mishkan, which was like a miniature world.

Hashem's *Shechinah* would then emanate from the Mishkan, residing among all of Klal Yisrael, since they are the purpose of Creation (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 36:4).

It was only after seven days of serving as Kohen Gadol in the Mishkan that Moshe completed the task of repairing the damage that had been caused to the seven days of Creation. Then, he felt prepared to transmit the job of Kohen Gadol to his faithful brother, who had originally been appointed by Hashem.

The Torah begins the account with the word ויהי, which denotes anguish. Moshe was anguished upon observing the restriction of the *Shechinah* to the relatively small confines of the Mishkan, when in reality the entire world is filled with Hashem's glory, and there is no corner that is void of Hashem. Upon the creation of the world, Hashem's glorious Presence was obvious from one end of the world to the other. However, thereafter, all His glory would be limited to the confines of the Mishkan.

Conversely, Hashem had great joy on the day that He rested His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan. His joy was as great as it had been at Creation. This is because Hashem knew that through restricting His *Shechinah* within man, it would spur him to serve Hashem with greater passion, until his spiritual "light" would burst forth illuminating the entire world with the truth of Hashem. Originally, upon the creation of the world, the Presence of Hashem illuminated the world freely. However, now that Hashem was restricting His *Shechinah* within the confines of man, he became consequently stimulated to become elevated and sanctified. Through this elevation, the *Shechinah* of Hashem could burst forth from within him and illuminate the entire world.

This implies that man is merely a tool to spread the light of Hashem, causing people to acknowledge Hashem's *Shechinah* in the world. Man shoulders a great responsibility. It is up to him to reveal the hidden truth of Hashem's Presence, thereby uprooting all foreign beliefs. A person's mission is, as we say in the *Aleinu* prayer each day, "to remove detestable

idolatry from the earth, and false gods will be utterly cut off to perfect the universe through the A-lmighty's sovereignty."

Moshe Rabbeinu was the one chosen to pave the way for the *Shechinah's* eternal descent because Moshe's attribute is the *sefirah* of *netzach* (eternity) (*Zohar* I, *Hashmatot* 6a). Thereafter, he transferred the responsibility to Aharon, who personifies the attribute of *hod* (glory), which is the eighth *sefirah*. This hints to the eighth day in which Aharon was initiated into the role of a Kohen Gadol, a reflection of *hod*. Since the Kohanim correspond to the eighth day (symbolizing *hod*), they were the ones who would serve in the Mishkan in order to bring down the *Shechinah*, which is synonymous with *malchut* (kingship), bringing realization of Hashem's sovereignty to the world.

It seems that Moshe Rabbeinu called to Aharon together with his sons because Moshe knew that on the day that the *Shechinah* would descend, Hashem would sanctify His Name through the demise of one of His close ones (*Tanchuma, Shemini* 1). This was essential in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that there is a Judge Who demands justice. When a person who is unfit enters the Mishkan, he is liable for capital punishment. When Am Yisrael would witness Hashem punishing by death those who deviate from its strict conditions, it would rouse them to relate with utmost caution regarding the Mishkan.

However, Moshe did not know through whom Hashem would choose to sanctify His Name. Would it be him, or Aharon, his brother? Therefore, he told Aharon to approach with his two sons. This way, if Hashem would choose to sanctify His Name through the death of Aharon, then his sons would be present to take his place as the Kohen Gadol. Moshe did not know that Hashem intended to sanctify His Name through the death of these very sons.

Nadav and Avihu were well known for their outstanding righteousness. When Yitro had made a *seudat mitzvah* in honor of Bnei Yisrael following *Matan Torah*, Hashem had revealed Himself to them. Nadav and Avihu had looked directly at the *Shechinah* while continuing to eat (see *Tanchuma*

[Bobar], Acharei Mot 13). Chazal (see *Ramban, Shemot* 24:11) say that their feast was entirely a spiritual experience. If not, they would not have been able to continue eating while looking directly at the *Shechinah*. This suggests that Nadav and Avihu always sought ways to elevate and sanctify the mundane. They removed their lust for food and turned eating into an entirely spiritual service. Their sole aspiration was that Hashem should choose them to sanctify His Name. Because this desire burned strongly within them, they decided a law in front of their Rabbi and lit an "alien fire" of their own in the Mishkan.

Nadav and Avihu ultimately erred, since they did not recognize their limits and thought that they were capable of attaining more than was truly possible. However, since their intentions were purely for the sake of Heaven, rather than for personal acclaim, Hashem commanded upon their death, "And your brothers, the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." This implies that Hashem did not hold their actions against them, since their intentions were solely to sanctify His Name. Nevertheless, their death imparted a lesson to Bnei Yisrael that despite their best intentions to elevate and sanctify themselves, they must recognize their limits and not seek inappropriate methods of serving Hashem.

Nadav and Avihu lived their entire lives according to (*Tehillim* 16:8) "I have set Hashem before me always," as well as (*Iyov* 19:26) "I see [the judgment of] God from my flesh." Therefore, they could not bear the thought of joining a woman in marriage. The reality of "Know before whom you stand" (see *Berachot* 28b) was so obvious to them that they could not distract themselves from beholding Hashem for even a moment in order to get married and be attached to someone else. Moshe and Aharon recognized their lofty considerations. Therefore, they did not admonish them to get married. They knew that their intentions were purely for the sake of Heaven.

Nonetheless, Hashem accused Nadav and Avihu for not getting married. Hashem reproached them that just as they had succeeded in transforming food from its physical state to a spiritual entity, to the extent that they

were able to continue eating while gazing at the *Shechinah*, so too, they could marry a woman. Through sanctifying their physical inclinations by using them to serve Hashem, they could turn marriage into a spiritual achievement. Since only a married person is considered complete (see *Yevamot* 63a and Zohar III, 109b), through marriage they could have succeeded in serving Hashem more intensely.

Just as raw food becomes tasty through the process of cooking, likewise it is possible to infuse spiritual content into all physical matters. In this way one elevates the material elements, which is the purpose of Creation. Getting married and having children magnifies Hashem's honor in the world by creating many more people to serve Him. The mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying is so important that through this act one becomes a partner with Hashem in Creation (*Kiddushin* 30b). It is told of Rabbi Eliezer that he would approach his wife as if he was being forced by gunpoint (*Nedarim* 20b). Notwithstanding, he did not divorce her, since he recognized the importance of establishing a family and bringing children to the world. The sons of Aharon should have married wives and infused their marriage with spiritual elements. Chazal (*Sotah* 17a) say that if man and woman are worthy, they merit the *Shechinah* residing among them. This suggests that it is possible to elevate marriage to the lofty state of meriting the *Shechinah's* presence to reside among the couple.

One of the commentaries mentions that Moshe Rabbeinu did not reprimand Nadav and Avihu for abstaining from marriage because in his humility he made the following calculation. Hashem had told Moshe to divorce his wife, Tzipporah, so that he could cleave to Hashem and be prepared to speak with the *Shechinah* directly at all times. Moshe Rabbeinu recognized the outstanding righteousness of Aharon's sons and knew that they were worthy of leading Am Yisrael after his death. He calculated that if Hashem commanded him to divorce his wife in order to cleave to Him, then all the more so Hashem would want the same conduct of Nadav and Avihu, who were particularly holy and pure. In this way they would be able to devote themselves entirely to performing the services of the Kohen Gadol. For this reason Moshe Rabbeinu did not reprimand

them when they approached the Mishkan to begin their service. In Moshe's great humility, he thought that they were on a higher level than he was. Therefore, if Hashem commanded him to divorce his wife, all the more so this would apply to Nadav and Avihu. However, this was a mistake on Moshe's part. The instruction that Hashem gave Moshe was an exception that was applicable only to him.

Hashem immediately killed Nadav and Avihu in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that this instruction that Hashem gave Moshe was an exception, applying to Moshe Rabbeinu alone. The rest of the nation was obligated to marry, each one according to his level, to fulfill the mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying, which ensures the world's existence. The death of Aharon's sons also proved to Am Yisrael that one cannot make his own decisions concerning the Mishkan. Only Moshe and Aharon were authorized to instruct the Kohanim how to serve in the Mishkan according to Hashem's command; a person may never decide the law by himself.

The death of Aharon's sons on the most joyous day of the dedication of the Mishkan demonstrated to Am Yisrael that Hashem is awesome, and His Name is awesome. They understood that Hashem does not favor tzaddikim nor does He forgo punishment for the wicked. Even on His festive occasion, He did not abstain from punishing those who were deserving of punishment. The death of Aharon's sons also proved to Am Yisrael that Hashem had forgiven them for the sin of the Golden Calf. We learn that (*Mishlei* 3:12) "Hashem admonishes the ones He loves." In spite of Hashem's great love for them, they must exercise caution concerning the Mishkan and not become accustomed to the *Shechinah*. Even if a person's intentions are for the sake of Heaven, if he conducts himself inappropriately while in the presence of the *Shechinah*, he will ultimately be punished.

The reaction of Aharon following the death of his two sons was silence, as it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "Aharon fell silent." The *Midrash Peliah* (70) states that if he would not have remained silent, he could have said, "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be

circumcised" (*Vayikra* 12:3). This is surprising. What is the connection between *brit milah* and Aharon's reaction to his sons' death?

Aharon wanted to tell Moshe that he had no grievance regarding his sons' death. The comparison to *brit milah* is as follows. On the eighth day after a boy is born, the father enters his son into the covenant of *brit milah* with great celebration and feast. Despite the inherent danger of circumcision, whereby the baby's flesh is cut and blood is drawn, the father fulfills this mitzvah with self-sacrifice, expressing great joy. He even prepares a festive meal in order to convey how joyful he is that he merited entering his son into the *brit* of Avraham Avinu.

If the *brit*, which is a private ceremony that connects the father and son with Hashem, generates such great joy, how much more so did the sacrifice of Aharon's two sons for Hashem's sake, serving to sanctify His Name through their death. Moreover, it was not only a private matter, but concerned all of Klal Yisrael. Therefore, the joy over his sacrifice is even more enhanced. Through the death of his two sons, the sanctification of the eighth and holiest day of the inauguration of the Mishkan would be remembered forever. Their death would be considered as a collective *korban*, serving to atone for the sins of all Jews and enabling the *Shechinah* to descend and rest among them. Since the sacrifice of Aharon's two sons was of such magnitude, it was a greater event than the day a father enters his son into the covenant of *brit milah*, which is only a private matter. Therefore, the joy was so much greater.

Aharon felt that despite his immense happiness, he could not express it in public because he was obligated to conduct himself according to the laws of an *onein*, while his sons lay lifeless before him. Therefore, he chose to remain silent and keep his joy only in his heart, that the Name of Hashem was sanctified through the departure of his holy and pure sons, Nadav and Avihu.

In Summary

- The Chatam Sofer poses several questions. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu serve as the Kohen Gadol during the seven days of the *miluim* and only

on the eighth day called to Aharon, his brother, to begin officiating? Why did Moshe also call the sons of Aharon, when it is not specified what he instructed them? It states, "And Aharon fell silent" when he heard of the death of his two sons. In the *Midrash Peliah* it states that Aharon could have said, "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." This is truly perplexing. One can find clarification in the sefer *Ohr Penei Moshe*.

- I have additional questions: Why did Moshe not continue to officiate as the Kohen on the eighth day? In this way the sons of Aharon would not have lit an "alien fire" of their own. Also, why did Moshe not encourage Aharon's sons to marry in order to be worthy of serving in the Mishkan in a permissible manner? Above all, why did Hashem choose to disturb His joyous festivities of the inauguration of the Mishkan with the death of Aharon's sons? Why could their punishment not be postponed to a later date?

- When Adam Harishon sinned, the spiritual light of the seven days of Creation, illuminating the world, was eliminated. Am Yisrael succeeded in repairing the damage prior to *Matan Torah* while counting seven full weeks, corresponding to the seven days of Creation. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to repair those very lights that were dimmed by the sin of the Golden Calf and restore them during the seven days of *miluim*. During these days, he would erect and dismantle the Mishkan, thereby arousing Am Yisrael to do teshuvah. Only on the eighth day, when they had succeeded in correcting their sin and returning the original light to illuminate the world, Hashem descended His *Shechinah* upon them.

- Moshe Rabbeinu alone could repair the damage, because only he ascended to Heaven and beheld the *Shechinah*. Therefore, only he could bring it down to earth. It was only after seven days of serving as Kohen Gadol in the Mishkan that Moshe completed the task of repairing the damage that had been caused to the seven days of Creation. Then, he felt prepared to transmit the job of Kohen Gadol to his faithful brother, who had originally been appointed by Hashem.

- The Torah begins the account with the word **ויהי**, which denotes anguish. Moshe felt anguish upon observing the restriction of the *Shechinah* to the relatively small confines of the Mishkan. This was not the case upon the Creation of the world, when Hashem's glorious Presence was obvious throughout the world.

- Moshe Rabbeinu, who personifies the *sefirah* of *netzach* (eternity), was selected to help bring the Shechinah, which is eternal, down to earth. On the other hand, Aharon, who personifies the *sefirah* of *hod* (glory), which is the eighth *sefirah*, was chosen to serve as the Kohen Gadol on the eighth day. Through their combined merit, they would succeed in causing the *Shechinah*, which is *hod v'hadar* (splendid glory), to descend.

- Moshe Rabbeinu also called the sons of Aharon to approach the Mishkan because he knew that Hashem intended to be sanctified through one of his close ones, but he did not know through whom. Therefore, he calculated that if Aharon would be taken to Heaven, his sons would immediately continue his service.

- The Torah relates that Nadav and Avihu ate and drank while gazing at the *Shechinah*. Commentaries explain that they were on such a lofty level that they were able to transform physical acts into spirituality. Therefore, they were capable of gazing at the *Shechinah* while eating. Since Nadav and Avihu lived their lives according to the dictum "I see [the judgment of] God from my flesh," they could not fathom joining a wife in marriage. Aharon and Moshe did not admonish them, because they knew that their intentions were for the sake of Heaven. However, Hashem considered this a fault, since they could have sanctified marriage just as they sanctified eating and drinking.

- There are commentaries who explain that Moshe did not admonish Aharon's sons because he considered them greater than himself. He calculated that if Hashem instructed him to divorce his wife in order to lead the nation, all the more so should the sons of Aharon be instructed to abstain from marriage in order to devote themselves entirely to the

service of the Kohen. He did not know that Hashem's instruction to him was an exception. Hashem chose to kill them specifically on this day, in order to warn Am Yisrael that every man should marry a wife no matter his exalted level.

- As mentioned above, when he heard of his sons' death, Aharon could have said, "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." This implies that just as a father rejoices to sanctify Hashem's Name when entering his son into the *brit* despite the danger involved, likewise Aharon had reason to rejoice. This is because by sacrificing his two sons, Hashem's Name was sanctified through their death. Since Hashem was sanctified in public, Aharon had reason to exult even more. However, since he had to conduct himself according to the laws of *onein*, he had to contain his joy; therefore it states, "And Aharon fell silent."

The Death of Tzaddikim

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

The parashah begins with the word ויהי, which denotes anguish (*Megillah* 10b). This indicates the great anguish that Hashem experienced through the death of Aharon's two sons. Following their death it states (*Vayikra* 10:6), "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." It seems from this pasuk that the untimely death of Nadav and Avihu aroused much distress both in the Upper Worlds, as well as the Lower Worlds. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to mourn the death of Aharon's sons.

On the day that the two sons of Aharon died, Hashem brought His *Shechinah* down to rest among Am Yisrael. Chazal (*Megillah* 10b) say that the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was as joyous to Hashem as the days in which He created the world. Clearly, the joy that filled Hashem upon the creation of the world is unimaginable. This tremendous joy was experienced on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan, as well. The joy was even greater, since it was the day that Hashem descended to rest His *Shechinah* among Bnei Yisrael after He had removed it following the sin of the Golden Calf.

We find that on the same joyous day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, there was both happiness and deep mourning. However, we note that the Torah relates only to the mourning that descended upon the world with the death of Aharon's two sons. Therefore, it begins with the word ויהי, which denotes anguish. Why did the Torah not begin with a word that signifies the joy that would appropriately describe the radiance and ecstasy that Am Yisrael felt on that awesome day? Why is only the anguish expressed? At least, we would expect that the Torah would choose a word expressing both sentiments, and not only relate to the mourning.

From this we learn how difficult the passing of a tzaddik is for Hashem. The pain and anguish over the death of Aharon's sons repressed the joy of Creation, to the extent that it was the mourning that was predominately felt by all. Therefore, the Torah chose the word ויהי.

During the first seven days of the *miluim*, Moshe Rabbeinu erected the Mishkan each day. However, by nightfall, when Hashem had not yet rested His *Shechinah* upon it, Moshe Rabbeinu would dismantle the Mishkan in the hope that Hashem would reveal His *Shechinah* to Am Yisrael the next day. A great miracle was performed for Moshe in that he succeeded in erecting and dismantling the Mishkan, which consisted of huge and heavy beams, single-handed. When the eighth day arrived, Moshe sensed that this day was more special than the others that preceded it, and that it was appropriate that on this day the *Shechinah* would finally descend. Therefore, he told Aharon that on this day Hashem would reveal His glory in the Mishkan. Moshe was able to relate this to

Aharon with complete confidence because he sensed the palpable joy throughout all the worlds. It was a blissful jubilance that had not been experienced during the previous seven days of *miluim*.

Amidst the great joy, Moshe knew that Hashem's *Shechinah* would ultimately descend through the sanctification of one of His close ones. However, Moshe did not know through whom Hashem would choose to sanctify His Name. Would it be through his own death, or perhaps, through the death of Aharon, his brother? Moshe desired that his life be sacrificed in sanctification of Hashem, and ultimately his brother, Aharon, should continue to live and lead Am Yisrael. Moshe loved Aharon to the extent that he considered Aharon's life as important as his own, as it says (*Tehillim* 99:6), "Moshe and Aharon were among His priests."

How can we equate Aharon with Moshe? Up to this point Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who served as the Kohen Gadol and performed the duties in the Inner Sanctuary. How could Moshe compare his lofty level to that of Aharon, who had not yet begun to serve as a Kohen Gadol? On the eighth day, Moshe Rabbeinu felt that something great was about to take place. He also knew that the service of the Kohen Gadol would be transferred to his older brother Aharon, whom Hashem had chosen. Therefore, he compared the status of Aharon to his own on account of what was to transpire in the near future.

Since only one leader officiates at a time, already on that day, Moshe called Aharon and told him to sacrifice the offerings for Hashem, as it says (*Vayikra* 9:2), "He said to Aharon: Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering and a ram for an *olah*-offering – unblemished; and offer [them] before Hashem." However, Moshe feared that at the time that Aharon would usher the *Shechinah* to descend upon the Mishkan, he would choose to be the one to die in sanctification of Hashem's Name. Therefore, Moshe experienced anguish, which is reflected in the word ויהי. Moshe was distressed at the thought that his brother would shortly die and Bnei Yisrael would lose an exceptional role model.

When Hashem saw Moshe's pain and fear for his brother's death, He also joined in his misery, and in the misery of what was shortly to befall Am Yisrael on the joyous day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. We can see from this account the outstanding virtue of Hashem. For example, if a groom, standing under the *chuppah*, hears a bad tiding, the personal joy of his impending union overrides the sadness of the tiding he hears. On his momentous occasion, only pleasure fills his heart. This is not the case regarding Hashem. He related to the pain of Moshe Rabbeinu and that of Am Yisrael more acutely than His own joy at the dedication of the Mishkan and even ordered that "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited."

The wailing of Am Yisrael over Aharon's sons, who died *al kiddush Hashem*, served two purposes. First, it perpetuated their memory among the nation for all generations. Second, it caused that their memory was constantly before Hashem, serving as a merit for Am Yisrael, atoning for their sins not just at this time, when the Mishkan was dedicated, but also for the future. The forgiveness and atonement granted at this time served as compensation for Am Yisrael for the festivities that were disturbed on the holy, exalted day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, which was compared to the days of Creation.

When there is a tzaddik living among the nation, his mitzvot and good deeds cause the nation to be judged favorably, and this protects them from suffering and harsh decrees. Likewise, the entire world benefits from the abundance of blessing that result in merit of the tzaddik, who follows in Hashem's ways. Chazal (*Shabbat* 55b) say that there were four tzaddikim who died only as a result of the Snake, i.e., the decree of death imposed upon mankind because of the sin of Adam and Chava, which was caused by the Snake. On the other hand, it says (*Kohelet* 7:20), "For there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he [always] does good and never sins."

These ideas seem contradictory. From the pasuk it seems that everyone sins, at least in something minute. However, from Chazal we learn that there are those who do not sin, but die only on account of the Snake.

Perhaps we can resolve this by saying that this implies that even if the tzaddik himself did not sin, he is held responsible for the nation's sins. This is true because each Jew serves as a guarantor for his fellow Jew. He would truly not die on his own accord; his death is only on account of the Snake, which caused others to sin.

Yishai and Binyamin are examples of those who died on account of the Snake, because of the sins of their generation. Chazal (*Shabbat* 55b) relate that Yishai, the father of David Hamelech, and Binyamin, the son of Yaakov Avinu, who was called "Binyamin the Tzaddik," never sinned at all. We may infer from this that Hashem causes the Attribute of Justice to be roused upon tzaddikim because of the sins of their generation (*Shabbat* 33b). The death of a tzaddik ultimately atones for these sins.

This type of death sanctifies the Name of Hashem (*Zevachim* 116b) since the entire world witnesses that Hashem judges His sons with true justice. They observe that the tzaddikim did not die in vain, but only because each Jew is responsible for his fellow. When a tzaddik dies in this way, it arouses people to examine their deeds and search their ways in order to discover the reason for the harsh decree that caused their great leader to be taken from them. This is a reflection of the immense compassion of Hashem. Instead of venting His wrath against all those who rebelled against Him, destroying them completely, Hashem chooses a valuable "diamond," whose loss will shock the whole nation, arousing them to do teshuvah and thereby saving them.

Chazal teach that when the great angel, Michael, perceives that the Attribute of Justice is about to descend upon Am Yisrael, he sacrifices a lofty *neshamah* on the Altar. Through its death, the Attribute of Justice is prevented from prosecuting Am Yisrael. As a result, not only does Am Yisrael escape the harsh decree sentenced upon them, they are also prompted to do complete teshuvah. In this way, Hashem's Name is sanctified through the death of the tzaddik, as it says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Am Yisrael would merit the *Shechinah* resting upon them only after they would entirely eliminate any trace of the sin of the Golden Calf. Only after they would do complete teshuvah, achieving absolute forgiveness and atonement, would Hashem be able to descend, resting His *Shechinah* among them. Moshe Rabbeinu realized that Am Yisrael would only be aroused to absolute teshuvah through a severe shock. He thought that this would be accomplished either through his death, by which they would incur the loss of their leader, or through the loss of Aharon, who helped establish the Golden Calf. Their anguish in losing their leader would cause Am Yisrael to do complete teshuvah, thereby meriting atonement for their sins. Thereafter, Hashem would be able to rest His *Shechinah* among them.

This is the reason that Moshe Rabbeinu feared for the life of his brother. He knew that one of them would die in order to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, enabling the *Shechinah* to descend upon them. Therefore, the Torah began the parashah with the word ויהי, denoting anguish. It signifies the great anguish and worry that Moshe experienced regarding the future fate of his brother Aharon. Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to sacrifice his own life gladly for the sanctification of Hashem. However, the life of his brother Aharon was even more valuable to him than his own. He wholeheartedly pleaded that Aharon should remain alive to lead Am Yisrael.

We can also explain how the death of tzaddikim arouses people to do teshuvah in another way. While the tzaddik lives among his fellow people, his followers become accustomed to hearing his lectures and gaining inspiration from him. They get so used to this that they may become dependent on the tzaddik to do their Avodat Hashem for them. They may also forget to whom they owe their achievements. Their prayers begin to be lacking in content, and their hearts turn cold, as an empty pit without water. They lack the waters of Torah, which possess the potential of restoring life to people. Although their hearts are not filled with the proverbial “snakes and scorpions,” lethargy regarding

their service of Hashem overcomes them, since they become dependent on their great leaders.

When the tzaddik disappears from their midst, suddenly everyone senses his absence. They begin to realize that hereafter they are required to serve Hashem with more intensity, in order that the abundance of blessing that they enjoyed on account of the tzaddik should not cease, both for their sake and for the sake of the public (*Sanhedrin* 37a). Through the eulogies and tears over the loss of the tzaddik, people are aroused to teshuvah and seek connection with Hashem.

This parashah recounting the death of Aharon's sons is read on Yom Kippur. Regarding his sons it says (*Vayikra* 16:1), "When they approached before Hashem, and they died." Their death is remembered on Yom Kippur in order to inspire people to do teshuvah (*Yerushalmi* 1:1). Hashem's compassion is aroused upon the people and He forgives all their misdeeds in the merit of Nadav and Avihu, who died striving to draw near to Hashem and sanctified His Name. Despite the fact that Yom Kippur is a day of joy, this very joyfulness is mingled with fear and solemnity, as it says (*Tehillim* 2:11), "Rejoice when there is trembling." On the one hand, Am Yisrael is joyful because they are confident that Hashem will judge them favorably since they are close to Him and resemble angels on that day. At the same time, the parashah of Aharon's sons hovers over them on their holy day and behooves them to do teshuvah in order to obtain forgiveness and atonement in the merit of those tzaddikim.

On this occasion, as well, we find that Hashem interrupts His joy over the exalted level His children have reached through their teshuvah, and instead joins in the pain and mourning of Am Yisrael, who anguish over the death of Aharon's sons. However, this is ultimately for the best, since specifically because of the pain of the great loss, Am Yisrael awaken to serve Hashem with greater intensity and seek to come close to Him and follow in His ways. If the reading of the parashah recounting the death of Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur arouses the nation to do teshuvah, all the more so does the death of a tzaddik who lives among

them leave an impact. It ultimately prompts people to draw closer to their Father in Heaven.

Besides for mentioning the death of Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur, we repeat many times the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy: "Hashem, Hashem, God, Merciful and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth, etc." (*Shemot* 34:6-7). The first letters of the names **נדב אביהו** have the numerical value of fifty- two (including one for the unit), which corresponds to two times the numerical value of the Name of Hashem י-ה-ו-ה. In addition, the letter **ב'** at the end of the name **נדב**, plus the letter **ו'** at the beginning of the name **ואביהו** equals eight, which corresponds to the eighth day of the inauguration, when Nadav and Avihu were summoned to the Heavenly Court. The word שמונה (eight), which denotes the supernatural, has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul). This hints that the *neshamot* of Aharon's sons were burnt and sanctified through a Divine fire, as it states, "When they approached before Hashem."

On Yom Kippur, we mention both the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy and the death of Nadav and Avihu. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy always arouse the compassion of Hashem. Mentioning the death of Nadav and Avihu generates within us the desire to purify our *neshamot*, just like their *neshamot* were burnt and sanctified by a Divine fire. Thus we attain Divine mercy.

In Summary

- The day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was both a day of mourning and joy. The parashah describing the events begins with the word **ויהי**, which denotes anguish. Why did the Torah not begin with words that express both emotions? From this we learn how agonizing the death of tzaddikim is for Hashem. His anguish repressed the joy of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, which is compared to the joy of the Creation of the world.
- Moshe Rabbeinu sensed that Hashem was about to reveal His *Shechinah* on the eighth day. Concurrently, Hashem would become sanctified

through the death of one of His close ones. Moshe did not know whom Hashem would choose. Would it be him or his brother, Aharon? Moshe pleaded to be the one to die in order that Bnei Yisrael should not lose an exceptional role model in Aharon the Kohen.

- "Moshe and Aharon were among His priests." How is it possible that Aharon was called a Kohen when he had not yet begun to serve as one? The reason is that since Moshe Rabbeinu sensed that on the eighth day Hashem would rest His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan, he called upon Aharon to sacrifice the offerings before Hashem, in order that it hasten the descent of the *Shechinah*. Nevertheless, Moshe feared that Hashem would seek to sanctify His Name through the one that was sacrificing the offerings. Therefore, it states "**ויהי ביום השמיני**," denoting anguish.
- We learn that "there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he [always] does good and never sins." If so, for what reason do tzaddikim die? It is because of the responsibility of one Jew to another. The sins of the people are referred to the tzaddikim, and they are condemned to die. There is a double benefit as a result of their death. The nation is saved from a harsh decree, and they are also aroused to teshuvah, drawing them closer to Hashem.
- Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Hashem would reveal Himself to His children only after the sin of the Golden Calf was entirely eliminated. This would be accomplished through the death of one of His close ones. This death would shock the people into doing complete teshuvah for the sin of the Golden Calf, and thereby be worthy of the *Shechinah* resting among them.
- We mention the death of Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur and plead that Hashem forgive our sins in the merit of these two tzaddikim. Moreover, mentioning the death of Aharon's two sons arouses fear, as it states, "Rejoice when there is trembling." Through experiencing anguish over the loss, Am Yisrael are aroused to do teshuvah and thus merit Hashem's overwhelming mercy.

The Pitfalls of Overachieving

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

Chazal (*Megillah* 10b) teach that the word ויהי always denotes anguish. The parashah begins with this word in order to inform us of the anguish of the *Shechinah* and of Bnei Yisrael at the death of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. Precisely on Hashem's joyous occasion, on the day that Hashem intended to rest His *Shechinah* among Bnei Yisrael, these two great tzaddikim departed, causing profound anguish. Instead of rejoicing over the descent of the *Shechinah* upon them, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited.

Commentaries explain (*Shelah*, *Vayikra*; *Torah Ohr* 13) that the sons of Aharon died because they attempted to draw too close to Hashem, seeking elevation that was beyond their capabilities. For example, every man's physical strength is measured by the weight that he is capable of lifting. The greater his physical capacity, the more he is capable of lifting. Every person has a limit of how much weight he can carry. He is not capable of lifting weights beyond his limit, even though he may very much want to do so. If he were to suddenly lift an excessively heavy weight that is beyond his ability, he would be greatly harmed and may even suffer permanent disability. However, if he would gradually train himself daily to carry heavier weights, ultimately he would be capable of raising his limits.

Similarly, regarding Avodat Hashem, a person must train himself to go gradually from "strength to strength," and not jump to high levels of sanctity in one giant leap. This is referred to by the pasuk (*Tehillim* 19:3), "Day following day utters speech." This implies that every day one should progress a little further in his Avodat Hashem, until he reaches the high

level of closeness to Hashem. However, if a person does not work gradually, day by day, but instead seeks to immediately reach lofty levels, this abruptness may harm him. This is what occurred to Aharon's sons, who sought to acquire an exalted level in Avodat Hashem hurriedly. Since they were not capable of bearing this level of sanctity so soon, they got burnt from the intense *kedushah*.

There were several *Tanna'im* who sought to uncover the secret of *Ma'aseh hamerkavah* (*Chagigah* 14b). Since these concepts were beyond their understanding, they were harmed by their attempt. One of them died, the second lost his mind, and the third rebelled against Hashem. On the other hand, we find that Rabbi Akiva succeeded in uncovering these secrets without getting harmed. How is it possible that all the other *Tanna'im* did not succeed in this quest, whereas Rabbi Akiva did?

The difference between them is illustrated by the very lesson that inspired Rabbi Akiva to begin learning Torah at the advanced age of forty. He observed drops of water dripping onto a stone and realized that if water could wear through the hard stone, then certainly the persistent study of Torah, which is compared to water, could succeed in penetrating his heart (*Avot d'Rabbeinu Natan* 6b). Rabbi Akiva also realized that if a lot of water would have fallen on the stone all at once, it would not have succeeded in boring a hole through it. On the contrary, gushing water would have caused a flood, which would have dislodged the stone from its place. Only because the water dripped slowly and consistently, drop by drop, did it ultimately succeed in penetrating the stone.

This revelation taught Rabbi Akiva an important lesson. He understood that in order to learn Torah and become elevated through it, reaching the most exalted levels, one must progress step by step and not jump to lofty heights in one leap. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva began by sitting in a class with small children, learning with them the letters of the *aleph-beit*, in spite of being forty years old. Since he knew that this was the correct path, he was not embarrassed to learn with children. He sought to progress little by little. This moderate progress would ensure that he reached his final spiritual goal. Therefore, we find that Rabbi Akiva entered the domain of

Ma'aseh merkavah peacefully and exited peacefully, achieving success in his endeavors. Since he did not seek to comprehend the entire issue at once, but progressed step by step, he ultimately acquired Divine knowledge and became sanctified through its *kedushah*.

Normal rainfall is considered a blessing. It causes the world to blossom and flourish. However, when the rain descends in unrestrained torrents, not only does it not water the fields in a beneficial manner, but causes much damage, and can even destroy the world. Lately we have witnessed many floods that have washed away whole settlements and left thousands of people homeless.

Similarly, Hashem precisely chose to punish the Generation of the Flood with destructive rain, which annihilated the entire world, in order to teach us a lesson. The Flood began through gentle raindrops, and only afterwards developed into a turbulent storm (*Rashi Bereishit* 7:12). This indicates that the same rain that had the potential to bring blessing to the world can destroy it as well. It all depends upon the behavior of its inhabitants. When rain falls in moderation, there is no greater blessing. However, when people become depraved, the rain descends in overwhelming torrents, until whole communities are uprooted.

Parashat *Shemini* begins with the command to Moshe and Aharon (*Vayikra* 9:2), "Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering and a ram for an *olah*-offering – unblemished; and offer [them] before Hashem." Further on, Moshe Rabbeinu adds to this, saying to Aharon and his sons (ibid. 9:4): "For today Hashem appears to you." It seems from Moshe's words that he knew that after Aharon and his sons would sacrifice sin-offerings on the eighth day, Hashem would descend to rest His *Shechinah* among Am Yisrael. This is perplexing. If Moshe Rabbeinu knew this in advance, why did he not order Aharon and his sons to sacrifice the sin-offering already on the first day of the *miluim*? Why did he wait seven days, and only on the eighth day command them to officiate? It is possible that if Moshe would have commanded Aharon to sacrifice the offerings on the first day, Hashem would have descended to rest His *Shechinah* already on that day. Then they would not have had to

wait another seven days, during which Moshe had to labor daily to erect and dismantle the Mishkan (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 518).

This can be understood through the following explanation. Moshe knew that Am Yisrael were still under the influence of the sin of the Golden Calf and not yet worthy of the *Shechinah* resting among them. Thus, if Hashem were to rest His *Shechinah* upon them on the first day, Am Yisrael would not be able to bear the intense *kedushah* and would have died.

Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu waited seven days. During these seven days, Moshe erected the Mishkan each day in the morning and dismantled it in the evening, in order that Am Yisrael would see and perceive that Hashem had not yet rested His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan. In this way, Am Yisrael would be aroused to teshuvah and would yearn for the *Shechinah*. Through their yearning, they would improve their ways, until they would be worthy of the *Shechinah's* descent. This ultimately caused them to prepare themselves daily for greeting the *Shechinah*, since they realized that they were still not worthy of it.

On the eighth day, when Moshe Rabbeinu observed that Am Yisrael had utilized the previous seven days to mend their ways and were able to bear the intense *kedushah* of Hashem's Presence, he instructed Aharon to sacrifice the sin-offerings, which had the potential to bring the *Shechinah* to rest upon the Mishkan. This is as described (*Tehillim* 19:3), "Day following day utters speech." Moshe Rabbeinu prepared Am Yisrael day by day during the first seven days of the *miluim* in order that on the eighth day they should be worthy of meriting the *Shechinah* to rest among them.

Nadav and Avihu died because they attempted to draw too close without being worthy and capable of it. They should have recognized their rank and shown respect to their father, Aharon, who was greater and older than them, by letting him do the Avodah. Since they did not recognize their true position and did not honor their father, Aharon, it was considered as if they decided a law before their teacher. Through this, their lofty level was lowered, reducing their capacity to attain the

closeness to Hashem that they desired. Therefore, they were punished and ultimately died.

Nadav and Avihu sought to perform something that Hashem had not commanded them to do. Hashem had not commanded them in this service because He knew that they were not ready for it. However, Nadav and Avihu did not recognize their limits and sought to serve Hashem beyond their abilities. Therefore, they were deserving of death. This teaches that Hashem does not demand from man to place himself in danger. Hashem only requires man to do things that he is capable of doing. Along these lines, the *ba'alei mussar* teach (*Bereishit Rabbah* 55b; *Alshich, Devarim* 8a) that Hashem does not place a person in a challenge that he is not capable of withstanding. If a person faces a challenge, it is a sign that according to his level and capabilities, he is able to succeed, on condition that he exercises determination and fortitude. It all depends on his commitment in serving Hashem with self-sacrifice.

Therefore, it is important for a person to realize that he should progress in his pursuit of Torah and *yirat* Hashem slowly, step by step, day after day, until he realizes all the potential that Hashem granted him. Regarding this Chazal (*Shabbat* 104a) teach, "One who comes to be purified is assisted." When a person follows in the proper path, he is granted Divine assistance to progress and rise to lofty levels in Avodat Hashem. One should never attempt to achieve perfection all at once, but should map out a plan to acquire an additional virtue each day. Only after he feels secure that he mastered that virtue should he progress further, climbing the ladder and drawing closer to Hashem.

We know that Hashem created the entire world in six days. We may wonder that since Hashem is the Master of the universe and there is nothing greater than Him, clearly Hashem could have created the universe in one moment. Why did He bother to spend six days in creating the world?

This teaches us how we should proceed in building our personal lives and acquire success in our Avodat Hashem. If Hashem, who is

Omnipotent, created the world in six days, all the more so should man create his spiritual world slowly, step by step. One, who overachieves, ultimately loses out (*Yoma* 80a). If a person would attempt to acquire spiritual achievements and build his world in one moment, he could forfeit it all very quickly. Similarly, we see that food cooks well when it is placed on a small flame. If the pot is placed on a high flame, not only does the food not cook well, but it gets burnt. In order for the food to be cooked thoroughly, one must cook it slowly. Only then is it worthy to be eaten.

When a poor person gets rich unexpectedly through winning the lottery, he will probably lose all his money just as suddenly. This is because all his life he lived in dire poverty and has no idea how to handle finances wisely. On the other hand, a man who labored all his life to earn money, gradually acquiring financial acumen and finally becoming wealthy, is prepared to handle his money wisely, since he prepared himself to attain this status for many years. Prior preparation enables a man to guard his wealth and not lose it quickly. One should approach Avodat Hashem in a similar manner.

David Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 24:3-4), "Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in the place of His sanctity? One with clean hands and pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul, and has not sworn deceitfully." He asks who will merit ascending the mountain of Hashem and establishing himself there. He answers that it is only a person who refined his character traits, improving them one after the other, as specified. It is no simple feat to achieve spiritual elevation, but requires constant, daily exertion. Then a person is worthy to "stand in the place of His sanctity."

Likewise, Bnei Yisrael merited standing at the foot of Har Sinai and receiving the Torah only after they removed themselves from the forty-nine levels of impurity (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of *Yitro*) and achieving forty-nine levels of purity (*Zohar* III, 97a). This was not accomplished in one day. It required strenuous work day after day.

This implies that Nadav and Avihu were punished because they aspired to acquire lofty achievements beyond their capabilities and were prepared to sacrifice themselves as offerings before Hashem. This contradicts the Torah's command (*Vayikra* 18:5), "And live by them." We are supposed to live by keeping the mitzvot, and not die through doing so. However, they did not realize that Hashem did not desire this from them.

Since Nadav and Avihu sought a level of service that was not requested of them at all, and which was beyond their capabilities, they were summoned to the Heavenly Court. Despite the fact that they did not perform Hashem's will, all of Am Yisrael was commanded to bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited, since their intentions were solely for the sake of Heaven.

In Summary

- Chazal say that Nadav and Avihu deserved to die because they sought to achieve high levels in Avodat Hashem quickly rather than acquire them gradually. Even in physical matters, a person cannot lift heavy weights until he is able to do so. He must train himself daily, lifting heavier weights gradually, until his body is able to withstand the strain. Likewise, in Avodat Hashem, a man should progress step by step. A sudden leap to lofty levels could result in disaster.
- Three *Tanna'im* sought to uncover the secrets of *Ma'aseh merkavah*, but did not succeed. On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva also sought to explore it and did succeed. This is because he progressed in his Avodat Hashem step by step.
- Rabbi Akiva learned a lesson from the drops of water that succeeded in penetrating the stone since it dripped slowly drop after drop. Had it flooded the stone all at once, it would not have succeeded in boring a hole through it.
- When Hashem brought the Flood during the days of Noach, He first brought down a moderate rainfall, which serves as a blessing to the world.

Only afterwards did the rain turn into a deadly flood that destroyed the entire world. Hashem wanted to teach the world that as long as rain falls moderately, it is a blessing. However when torrents of water descend all at once, it causes heavy destruction. This teaches us to progress gradually in our Avodat Hashem.

- On the eighth day, Moshe commanded Aharon to sacrifice a sin-offering because he saw through divine inspiration that on this day Hashem would rest His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan. Why did Moshe wait until the eighth day and not command Aharon to sacrifice the offerings on the first day in order to hasten the descent of the *Shechinah*? The reason is because Moshe knew that Am Yisrael had to first remove all traces of the sin of the Golden Calf. Had Hashem revealed Himself to them on the first day, they would not have been capable of withstanding the intense *kedushah* because of the remnants of the sin that were still attached to them. However, after they witnessed Moshe erecting and dismantling the Mishkan for seven days because the *Shechinah* had not descended, they were sufficiently aroused on the eighth day to complete teshuvah, eliminating all traces of the sin, and becoming worthy of the *Shechinah* resting upon them.

- Why did Hashem create the world during six days when He could have done it with a single utterance in one moment? It seems that Hashem wanted to teach His children a lesson that they should build their individual worlds step by step. If Hashem Himself created the universe in six days and not all at once, all the more so should they progress gradually. “One who attempts to overachieve, ultimately does not achieve.”

- David Hamelech says in Tehillim, “Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in the place of His sanctity? One with clean hands and pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul, and has not sworn deceitfully.” This implies that only a person who improves his

character traits gradually, one after the other, merits ascending the mountain of Hashem and dwelling there.

Attaining Atonement

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel. He said to Aharon: Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering and a ram, for an olah-offering – unblemished; and offer [them] before Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 9:1-2)

Prior to *Matan Torah*, Hashem offered the Torah to all the nations of the world (*Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer* 40). However, before accepting it, they first wanted to verify what was written in it. When they heard of the many prohibitions which the Torah forbids, each nation refused to accept it. They showed no interest in elevating themselves by overcoming their base instincts in order to serve Hashem. When Hashem saw that none of the nations were interested in the Torah, He went to Bnei Yisrael and offered it to them. When Bnei Yisrael heard Hashem's offer to grant them the holy Torah, they immediately proclaimed (*Shemot* 24:7; *Avodah Zarah* 2b; *Shabbat* 88a) "We will do and we will obey."

Usually a person examines merchandise carefully before buying it. However, since Am Yisrael had already seen the miracles that Hashem did for them and they recognized His mightiness, they did not hesitate in the least to accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah and mitzvot without first investigating what it demands. They immediately responded by saying "We will do," and only thereafter, "We will obey." Am Yisrael were

prepared to accept upon themselves the words of the holy Torah even without knowing what hardships it entails. It was not the difficulty that concerned them. Their only desire was to cleave to Hashem, Who redeemed them from Egypt "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."

Chazal (*Shabbat* 88a) say that following Bnei Yisrael's proclamation of "We will do and we will obey," two angels approached each person and crowned him with two spiritual crowns. One corresponded to their declaration of "We will do," and the other corresponded to "We will obey." This indicated that from the moment that Bnei Yisrael accepted upon themselves the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, the *Shechinah* descended, resting among them. However, when Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem immediately removed His *Shechinah* from them. Only at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, did Hashem return to rest His *Shechinah* among them.

We learn from Chazal (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6) that Hashem did not experience greater joy on any occasion than on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. His joy was so great on that day that it compared to His joy at the Creation of the world (*Megillah* 10b), which were days that Hashem's joy knew no bounds. Why did Hashem judge Bnei Yisrael so harshly after sinning with the Golden Calf, to the extent that He removed His *Shechinah* from them? In addition, what is the connection between the *Chanukat Hamishkan* and the descent of the *Shechinah*?

The commentaries explain the following. Moshe Rabbeinu erected the Mishkan each morning and dismantled it each evening during the seven days of the *miluim* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 518). Each evening, when Moshe observed toward nightfall that Hashem had not yet rested His *Shechinah* among Am Yisrael, he dismantled the Mishkan, while praying that Hashem hasten to reveal His *Shechinah* upon the following morning. Moshe's sorrow was intensified when he observed that Hashem had not rested His *Shechinah* among them on each successive morning. Therefore, each consecutive evening he would dismantle the Mishkan with great sorrow. When the eighth day arrived, Moshe knew that this

was the day that Hashem would surely rest His *Shechinah* among Bnei Yisrael, since the number eight denotes the supernatural. Even if there was any residual anger against Am Yisrael because of the sin of the Golden Calf, the eighth day, which is beyond nature, had the potential to remove this anger and cause Hashem to descend, resting His *Shechinah* in the world below.

In order to hasten the *Shechinah's* descent, Moshe ordered Aharon to sacrifice sin-offerings, whose purpose is to atone fully for the sin of the Golden Calf, thereby enabling Hashem's *Shechinah* to descend. As long as there remained a trace of the sin, the Attribute of Justice prevailed and did not allow Hashem's *Shechinah* to rest upon the Mishkan. The sin-offering would fully remove the anger that Hashem harbored as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf. In this way, the *Shechinah* would be able to descend upon Am Yisrael and rest among them.

Regarding this, the author of the Noam Elimelech states (see *Likutei Shoshanah* starting at *Shiru L'Hashem*) that sometimes a person prays fervently to Hashem to salvage him from a difficult situation, but his prayers are not accepted Above and do not succeed in reversing the harsh decree. He suggests that when prayers do not yield results, it may be because there are barriers between the person's prayer and the Worlds Above as a result of a sin that he committed. To illustrate the point, we can compare it to creating an electrical circuit. In order for electricity to flow between the wires, they must be connected. It is enough for a tiny separation between them to cause the electricity to cease flowing. Likewise, when a man is steeped in sin, he thereby disconnects from Hashem. Therefore, his prayers are not accepted Above.

It can also be compared to a day in which the sun shines in full force, but ultimately does not warm the people below. If there are heavy clouds blocking it, the people below cannot enjoy the sunshine. Just because a person does not feel the warmth of the sun, it does not mean that the sun is not present. It merely indicates that there may be various factors, such as clouds or winds, which interfere between him and the sun, preventing him from enjoying its warmth. In order for man to enjoy the splendor of

the *Shechinah* of Hashem and benefit from the Light of the world, he must first examine and scrutinize his deeds to check if there is anything interfering between him and Hashem, which prevents his *tefillot* from ascending Above and achieving their objective.

Therefore, Moshe told Aharon to sacrifice a sin-offering for Hashem with a prayer that the sin-offerings should cleanse and purify Am Yisrael from the sin of the Golden Calf that clung to them and interfered between them and Hashem. Moshe wanted specifically that Aharon should engage in sacrificing the offering in order that it should atone for his part in the sin. Despite Aharon's good intentions of delaying the people from fashioning the Golden Calf and attempting to distract them from their incorrect count to Moshe's return, he ultimately assisted in facilitating idol worship and thereby causing the *Shechinah* to depart. Therefore, Moshe wanted Aharon to sacrifice the offerings that would return the *Shechinah* to rest among the people. In this way, he would rectify his role in the sin, even though he acted entirely for the sake of Heaven.

Chazal (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 1) teach, "Good manners preceded the [giving of] the Torah." This implies that good manners are a prerequisite to fulfilling the commandments of the Torah. There are three types of relationships which require good manners. The first is good manners in relation to the people around us. The second is displaying good manners and behaving politely in order to maintain our own dignity. The third is exhibiting good manners toward Hashem.

How can we demonstrate good manners regarding Hashem? He is not a corporeal being, thus it impossible to demonstrate respect through physical contact. However, man is obligated to display good manners toward Hashem by praying to Him with concentration and not speaking with others during prayer. One who engages in idle chatter in the Beit Hakeneset is compared to one who is invited to feast with the king. However, instead of paying attention to the king, he turns away from him in order to speak to other people.

For this reason Chazal (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 151a) instituted that when a person leaves something behind in the Beit Hakeneset, he is forbidden to return to take it and exit immediately. He is obligated to first study a bit of Torah or say a short prayer and only thereafter leave the Beit Hakeneset. This is in order to display good manners, and demonstrates to what extent we should respect the sanctity of the Beit Hakeneset. It is compared to a miniature Beit Hamikdash and therefore demands that we have a serious attitude concerning it. For the same reason, we do not turn our backs to the *Kotel Hama'aravi* upon exiting, but instead walk backwards so that we continuously face the *Kotel*. This, too, demonstrates good manners and expresses our trepidation and fear when visiting this holy site, from which the *Shechinah* never departs.

Having good manners is the foundation of the Torah. Therefore, Hashem agreed to bestow the Torah to His children only after they camped "as one man with one heart" at the foot of Har Sinai. On that occasion, they demonstrated good manners toward each other, fostering good relationships (*Derech Eretz Zuta, Perek Hashalom*). This served as a lesson for Bnei Yisrael. If they desired to receive the Torah, and in addition merit the *Shechinah* residing among them, they were first required to exhibit good and polite manners since "good manners preceded the [giving of] the Torah."

The sin of the Golden Calf indicated that Am Yisrael had abandoned the rules of proper conduct. They denied the benevolence of Hashem in redeeming them from Egypt "with a mighty hand and outstretched arm." Therefore, Hashem also hurried to remove His *Shechinah* from them. By removing His *Shechinah*, Hashem was imparting the message that if they desired to have the *Shechinah* and Torah dwell in their hearts, they must first learn the rules of ethical conduct and good manners, which are the foundations of the Torah and the prerequisite for the *Shechinah's* presence.

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu that if he wanted the *Shechinah* to return to dwell amongst Bnei Yisrael, he must build a Mishkan in which offerings would be sacrificed; the *lechem hapanim* would be baked; and which

would contain an Aron, Mizbeach, and Menorah, etc. Why did Hashem require the service of *korbanot*? At first glance, it seems similar to idol worship, *chas v'shalom*. If we were to hear, *l'havdil*, that in India there are people who sacrifice animals on an altar, we would immediately assume that it was an act of *avodah zarah*. How can we explain that Hashem commanded us to serve Him in the Sanctuary with such a similar procedure?

The main reason that Hashem commanded Am Yisrael to build a Mishkan was in order to uproot from their hearts any trace of the sin of the Golden Calf that remained. As a result they would merit the *Shechinah* residing amongst them once again. How is it possible to eradicate all traces of the sin? By witnessing Aharon the Kohen taking a calf, slaughtering it and sacrificing it on the Altar all traces of the sin would be eradicated. Then they would be completely prepared to dedicate themselves for Hashem alone and to demonstrate good manners and respect toward Him. (See the *Ramban, Vayikra* 1:9; *Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim,* Part III, 46 for explanations clarifying why sacrifices were necessary.)

This teaches us that when a person sins, he should examine the cause for his transgression and transform it by sanctifying it in the service of Hashem. For example, a woman may choose to abort her fetus and afterward regret wholeheartedly that she shed innocent blood. She cannot reverse this evil, because the child cannot be resurrected. However, she can rectify her deeds through dedicating herself to raising the awareness of the evils of abortion. She can publicize that abortion is an act of murder. Just as one would not consider murdering an innocent and vulnerable person, likewise it is forbidden to murder a fetus in its mother's womb. It, too, is innocent and vulnerable. How can one attack a life that has no ability to protect itself?

Likewise, a woman who did not keep the laws of family purity and gave birth to a child whilst in an impure state cannot reverse this misconduct and give birth to this child anew in a pure state. But she does have the ability to correct her misdeed by arousing other women to join her in

embracing the laws of family purity and strengthening their connection with Hashem. This will serve to atone for her sin.

Similarly, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan and sacrifice offerings in it so that through the *korbanot* they would remove from their hearts any trace of sin that the Golden Calf had left. This method of rectification, measure for measure, would serve as the ultimate teshuvah. Thus they would be purified before Hashem and would thereafter serve him with proper fear, respect, and good manners.

In Summary

- Why did Hashem judge Am Yisrael so severely when they sinned with the Golden Calf, to the extent that He removed His *Shechinah* from them?
- Moshe Rabbeinu erected and dismantled the Mishkan during the first seven days of *miluim*, and on the eighth day he requested of Aharon to sacrifice the sin-offering. This was because Moshe knew that the eighth day was of a supernatural nature and therefore possessed the potential for the *Shechinah* to descend precisely then. Aharon was specifically chosen to sacrifice the offering in order to atone for his part in the sin of the Golden Calf, despite his virtuous intentions.
- The *Noam Elimelech* says that sometimes a person's prayers are not accepted Above because his sins create a barrier between him and Hashem. In order for his prayers to be heard, he should do teshuvah.
- There are three types of relationships which require good manners. The first is good manners in relation to the people around us, the second is toward ourselves, and the third is exhibiting good manners toward Hashem. When Bnei Yisrael fashioned the Golden Calf, they exhibited a lack of good manners toward Hashem. We are taught that "good manners preceded the [giving of] the Torah," Hashem removed His *Shechinah* from them in order to emphasize the magnitude of their iniquity and indicate their shortcomings.
- Hashem commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan in order to sacrifice *korbanot* in it. When Am Yisrael would observe the service of the

korbanot, they would be aroused to connect to Hashem and cleave to Him. Likewise, when they would witness the cows being slaughtered, all traces of the sin of the Golden Calf would be removed from their hearts.

- When a person transgresses in any way, he should strengthen himself and rectify his misdeed in a way that corresponds to the nature of his sin. In this way he will be able to repair his iniquity. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to sacrifice animals as *korbanot* in order to remove any traces left of the sin of the Golden Calf.

Avoiding Jealousy

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel. He said to Aharon: Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering and a ram, for an olah-offering – unblemished; and offer [them] before Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 9:1-2)

Parashat *Shemini* begins with a description of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, which was a day filled with joy for Hashem and for Am Yisrael. Chazal (*Megillah* 10b) say that the joy of that day can be compared to the immense joy that Hashem experienced upon the Creation of the world. The reason for this great happiness stemmed from Hashem returning His *Shechinah* to reside amongst Am Yisrael. It demonstrated that Hashem desired to dwell among them, and that the hostility toward Am Yisrael because of their sin with the Golden Calf was gone. In every generation Am Yisrael is punished because of this enormous sin. Hashem's

willingness to rest His *Shechinah* amongst Am Yisrael demonstrated that His raging fury following the sin had abated.

If the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was a joyous day for Hashem and for Am Yisrael, to the extent that Chazal compare it to the joy felt at the Creation of the world, why does the parashah describing the event begin with the word ויהי, a word that denotes anguish (*Megillah* 10b)? It seems that such an allusion to pain and anguish contradicts the essence of the day, which was one of unparalleled joy. We could suggest that ויהי expresses the sorrow that would be felt upon the death of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon. However, at that point they had not yet perished. They were, in fact, being summoned by Moshe to approach the Mishkan together with Aharon, their father, and the elders of the congregation. Kohelet teaches (3:1), "Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything." Why is sorrow hinted to at this point, before the tragedy occurred?

My forefather, the tzaddik, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto asks why on the eighth day did Moshe Rabbeinu summon Aharon's sons and the elders of the congregation in addition to Aharon, when in fact, only Aharon's presence was necessary? Only the Kohen Gadol himself was commanded to sacrifice offerings. Likewise, only Aharon was the one who would be required to be initiated into the priestly garments.

We can answer along the following lines, according to the *ba'alei mussar*. The tactic of the *Yetzer Hara* is to infiltrate the hearts of tzaddikim through ingenious deception. It is common knowledge that jealousy is a vice which can distort a person's logic and lead him to behave irrationally, to the extent that he may ruin his life, as Chazal (*Avot* 4:21) teach, "Jealousy, lust, and glory remove a man from the world." The *Yetzer Hara*, in his great wisdom, knows that the tzaddik will not be induced to become jealous, since it brings vast destruction in its wake. Therefore, he induces the tzaddik to foster a permitted jealousy. It is permitted for one to be jealous of another's exalted level in learning Torah and perfecting their character traits, which our sages term *kinat sofrim*. Through inducing him to feel jealousy in a permitted fashion, the *Yetzer*

Hara approaches the tzaddik when his defenses are down, causing him to feel unpermitted and destructive forms of jealousy regarding his wealth, good health, and prominence.

In light of this, we can explain that Moshe Rabbeinu summoned Aharon's sons and the elders of the congregation to the *Chanukat Hamishkan* in order to establish that wealth and prominence are allotted by Hashem alone. He wanted to teach them that if a certain person merited a high position, this indicates that it was Hashem's will and it should not be disputed. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted that these distinguished elders of the congregation should see Aharon dressed in the priestly garments, sacrificing offerings for Hashem. Thus they would come to the conclusion that if Aharon had been chosen for this esteemed position, it was only because this is Hashem's will. They would conclude that there is no reason to be jealous, because it would be clear that no one was more suited than him. After the elders would have incorporated this important lesson, they would give over this message to the entire nation – that one should rejoice in their fellow's success and not begrudge his rank.

Likewise, Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to impart to them that the *Shechinah* of Hashem can reside among them only when there is mutual affection and benevolence. As long as Bnei Yisrael demonstrate concern and kindness for each other, they cause the *Shechinah* of Hashem to rest among them. However, the moment that jealousy penetrates their hearts, and one person begrudges the other, the *Shechinah* cannot remain among Am Yisrael and quickly departs. A person should be aware that the tactics of the *Yetzer Hara* are very ingenious, and he tends to approach a person with devious schemes.

Therefore, one should even avoid the permitted *kinat sofrim*, which in essence is beneficial, because the *Yetzer Hara* can easily gain a foothold, inducing him to thereafter engage in destructive jealousy. One should examine his motives to evaluate if his jealousy is truly altruistic and for the sake of Heaven. He must ensure that his motives for feeling jealous

are free of all subjectivity and that no destructive jealousy is mixed in. As we have learned, jealousy can lower a person to Gehinnom.

Based on this, we can explain the reason why parashat *Shemini* begins with the word ויהי, which denotes anguish, when the occasion of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was a joyous one. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to warn Bnei Yisrael that they should preserve this very exalted joy felt on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* for the entire year, and not only savor it for that day. In order to do so, one should always rejoice in his fellow's joy and not become jealous of each other.

This idea can be illustrated with the following parable. Reuven won a large sum of money in the lotto. He ran to share the good news with his friend Shimon. However, Shimon looked at Reuven with pity when he heard about his good fortune. Reuven was confused and could not understand why Shimon was looking at him in this way. He felt that his friend should rejoice over his good fortune and not pity him for it. However, Shimon explained to Reuven that although he had won a fortune of money, he feared for his friend's ability to guard it and use it wisely. He might lose it entirely through one reckless act. *L'havdil*, Moshe Rabbeinu greatly feared that through feeling jealousy over Aharon's position, Bnei Yisrael would lose their good fortune of having Hashem's *Shechinah* reside among them.

Moshe Rabbeinu very much feared that the rejoicing would turn into anguish as signified in the word ויהי, since either Aharon or one of his sons would die that day for the sanctification of Hashem. The fears of Moshe Rabbeinu were well founded. It was also prophetic of the future, when the Beit Hamikdash would ultimately be destroyed and the *Shechinah* would depart because of baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b), which was caused by the envy that prevailed among Am Yisrael at that time.

In Summary

- The day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was a day filled with joy for Hashem and for Am Yisrael, compared to the immense joy that Hashem had upon

the Creation of the world. Why does the parashah describing this event begin with the word **ויהי**, a word that denotes anguish? We cannot suggest that it was because of the death of Aharon's sons, since they were being summoned to appear before Moshe Rabbeinu and had not yet died.

- My forefather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, questions why Moshe summoned Aharon's sons and the elders to approach the Mishkan, since only Aharon was commanded to sacrifice offerings before Hashem and wear the priestly garments.
- One possible answer is that it was in order to teach us a lesson regarding the vice of jealousy. Jealousy can ultimately ruin a person's life. The tactic of the *Yetzer Hara* is to make a person feel the beneficial type of jealousy, *kinat sofrim*, and thereby lead him to feel the destructive form of jealousy. Moshe Rabbeinu summoned the sons of Aharon and the elders of the congregation to witness the splendor of Aharon. He wished to teach them that rank is decided by Hashem and therefore there is no reason for envy. The elders would impart this message to the entire nation.
- Moshe Rabbeinu prophesied that the Beit Hamikdash would ultimately be destroyed because of baseless hatred, which is caused by envy. Therefore, the parashah begins with the word **ויהי**, denoting sadness. This served as a warning for Am Yisrael that only by avoiding jealousy would they be worthy of the *Shechinah* residing among them. If there would be jealousy among them, Hashem would hasten to remove His *Shechinah* from them.

Aharon's Exemplary Humility

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel. He said to Aharon: Take for yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering and a ram, for an olah-offering – unblemished; and offer [them] before Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 9:1-2)

Rashi comments on the words of the pasuk *Take for yourself a calf*: "To inform Aharon that the Holy One, Blessed is He, grants atonement for him through this calf for the matter of the Golden Calf (מעשה העגל) that he made."

The author of *Ateret Tzvi* questions that if Aharon truly sinned with the Calf, why was he not required to sacrifice a he-goat as a sin-offering? The word שעיר (he-goat) shares the same letters as רשע (wicked), since the he-goat is sacrificed to atone for the wickedness of the sin. Additionally, why does Rashi say מעשה העגל (the matter of the Golden Calf) and not חטא העגל (the sin of the Golden Calf)?

We can explain that Aharon actually did not sin with the Golden Calf; he only observed the matter and feared it. When Aharon witnessed Am Yisrael murdering Chur, who admonished the Jews, Aharon feared that they would kill him as well (*Sanhedrin* 7a). This fear did not stem from a desire to protect himself. He feared that if Am Yisrael would be guilty of killing a Kohen (Aharon) and a *Navi* (Chur), they would not receive atonement. As a result of his concern for Am Yisrael, that they should not commit such a devastating iniquity, he preferred to shoulder the blame by himself and act as if he was joining them. His sole intention was to save Am Yisrael. Thus, Aharon surrendered his own honor in order to save the honor of Am Yisrael.

Why, then, was Aharon required to sacrifice a calf for a sin-offering, if he did not sin at all? This is because the impact of the sin remained, and as a result, Hashem's Name was profaned throughout the world. We learn from this the tremendous impact that a sin leaves, even when it is committed unintentionally. All the more so, when someone sins intentionally.

At that point, Aharon was not yet the Kohen Gadol. He was only destined for the appointment by Heaven. Since Am Yisrael had sinned with the Golden Calf, they were condemned to wander in the Desert for forty years. As a result, they were required to build a Mishkan so that there should be a temporary place to sacrifice offerings. Consequently, they required a Kohen Gadol to officiate. Hashem told Aharon that since he had linked his fate to the fate of Chur, the prophet, relinquishing his honor through self-effacement, therefore, measure for measure, Hashem would appoint him to serve as the Kohen Gadol.

The Gemara says (*Berachot* 32b) that there are four beneficial things that require reinforcement: Good deeds, prayer, good manners, and the study of Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* continually fights to prevent the realization of these things so that man, who was infused with a Divine breath of life, will not gain these benefits. However, by learning a lesson from Aharon's humble conduct, we can fortify ourselves to persevere in their pursuit.

In Summary

- On the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan,* Aharon was required to sacrifice a calf in order to atone for the "matter" (מעשה) of the Golden Calf. The *Ateret Tzvi* questions that if Aharon really did sin, why was he not required to sacrifice a he-goat as a sin-offering? Also, why does Rashi say that it atoned for the מעשה (matter) of the Golden Calf and not the "sin" of the Golden Calf?
- Actually, Aharon did not sin. He observed that Bnei Yisrael had killed Chur, who admonished them. Therefore, he made it seem as if he was

joining Am Yisrael in their matter (מעשה) so that they would not kill him as well. His only concern was to prevent Am Yisrael from committing the sin of killing a Kohen and *Navi*, which would prevent them from receiving atonement.

- Even so, Aharon was required to sacrifice a calf. This is because the impact of the matter (מעשה) had caused damage.
- Aharon relinquished his honor by acting as if he was joining Am Yisrael in the מעשה (matter) of the Golden Calf. Therefore, he was rewarded by being given the honor of serving as the Kohen Gadol.

Bestowing Honor

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel. He said to Aharon: Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering and a ram, for an olah-offering – unblemished; and offer [them] before Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 9:1-2)

Several sefarim raise the question why Moshe Rabbeinu called the elders of the congregation in addition to Aharon and his sons to approach the Mishkan on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. Moshe called upon Aharon and his sons in order to command them about the sacrifice of their personal sin-offering and the public sin-offering. Why was it necessary to call the elders as well? After all, only the Kohanim were involved in sacrificing the offerings.

In addition, Moshe knew that Hashem would reveal Himself to His children on the eighth day, as the pasuk (*Vayikra* 9:4) states "For today

Hashem appears to you." It also states (*Vayikra* 9:6), "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." If so, why did Moshe not inform Aharon on the first day that when he and his sons would sacrifice their sin-offering and the sin-offering for Bnei Yisrael on the eighth day, Hashem would appear to them? Why did Moshe Rabbeinu wait seven days, and only on the eighth day inform Aharon and his sons about this?

There is another question asked regarding these pesukim. Why did Moshe inform Aharon and his sons that Hashem was about to reveal Himself to them on the eighth day in two different ways? He said (vs. 4) "For today Hashem appears to you," and continued (vs. 6): "Then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." We must try to analyze what lesson can be learned from these two different styles that Moshe used to inform Aharon of what was expected to occur.

This parashah is generally read during the days of Sefirat Haomer. During these special days between Pesach and Shavuot we prepare ourselves to receive the Torah by correcting our character traits. The Torah cannot become integrated within a person unless specific conditions are met, which require preparation. He must conduct himself with good manners and refined character traits, as Chazal (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 1) say, "Good manners preceded the [giving of] the Torah." It is especially important to strengthen ourselves during these days in the laws of interpersonal relationships, since the reason that the students of Rabbi Akiva perished in the plague during Sefirat Haomer was because (*Yevamot* 62b) "they did not accord honor to each other."

Likewise, the study of Torah needs constant reinforcement (*Berachot* 32b). It is not enough to learn a subject only once, but it is necessary to review it again and again in order that it not be forgotten and becomes etched permanently in one's heart. Regarding this Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 99a) say, "One who learns but does not review is compared to one who plants but does not reap." It seems that in order to merit "reaping" the fruits of Torah study, it is necessary to labor in reviewing it constantly, so that they become part and parcel of the person.

Moshe Rabbeinu served in the Mishkan with great self-sacrifice during the seven days of the *miluim*. Each evening at nightfall, when Hashem had not yet come to rest His *Shechinah* upon them, Moshe realized that it was necessary to invest even more effort in his preparations on the following day than he had on the previous one. Perhaps his additional efforts in the service of the Mishkan would cause the *Shechinah* to descend. He realized that they were required to strive to greater heights in Avodat Hashem in order to merit the *Shechinah*. Moshe Rabbeinu prepared each day anew for the descent of Hashem's *Shechinah*, in the hope that Hashem would hasten to rest His *Shechinah* upon them even before the eighth day.

When the eighth day arrived, Moshe Rabbeinu sensed that this day possessed the potential for the *Shechinah* to descend. He felt that something had to be done in order to facilitate the descent of the *Shechinah*. Therefore, he turned to Aharon and his sons and ordered them to sacrifice two sin-offerings. One was to atone for their personal sins, and the other for the sins of the people. Moshe knew that these sacrifices would cause great pleasure in the Heavens Above and thereafter Hashem would descend to rest His *Shechinah* among Am Yisrael on the eighth day, Rosh Chodesh Nisan. This is the reason that Moshe waited until the eighth day before stating (*Vayikra* 9:4), "For today Hashem appears to you."

Although Moshe reserved hope that Hashem's *Shechinah* would descend even prior to the eighth day, he did not want to plant false hope in the hearts of Aharon and his sons. When the seventh day elapsed without the *Shechinah's* descent, Moshe knew that on the following day, the eighth day, Hashem would certainly rest His *Shechinah* following the sacrifices of the sin-offerings. Therefore, only then Moshe asserted with confidence, "For today Hashem appears to you."

In truth, Moshe would have been able to sacrifice the offerings by himself on the eighth day. However, he knew that if he would do so by himself, the nation would conclude that the *Shechinah* had descended in his merit. Since Moshe wished to honor his brother, Aharon, he commanded him and his sons to sacrifice the offerings. This way the

nation would assume that it was in the merit of Aharon and his sons that the *Shechinah* descended upon the Mishkan. By commanding Aharon to sacrifice the offerings, Moshe was referring his honor to his brother and his sons, which reflected a supernatural conduct. Usually people try to refer honor to themselves, because they crave honor. However, Moshe Rabbeinu overcame his natural instincts, and because of his exceptional humility, he referred the honor to his older brother.

Moreover, through this it would be clear to all the people that Hashem did not harbor any anger toward Aharon for his part in the matter of the Golden Calf. Moshe Rabbeinu learned this lofty behavior from Hashem. Hashem also refers honor to those who fear him. He does so by affirming that the world exists only for Am Yisrael (*Masechet Geirim* 1), when in reality the world exists only in order to glorify Hashem and His Torah.

This is the reason that Moshe Rabbeinu called the elders to be present at the sacrificing of the offerings even though they took no part in the actual sacrifice. The elders were the elite of Am Yisrael and served as role models for the entire nation, as it says (*Tehillim* 119:100), "From wise elders I gain understanding." Moshe wanted the elders to witness how he bestowed honor upon Aharon so that they should learn from his example. Thereafter, they would impart this important lesson to the rest of the nation.

Moshe had another reason for wanting the elders to be present. One sin-offering was sacrificed to atone for Am Yisrael. Since it was the elders who kept the people in check and guided them, they were commanded to be present on the occasion of the sacrifice of the sin-offering of Am Yisrael, because the responsibility for the people rested on their shoulders.

In addition, Moshe wanted to prove to the elders that although Hashem did not bring His *Shechinah* to rest upon the Mishkan during the first seven days, it was not on account of Aharon's sins. In fact, the opposite was true. Hashem waited specifically for Aharon and his sons to sacrifice the sin-offerings. The delay of the *Shechinah's* descent was not because of Aharon but because of Yisrael, who forced Aharon to assist them in

fashioning the Golden Calf. Aharon wished to delay them by demanding that they bring all their gold and silver. He hoped that until they would gather their jewelry, Moshe would return. Had Aharon not feared for his life, he would not have asked them to bring jewelry to fashion the Calf. Only after he sensed how unsettled the people had become without a leader, he instructed them to do so. Aharon's participation in the Golden Calf can be contributed to the nation, who coerced him into participating. Since the fault lay with Bnei Yisrael, Hashem did not bring His *Shechinah* down immediately, but waited until they would sacrifice the sin-offering to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. Only then were they deemed worthy of having the *Shechinah* of Hashem rest upon them.

Moshe Rabbeinu preferred to refer the honor to Aharon, his brother, by having him be the conduit for the *Shechinah's* descent. Since Aharon unintentionally aided in the fashioning of the Golden Calf, its rectification and forgiveness had to come through him. By serving as the channel for bringing the *Shechinah* back to their midst, Aharon would be greatly honored by the nation. They would regard him in high esteem for his efforts in bringing the *Shechinah* down to them.

Regarding the question as to why Moshe seemed to repeat himself, we can explain the following. Moshe added (*Vayikra* 9:6), "Then the glory (כבוד) of Hashem will appear to you" after he had previously stated (ibid. vs. 4), "For today Hashem appears to you." The word כבוד (honor) has the same numerical value as the word לב (heart). Moshe wanted to instruct the elders to impart to the entire nation that when a person bestows honor upon his fellow, it is as if he is bestowing honor upon the *Shechinah*. He must be careful that this should not merely be superficial lip service. However, if a person honors his friend only in order to ultimately be honored himself, by broadcasting his nobility and fine character traits, it is not considered truly honoring his fellow. Hashem, Who scrutinizes a person's intentions, knows exactly what one's reasons are for displaying respect to his fellow. It is praiseworthy only when a person waives his own honor in order to honor his friend, feeling true joy in his heart that his friend was honored more than himself. By granting true honor to his friend in this way, he is also granting honor to Hashem.

In the end, Aharon's sons died as a result of the honor that Moshe Rabbeinu granted his brother, Aharon. Had Moshe not bestowed the honor upon his brother and had sacrificed the offerings alone, the sons of Aharon would not have died. Despite this it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "And Aharon fell silent." This indicates that he accepted the decree with love and did not question why the descent of the *Shechinah* had to come about through him and his sons, which ultimately caused their death. Aharon had no doubt that if his sons died as a result of the honor given to him by Moshe, this occurred only because it was Hashem's plan. Therefore "Aharon fell silent": he accepted the decree with love.

Aharon achieved such a lofty spiritual level, to the extent that he felt it was not in his merit that the *Shechinah* descended upon Am Yisrael, but in the merit of his sons. Through their death they brought *kedushah* upon the nation, as it says (ibid. 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." Since Aharon also followed in the path of Moshe, and referred his honor to his sons, by insisting that the *Shechinah* of Hashem descended upon the Mishkan in their merit, he was worthy of having Hashem speak with him individually. In the end, those who bestow honor are honored themselves. This corresponds to the words of Chazal (see *Eiruvin* 13b), "When one seeks to escape honor, the honor chases after him."

In Summary

- Why did Moshe call the elders to approach the Mishkan when they were not required for the service of sacrificing the sin-offerings? In addition, why only on the eighth day did Moshe tell Aharon and his sons, "For today Hashem appears to you"? If he knew this in advance, he could have informed them already on the first day that Hashem would appear to them on the eighth day. Also, we must clarify why Moshe repeated himself when he said, "For today Hashem appears to you," and continued saying, "Then the glory (**כבוד**) of Hashem will appear to you."
- Moshe engaged in the erection of the Mishkan every day with the hope that perhaps on that day Hashem would rest His *Shechinah* upon it. When

the *Shechinah* did not descend upon Am Yisrael, Moshe invested more efforts in his service of the Mishkan. Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Hashem would surely rest His *Shechinah* on the eighth day, but hoped that the *Shechinah* would descend prior to that. Therefore, when the eighth day arrived, he knew that on that day the *Shechinah* would definitely descend. That is why he said "For today Hashem appears to you," which implies that most assuredly Hashem would rest His *Shechinah* on the Mishkan on that day.

- Moshe referred his honor to Aharon by commanding him to sacrifice the *korbanot*, which would ultimately be the means through which the *Shechinah* would descend, when he could have performed the service himself. He wanted the nation to admire Aharon, who would cause the *Shechinah* to descend. For this reason, he called the elders, in order that they should observe his conduct and teach Am Yisrael that they, too, should refer honor upon their fellow. Another reason for calling the elders was because they were appointed to guide the nation. Because of the responsibility that they shouldered, they were invited to be present at the sacrificing of the sin-offering that would serve as atonement for Am Yisrael.

- Moshe Rabbeinu repeated "Then the glory (**כבוד**) of Hashem will appear to you," since the word **כבוד** shares the same numerical value as **לב** (heart). This implies that a person should grant honor to his friend with all his heart and not just superficially.

- It says, "And Aharon fell silent." This implies that he accepted the decree with love and did not question why his sons died through sacrificing the offerings. In addition, he referred honor to his sons by referring the descent of the *Shechinah* upon the nation to their merit. Since he sought to escape honor, he was worthy of having Hashem speak to him individually.

Exacting Judgment

"And to the Children of Israel speak as follows: Take a he-goat for a sin-offering, and a calf and a sheep in their first year – unblemished – for an olah-offering. And a bull and a ram for a peace-offering to sacrifice before Hashem, and a meal-offering mixed with oil; for today Hashem appears to you"

(*Vayikra* 9:3-4)

Hashem's Presence constantly fills the world. However, it is not always apparent, since we are not worthy of clearly seeing it. On the day that the Mishkan was erected, Am Yisrael merited seeing the Presence of Hashem openly. Until the sin of the Golden Calf was committed, Hashem was constantly present and visible in the world, as it says (*Shemot* 15:2), "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him," "A handmaiden saw at the sea what was not seen by Yechezkel ben Buzi" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 244). Likewise, at *Matan Torah* it states (*Shemot* 20:15), "And all the people could see the sounds." However, after Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, they were unable to perceive the Presence of Hashem obviously, except for on special occasions, as on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. This was in order to cause everyone to long for the days prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, bringing them to repent fully for their deeds.

This idea is supported by the following pasuk (*Vayikra* 10:1-2): "The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it... A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem". On that day, Nadav and Avihu transgressed by lighting an alien fire and were immediately punished by dying before Hashem. We do not find many other examples of sinners receiving retribution on the spot, since Hashem is Slow to Anger and waits patiently in order to give them the opportunity to repent.

Hashem is also Abundant in Kindness. If so, why did Hashem punish Nadav and Avihu immediately? It is because on that day the kingship of Hashem was established in this world in an obvious manner, which was different than on other days.

From this we can learn two lessons. The first is the severity of the sin of the Golden Calf, since it caused the *Shechinah* to depart. The second lesson we learn is the exactness of Heavenly judgment, since a person may die immediately upon transgressing. As a result of the unusual death, the Name of Hashem is sanctified because everyone witnesses the kingship of Hashem, Who rules the entire world, as it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

The parashah begins with the words "**ויהי ביום השמיני** – And it was on the eighth day." The word **ויהי** always denotes anguish and sorrow (*Megillah* 10b). It would seem that the parashah should have begun on a joyous note, since on this day Hashem revealed Himself to His people. However, the allusion to sorrow refers to the anguish experienced following the sin of the Golden Calf, since it resulted in the concealment of the *Shechinah*, which would not be beheld obviously, as in the past. Consequently, a Mishkan had to be built in order that the *Shechinah* would rest in it. It was only by means of the Mishkan that Hashem would reside among Bnei Yisrael.

In Summary

- Prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the Presence of Hashem was constantly evident in the world. For example, after the Splitting of the Sea, a handmaiden saw revelations that were not seen by the *Navi* Yechezkel ben Buzi. Also at Har Sinai, the sounds were seen. At the occasion of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* it says, "For today Hashem appears to you." It was the most elevating experience following the sin of the Golden Calf.
- Nadav and Avihu were punished immediately after lighting an alien fire. This is surprising, since Hashem is Slow to Anger. However, they were

punished because on that day there was a mighty revelation of the *Shechinah* in the world. Hashem punished them according to their lofty level.

♦ The parashah begins with the word **ויהי**, which denotes anguish. This is because the revelation of the *Shechinah* at the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was a reminder of the elevated status they could have enjoyed had they not sinned with the Golden Calf. This was a reason for sorrow.

Aharon's Love for Bnei Yisrael

"Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the olah-offering, and the peace-offering"

(*Vayikra* 9:22)

This pasuk seems to indicate Aharon descended **(וירד)** to the people from a higher spot, where he brought the sacrifices, in order to bless them. However, we do not find that he was standing above them. The commentaries explain (*Rashi, Vayikra* 9:23) that Moshe would erect the Mishkan in the morning and dismantle it in the evening for seven days, but Hashem did not rest His *Shechinah* upon them. Aharon became distressed that perhaps this was an indication that Hashem had become angry with him because he had indirectly caused the sin of the Golden Calf. Although he had good intentions when ordering that the Jews bring their jewelry to fashion the Calf, in order to delay them until Moshe's return (*Rashi, Shemot* 32:2), he was unwittingly a catalyst for the sin.

Aharon suspected that Hashem was angry at him and was therefore delaying the descent of the *Shechinah*. Mournfully, he turned to Moshe

and shared his fears with him. Moshe and Aharon would enter the Mishkan and pray to Hashem that He hasten to bring down the *Shechinah*. When the eighth day arrived and Hashem had not yet brought His *Shechinah* upon them, Aharon's fears increased, and Moshe comforted him saying that he was not to blame. He was obviously highly valued by Hashem, since He had chosen him to serve as Kohen Gadol.

However, Aharon feared that perhaps by serving as the Kohen Gadol and wearing the official garments, he would become haughty. Aharon felt that he had to make an added effort in order that he should be truly worthy that the *Shechinah* would descend as a result of the offerings that he would sacrifice. Therefore, he sought to strengthen himself in acquiring greater humility and to entirely remove any trace of haughtiness that he might possess. This is why the pasuk says "and Aharon descended." It signifies that he lowered himself and conducted himself with humility before the people and raised his hands and blessed them.

Aharon considered himself a "common" Kohen as opposed to a Kohen Gadol, and he descended to the people and blessed them, as it says (*Megillah* 16a), "The blessing of a commoner should not be taken lightly." When Hashem saw Aharon's efforts and his desire to reinforce his trait of humility, which is the root of all good character traits, as it says in Avot (4:4) "Be exceedingly humble in spirit," He immediately revealed His glory in front of all the people. This is implied in the sequence of the pesukim: first Aharon brought the offerings (vs. 22) and then (vs. 23) "the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people."

The author of the *Noam Elimelech* (*Parashat Shemini*) explains the words of the pasuk in the following way. "It seems to mean that the tzaddik always cleaves to Hashem and clings to the Upper Worlds. Since he always seeks to benefit Am Yisrael, that Hashem should shower them with benevolence and an abundance of blessings, he descends a bit from his lofty level of attachment to Hashem. However, despite this, he gains through lowering himself a little from his close attachment. When Bnei Yisrael perceive his dedication in benefiting them, they become infused

with fear of Hashem and love of Him, which arouses everyone to serve Hashem."

The *Noam Elimelech* continues that "in order to bless the nation, he had to descend from his lofty level. The lofty level of a tzaddik is characterized by his constant self-examination. He fears that perhaps he sinned, *chalilah*, through some hint of a sin or sinful thought. He constantly reflects upon his deeds and does teshuvah. This is alluded to by the mention of the sin-offerings and *olah*-offerings in the pasuk which are sacrificed to atone for sinful thoughts. The peace-offering alludes to his attachment to Hashem, Who makes peace among His celestial hosts. However, as a result of his wish [to benefit the people] he descends from his lofty level a bit."

It is the way of a tzaddik to be connected and cling to the Upper Worlds. However, since he also wishes to be attached to Klal Yisrael and benefit them, he disconnects a bit from the Upper Worlds and descends toward the people. It seems that his strong feelings for Am Yisrael and for the people found below in the Lower Worlds detract from his attachment to the Upper Worlds. The *Noam Elimelech* explains that when the tzaddik lowers himself for the benefit of Am Yisrael, it is ultimately for the best. When Am Yisrael sense the tzaddik's strong feelings of love for them, their hearts are stirred to fear Hashem and love Him and serve Him with all their heart. Similarly, Aharon felt a strong affection for Am Yisrael and wished to bless them. In order to bless them, he had to lower himself somewhat from his lofty level, by disconnecting a little from the Upper Worlds, so that he could be receptive to their needs and bless them accordingly.

The *Noam Elimelech* clarifies that the approach of tzaddikim is to constantly examine their deeds to see if there are any traces of sins or *hirhurim ra'im*. Aharon also did this. In his outstanding humility, he did not allow himself any rest, but continued to examine his motives, thoughts, and deeds to determine if perhaps there was still any anger directed toward him from Heaven, which required complete teshuvah in order that Hashem would be able to rest His *Shechinah* upon Am Yisrael.

This is the reason the pasuk (*Vayikra* 9:22) says, "And he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the *olah*-offering." This hints to the *korbanot* that atone for *hirhurim ra'im*. The peace-offering mentioned in the pasuk alludes to the attachment to Hashem, which brings peace to the celestial hosts.

Moreover, because of his wish to convey his loving-kindness toward Am Yisrael, Aharon lowered himself a little from his lofty level. This is because he feared that perhaps because he may have experienced a slight feeling of haughtiness while wearing the splendid garments of the Kohen Gadol, the *Shechinah's* descent had been delayed.

We cannot even suggest that Aharon succumbed to haughtiness, which corresponds to worshipping *avodah zarah*. However, it is the way of tzaddikim to constantly engage in teshuvah even for sins that they never committed. Because the tzaddik does teshuvah his entire life for sins that he did not commit, the sins of Am Yisrael are erased, and the people become elevated and purified. This ultimately leads to peace between Am Yisrael and the celestial hosts, which enables Hashem to rest His *Shechinah* among them.

For this reason, Am Yisrael were filled with joy. They realized the significance of the eighth day, in which the *Shechinah* descended upon them: It was not only a one time occasion of elevation. They became aware that the *Shechinah* would continue to escort them forever, even in exile, when the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash would be destroyed.

In Summary

- What is the meaning of the words in the pasuk, "and he descended from having performed the sin-offering"? Was Aharon standing high up? From where did he have to descend? When Aharon saw that Hashem had not yet descended to rest His *Shechinah* upon them, he feared that he was to blame because of his part in the sin of the Golden Calf, even though he had no evil intentions. Therefore, he sought to eliminate any trace of haughtiness from within himself and adopt the trait of humility. This is

the reason that the pasuk specifies that Aharon "descended." He lowered himself in order to be able to bless the people.

- Aharon specifically chose to excel in this trait because he feared that the splendid garments that he was required to wear while serving as the Kohen Gadol would arouse a feeling of haughtiness in his heart. In order to merit the *Shechinah* of Hashem descending following his sacrifice of the *korbanot*, he reinforced the trait of humility.
- The *Noam Elimelech* explains this pasuk in the following way. It is the way of a tzaddik to always be connected and cling to the Upper Worlds. However, he also wishes to be connected with Klal Yisrael and to benefit them. Therefore, he descends from his lofty level in order to be a part of the nation and relate to their needs. Aharon also possessed strong feelings of love in his heart toward the people, wanting to bless them. Therefore, he had to descend from his lofty level in order to reach out to the people and bless them.
- The approach of tzaddikim is to constantly examine their deeds to see if there are any traces of sin or *hirhurim ra'im*. This is supported by the words of the pasuk, since the sacrifices of the sin-offerings and *olah*-offerings mentioned are brought in order to atone for *hirhurim ra'im*. In addition, the peace-offering expresses the desire to be attached to the Upper Worlds and make peace among the celestial hosts. Also Aharon feared that perhaps he possessed a trace of haughtiness, which corresponds to *avodah zarah*. Therefore, he reinforced his trait of humility by descending to the people and blessing them.

The Delay of the Shechinah

"Moshe and Aharon came to the Tent of Meeting and they went out and they blessed the people – and the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people!"

(*Vayikra* 9:23)

Rashi gives two explanations of the words "Moshe and Aharon came to the Tent of Meeting" according to the *Beraita*. The first explanation is that Moshe entered with Aharon in order to teach him about the procedure of burning the incense. The second explanation is that when Aharon saw that all the offerings had been brought and all the acts of the Mishkan service had been performed, yet the *Shechinah* had not descended, he was distressed and thought that this was because Hashem had become angry with him. He expressed his sorrow and embarrassment to Moshe, who then entered with him. They both prayed for mercy, and the *Shechinah* descended to Israel.

After Moshe and Aharon entered the Mishkan, "they went out and blessed the people," (*Vayikra* 9:23). Rashi explains that they said, 'May the pleasantness of my Lord, our G-d, be upon us (*Tehillim* 90:17). May the *Shechinah* rest in the work of your hands.' This was because for seven days Moshe put up the Mishkan and officiated in it, yet each day, the *Shechinah* did not rest in it. When Bnei Israel saw Moshe dismantle the Mishkan, they were ashamed. They said to Moshe that the tremendous efforts they had made in constructing the Mishkan in order that the *Shechinah* should rest among them, so that they should know that the sin of the Golden Calf was atoned for, had all been for nothing. Therefore, Moshe said to them, "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you. Aharon, my brother, is worthier than I, for through his offerings and his service the *Shechinah* will rest among you, and you will know that the Omnipresent has chosen him."

This raises several questions. If Moshe and Aharon entered the Mishkan in order to pray that the *Shechinah* should reside within it, then it is clear why Moshe entered together with Aharon at that point. This was in order to realize the entire purpose of the Mishkan, which was that the *Shechinah* would dwell within it. Moreover, Moshe had not succeeded through the building of the Mishkan to cause the *Shechinah* to descend. He told Aharon that through the *korbanot* that he would sacrifice he would succeed in welcoming the *Shechinah*. However, neither did Aharon's efforts meet with success. Therefore Moshe entered together with him to pray so that Aharon should not become embarrassed, and so that the *Shechinah* should descend.

However, Rashi explains that Moshe entered together with Aharon in order to teach him the procedure of burning the incense. Was there no other time to teach this to him? Why did Moshe have to teach it to Aharon precisely after the *korbanot* were offered? Also, why did the *Shechinah* not descend when Moshe erected the Mishkan? Why did he have to labor for seven days to put it together and dismantle it? In addition, why did Moshe and Aharon bless Am Yisrael that the *Shechinah* should rest upon the work of their hands? What is the meaning of this blessing?

The Mishkan was inaugurated on the eighth day. On that joyous day, the *Shechinah* finally rested upon the Mishkan and also within every single Jew. If so, why specifically on this joyous day did Aharon have sorrow, being humiliated that all his efforts had not yet brought down the *Shechinah*? Also, Am Yisrael were distressed that the sin of the Golden Calf had not yet been forgiven. Why was there sorrow specifically on the day that the Mishkan was inaugurated?

Perhaps we can explain this in the following way. The Mishkan was built from the donations of Am Yisrael, which each person donated wholeheartedly. Despite this, they had not yet merited that the *Shechinah* should rest upon it. A fear arose among them that perhaps it was because they had exhibited greater haste in donating their jewelry for the Golden Calf than for the Mishkan. The Calf was also fashioned from the possessions of Am Yisrael. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael and Aharon accused

themselves regarding their involvement in the sin and were embarrassed of it. It was only due to their embarrassment for having sinned with the Calf that Hashem forgave them and that they merited the *Shechinah* resting upon them.

This also explains why Moshe had to erect the Mishkan eight times. Each of the first seven days he erected and dismantled it (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 518). This is because the sin of the Golden Calf had not yet been entirely corrected, and that is why the *Shechinah* had not yet descended. Therefore, it was necessary to repeatedly dismantle and erect it. Ultimately, as a result of this, Bnei Yisrael were aroused to repent and achieved atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf.

This is the reason that Aharon said that he was to blame after the *Shechinah* had not yet descended following the sacrifice of the *korbanot*. He agonized over the delay of the *Shechinah's* descent. Aharon also blamed himself for not investing enough effort in order to achieve atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Because of his intense agony, he merited atonement for the sin. Therefore, it is clear why it was necessary for Aharon to experience sorrow specifically on that day. This is because through his humiliation and regret for sinning with the Golden Calf, in addition to Am Yisrael's remorse, the sin was entirely forgiven, and they merited having the *Shechinah* rest upon them.

When Moshe and Aharon went out of the Mishkan after praying, they blessed the people. They specifically said the words, "May the *Shechinah* rest in the work of your hands." This can be explained to imply, "May the work of your hands in building the Mishkan be more important to you than your desire to make the Golden Calf." By fully repenting for their passion in creating the Calf, they would merit the *Shechinah* residing amongst them. Moshe told Am Yisrael that just as Aharon had made the Calf for them, likewise he would now sacrifice the *korbanot* for them and through this the *Shechinah* would descend upon the work of their hands in building the Mishkan. This is what Moshe meant when he told Bnei Yisrael, "My brother Aharon is worthier than me." Since Aharon had helped make the Calf, he should be the one to now sacrifice the *korbanot*

in order to atone for it. Through the combined remorse of both Aharon and the nation, they would be forgiven for the sin and would merit the *Shechinah* residing among them.

This teaches us that if a person admits his sins and feels humiliated before Hashem because of it, Hashem will ultimately forgive him and will rest His *Shechinah* within him. Thus, at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Am Yisrael fully repented for fashioning the Golden Calf and thereby merited the *Shechinah* descending upon the Mishkan and upon them.

In light of this, we can explain why Moshe chose to teach Aharon the procedure of burning the *ketoret* on this occasion. The *ketoret* possesses the ability to save people from plagues (*Shabbat* 89a). When putting up the Mishkan, Moshe saw that he could not bring the *Shechinah* to descend upon it. Therefore, he feared that Hashem would strike his close ones in order that they become adequately sanctified, at it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." In this way Bnei Yisrael would achieve atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore, Moshe quickly taught Aharon the procedure of burning the incense, so that they should know how to stop a plague, which might very well ensue. Afterwards, Moshe and Aharon went out to bless the people, beseeching that Hashem protect them in the event that there would be a plague. They blessed them, "May the *Shechinah* rest in the work of your hands," so that a plague should not break out. In this way they succeeded in preparing the remedy for the plague before it actually struck.

Consequently, the delay in the *Shechinah's* descent, which required Moshe to erect and dismantle the Mishkan for seven days, was necessary. Since the *Shechinah* had not yet descended even after Aharon sacrificed the *korbanot*, Aharon and the nation were stirred to scrutinize their deed in creating the Calf and fully regret their sin. Through their complete repentance, their sin was forgiven. Thus they merited the *Shechinah* descending upon the Mishkan and residing within them.

In Summary

- The reason for the delay in the descent of the *Shechinah* was because the sin of the Golden Calf had not entirely been forgiven. Because of the delay of the *Shechinah's* descent, ultimately it led to achieving complete atonement for the sin. Moshe had labored for eight days erecting the Mishkan each morning, and Aharon had sacrificed the *korbanot*, but the *Shechinah* had not yet descended. Moshe entered the Mishkan with Aharon to pray, and during this time all the people repented for fashioning the Golden Calf. Thus, the anguish of Aharon and the people ultimately made them worthy of complete forgiveness; thereafter, the *Shechinah* descended upon them.
- The reason that Moshe taught Aharon the procedure of burning the *ketoret* specifically at this time is because it has the ability to save the people from plagues. When Moshe saw that the *Shechinah* had not descended on the Mishkan, he feared that Hashem would strike His close ones in order to sanctify them. Thus, he taught Aharon the procedure of burning the *ketoret* so that they should know how to stop a plague, which might well ensue.
- Moshe and Aharon blessed the people upon exiting the Mishkan, beseeching Hashem to protect them from a plague, as they said, "May the *Shechinah* rest in the work of your hands." In this way they succeeded in preparing the remedy for the plague before it actually struck.

A Day of Joy

"A fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed upon the Mizbeach the olah-offering and the fats; the people saw and they praised and fell upon their faces"

(*Vayikra* 9:24)

Chazal say that there was no day as joyous for Hashem as the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, when Moshe erected it and the *Shechinah* ultimately descended to reside within it (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6). Until Bnei Yisrael had sinned with the Golden Calf, the *Shechinah* of Hashem had been constantly present and they had not required a Mishkan. However, after the sin, the *Shechinah* departed from their midst. Only after they had done complete teshuvah, did Hashem descend to rest His *Shechinah* within the Mishkan. In this way Am Yisrael knew that their sin had finally been forgiven.

During the period that the *Shechinah* was not present among them, Am Yisrael mourned. When Hashem perceived their great sorrow, He said to Moshe (*Shemot* 25:8), "They shall make Me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell among them."

Hashem commanded Moshe to establish the Mishkan in which *korbanot* would be offered, in order that the *korbanot* would atone for the sins of Am Yisrael. In this way, Hashem would not have to remove His *Shechinah* from them again. The *korbanot* would serve to achieve forgiveness for their sins, and as a result they would remain worthy of having the *Shechinah* reside among them.

In our days, when we have neither a Beit Hamikdash, nor a Mishkan, the Beit Hamidrash in which we learn Torah corresponds to the holy Sanctuary. The prayers correspond to the *korbanot*, which have the potential to achieve atonement for a person's sins and transform him

from guilty to innocent. Chazal comment about this (*Hoshea* 14:3; *Berachot* 26b), "Let our lips substitute for bulls." This implies that the prayers that we utter with our lips are equivalent to the cows sacrificed as offerings.

Hashem had tremendous joy on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan* since, from that day on, the method in which the *Shechinah* would descend was established. There would be no need to remove the *Shechinah* from the midst of Am Yisrael every time they sinned. Even in exile, Hashem continues to rest His *Shechinah* among us. The *Shechinah* is mostly concentrated in the Beit Hamidrash, which corresponds to the Beit Hamikdash. This was a significant accomplishment that Am Yisrael achieved through correcting the sin of the Golden Calf. By building the Mishkan and sacrificing *korbanot*, the *Shechinah* would reside among them forever. Even if the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash would eventually be destroyed, and the *korbanot* would cease, Torah study and the service of Hashem, which refers to prayers (*Ta'anit* 2a) as well as kind deeds, would be their substitute. In this way, the *Shechinah* would remain among Am Yisrael eternally.

Likewise, Bnei Yisrael merited another acquisition. They were granted the holy day of Yom Kippur. Since Hashem had forgiven Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Calf on Yom Kippur, and consequently had commanded them to build the Mishkan, that day was designated as the Day of Atonement for all future generations. On Yom Kippur, Jews attain forgiveness for all their sins (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Zuta* 4). Also, on this day, the memory of the holy forefathers rises before Hashem in order to plead for the benefit of Bnei Yisrael.

On the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan,* Bnei Yisrael experienced overwhelming elation, as it says (*Vayikra* 9:24), "The people saw and they praised." It was the first time that a fire came down from Hashem onto the Mizbeach and consumed the *olah*-offering and the fats of the sin-offerings. Upon witnessing the great joy of Am Yisrael, Hashem joined them in their elation. This joy was so intense that it is compared to the

immense joy that Hashem had in the days when He created the world (*Megillah* 10b).

Moreover, it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), "Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song." This describes the people's sentiments when they witnessed the fire of the *Shechinah* descending upon the Mishkan and consuming the *korbanot*. They came to an absolute recognition of Hashem's Kingship, and they felt that this obligated them to serve Him with intense joy.

From the occasion of Hashem resting His *Shechinah* among them, Bnei Yisrael also came to the understanding that Hashem is a G-d of Mercy, "Forgiver of Iniquity and Willful Sin" (*Shemot* 34:6). Despite the fact that they had willfully sinned against Him, He forgave them and did not permanently harbor anger toward them.

It says (*Chabakuk* 3:2), "In wrath, remember to be merciful." This implies that when there are accusations against Am Yisrael, Hashem is immediately filled with compassion for them. He even precedes His Compassion to Judgment. This is indicated in the words (*Devarim* 4:39) "ה' הוא האלוהי-ם– Hashem, He is the G-d." The Name of ה', which denotes the Attribute of Mercy, precedes the Name אלוקים, which signifies the Attribute of Justice. This teaches that Hashem always precedes mercy to retribution, in order to ease the punishment. When Bnei Yisrael saw that the *Shechinah* had descended upon them, they recognized the great extent of Hashem's mercy, since He did not continue to hold their sin against them, but forgave them. This caused their great elation.

When Am Yisrael perceived Hashem's compassion for them, they understood that from now on, the *Shechinah* would not depart from them forever. Even if the Mishkan were to be destroyed, the *Shechinah* would continue to remain with them, as it says (*Tehillim* 91:15), "I am with him in distress." This corresponds to Chazal's statement (*Megillah* 29a) that the *Shechinah* accompanied Bnei Yisrael to exile. The *Shechinah* accompanies them to every place that they wander. They felt a surge of overwhelming gratitude to Hashem for the great compassion that He had

demonstrated by resting His *Shechinah* among them, and they fell upon their faces and began to praise Him.

The joy was not limited to Am Yisrael alone; Hashem, too, joined in their elation. He was joyful because from now on He would not have to remove His *Shechinah* after each sin that they would commit. This is because, hereafter, the *korbanot* and the priestly garments of the Kohen Gadol would serve to atone for the sins of Bnei Yisrael. They would atone even for the most severe transgressions. In this way, Hashem would be able to continue to rest His *Shechinah* among them.

On the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan,* Nadav and Avihu were consumed by a divine fire, which descended from Heaven. In their great holiness, they appreciated more than anything else the value and significance of the great moment of the *Shechinah's* descent to rest among Am Yisrael forever. At that moment, their hearts filled with elation and joy, and a great longing overcame them to unite with the *Shechinah* by connecting with the Divine fire, in order to bond with the holiness of Hashem. They knew that they were risking their lives, since it would be considered deciding a law before their teacher (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6), and also because they were not wearing the special Robe. Nevertheless, they brought their "alien fire" because they so greatly desired to be close to Hashem and to connect with the initial fire that had descended from Heaven, which would rest in this world forever.

Since Aharon's sons should have gradually prepared to connect to the lofty holiness they aspired for, and not reach for it hastily, they endangered their lives. When they connected with the fire, their *neshamot* were immediately consumed (*Shabbat* 113b). They did not have the ability to withstand the intense holiness. This occurred during the joyous celebration of Am Yisrael and Hashem.

When Aharon noticed what had happened to his sons, it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "And Aharon fell silent." He did not know what to think. Had his *korban* been accepted and his supplications looked upon favorably? Was the sin of the Golden Calf forgiven? Perhaps, there was still anger directed

at Bnei Yisrael from Heaven? Only after Moshe came to Aharon's side and told him (ibid.), "Of this did Hashem speak, saying: 'I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people,'" Aharon understood that this was Hashem's will, and it did not indicate that He was angry.

Moshe explained to Aharon that in order for the *Shechinah* of Hashem to rest in this world forever, it was necessary that immediately upon its descent it would gain a foothold through one of the tzaddikim, as it says "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This is similar to what Hashem told Moshe at Har Sinai: that the moment the *Shechinah* would descend upon Am Yisrael, the *neshamah* of one of the tzaddikim would be taken. Moshe did not know if Hashem intended to take his own *neshamah* at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, or perhaps the *neshamah* of Aharon, his brother. In fact, at the death of Nadav and Avihu, they understood that Aharon's sons surpassed them in their righteousness, since Hashem had chosen to sanctify His Name through their death (*Tanchuma, Shemini* 1).

Why specifically at this time of joy for Bnei Yisrael and for Hashem was it necessary to spoil the celebration by the death of Aharon's two sons? It seems that this is the implication of the words, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." It was important to establish the new relationship of the *Shechinah* residing among the people in this world even when they sin. Until that point, the sins of Am Yisrael had caused the *Shechinah* to depart. However, through the death of Aharon's sons, Am Yisrael saw that Hashem would not remove His *Shechinah* from them again, but would immediately punish those who sinned. If Hashem were to remove His *Shechinah* from them once more, then their fate would be sealed and they would be destroyed, *rachmana litzlan*. The eternity of Yisrael will never be revoked. The death of Aharon's sons taught the nation that instead of removing His *Shechinah*, He would punish the sinners, so that Am Yisrael would be able to continue existing forever.

Because of their outstanding righteousness, Nadav and Avihu merited that Hashem's Name was sanctified through them. Their deaths taught

Am Yisrael the lesson that whenever they succumb to sin, they should immediately do teshuvah, so that Hashem would not have to strike them in His wrath. In the past, Hashem would remove His *Shechinah* from them as a punishment. But from now on, Hashem would not remove His *Shechinah* from them again. In order that they should not come to any harm, they would have to repent for their misdeeds. This is the meaning of the words "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." The death of Aharon's sons introduced the new conduct of the *Shechinah* residing among Bnei Yisrael forever, whether they would be worthy, or whether they would sin. Ultimately, the Name of Hashem is sanctified in the world when He brings retribution. Hashem made a lasting impression by taking the *neshamot* of Nadav and Avihu, as it says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." It proved that Hashem would not desert Am Yisrael forever, even if they do not follow in His path. Instead, Hashem would punish them as atonement for their iniquities.

For this reason, Bnei Yisrael exulted. The death of Aharon's sons signified that Hashem would reside among them forever. They saw that when Aharon's sons committed a sin, which was only considered a sin because of their exalted level of righteousness, Hashem did not remove His *Shechinah* from them. Instead, Hashem struck them in order to atone for their error, and the *Shechinah* was able to continue resting among Bnei Yisrael. Regarding this, it says (*Mishlei* 3:12), "For Hashem admonishes the one He loves, and like a father He mollifies the child." These words teach us that when Hashem admonishes His children and punishes them, He reveals His great love for them. Otherwise, He would not seek to admonish them. Moreover, as soon as He reproves them, they achieve atonement for their sins, and this enables Him to continue residing among them.

Had Hashem not punished Aharon's sons, it may have seemed as if He did not really care about their deeds. It would also seem, *chalilah*, that the world lacked rulership, as if there was no judge and no justice. Since Aharon's sons were punished and were immediately consumed by the fire

that descended upon the *korban*, this proved to the entire world that there is a Master Who rules His world by His command.

Precisely on their joyous day, Hashem wanted to warn His children that if they desire to have their joy at the *Chanukat Hamishkan* continue for generations to come, they must strictly adhere to His word and fulfill His will. If they would not listen to Him, and sin before Him, they would have to pay for their deeds, since Hashem would not remove His *Shechinah* from among them again.

Therefore the pasuk states, "And Aharon fell silent." When Aharon grasped Hashem's message to His people, he was silent. Since silence is equivalent to agreement, through falling silent he expressed his appreciation of Hashem's conduct regarding His sons. Not only did Aharon agree to the death of his sons, but he also recognized that they merited through their righteousness to be the conduit to impart Hashem's important lesson that "He will be sanctified through those who are close to Him."

Generally, when a father does not smile at his son, it distresses him. When a father gets angry with his son and afterwards smiles at him, the smile has the ability to soften the punishment, since the son senses that his father loves him. He perceives that if his father got angry at him and punished him, it was only for his benefit, because he loves him. On the contrary, if a father does not care about his son, he does not punish him. When a father smiles to his son after his anger subsides, there is nothing more satisfying, because it reinforces the father's sincere love for his son.

Likewise, Hashem removed His *Shechinah* from Bnei Yisrael and displayed His anger toward them after they sinned with the Golden Calf. However, after they repented, Hashem restored His "smile" and forgave them. As proof, Hashem rested His *Shechinah* upon the Mishkan, residing among them. When Aharon's sons transgressed, Bnei Yisrael feared that Hashem still remained angry at them because of their sin. They were confused, not knowing if Hashem was pleased with them or angry at them. Only after Hashem continued to rest His *Shechinah* among them even

after the death of Aharon's sons, did Bnei Yisrael understand that Hashem truly loved them and it was only because "Hashem admonishes the one He loves" that He punished Aharon's sons. Upon arriving at this conclusion, their joy was boundless.

In Summary

- There was no joy that surpassed the intense joy at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. On that day, Am Yisrael saw that the sin of the Golden Calf had been completely forgiven, and Hashem was no longer angry at them. Their joy was boundless, since Hashem informed them that from then on, even if they would sin, He would not remove His *Shechinah* from them. Instead He would punish them to atone for their sin. In this way, Hashem would be able to continue resting His *Shechinah* among them forever. When Aharon's sons died precisely on that day, Am Yisrael realized that Hashem truly would not remove His *Shechinah* from them again. As proof of this, when Aharon's sons transgressed, He did not remove His *Shechinah* from their midst, but instead, took their lives.
- The pasuk "Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song" describes the sentiments on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. There was fervent rejoicing when a Heavenly fire descended from Heaven and consumed the *korbanot* of Am Yisrael.
- Why specifically on this day did Hashem curtail the joyous celebration through the death of Aharon's two sons? The reason for this is implied in the words "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." Hashem established that He would remain among Bnei Yisrael even when they sin. However, in order to pacify the accusations against them, He would have to take retribution from those who sin, as in the death of Aharon's sons.
- Thereafter, it says, "And Aharon was silent." This indicates that Aharon understood Hashem's message, which He wished to impart to His nation. Therefore, he accepted it silently, which is the equivalent to agreement.

- The death of Aharon's sons created confusion among Bnei Yisrael. They were not sure if Hashem was reconciled with them or if He was still angry with them. However, after they witnessed that even following the death of Aharon's sons, the *Shechinah* still continued to rest upon them, "they praised and fell upon their faces."

The Sweet Scent of Tzaddikim

"The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem

(*Vayikra* 10:1-2)

Upon reading these pesukim, one may wonder how it is possible that the tzaddikim, Nadav and Avihu, were punished on the eighth and holiest day of the *miluim* and died in a strange way. A fire descended from heaven and consumed them. This was surprising because Nadav and Avihu were known for their outstanding righteousness. They reached the lofty level of eating and drinking while simultaneously gazing at the *Shechinah*. This indicates that they elevated the physical act of eating and drinking to a spiritual function, to the extent that they were able to gaze at the *Shechinah* while doing so. By succeeding in combining these two seemingly conflicting acts, it testified to their lofty level in Avodat Hashem and to the great extent that they sought to elevate their own physical characteristics.

Moreover, the fact that Nadav and Avihu were chosen to sanctify Hashem's Name on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, as it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me," testifies to their lofty level. Hashem chose them over the entire nation and its leaders to sanctify His Name. In light of this, it is difficult to understand why Hashem dealt with them with strict justice and killed them in a strange way, when He could have judged them more leniently.

Chazal (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6) explain that Aharon's sons deserved to die either because they decided a law in front of their teacher, or because they entered the Mishkan while they were drunk (ibid.). There are other commentaries that say that they were liable because they did not get married, leaving Jewish girls waiting for them in vain (*Vayikra Rabbah* 20:10). There are others who explain that they were accused of not showing adequate respect toward Moshe and Aharon. They said, "When will these two old men die so that we can lead Am Yisrael instead of them?" They had exceeded their limit of sin before Hashem, despite their good intentions. Hashem punished them on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, which was also the inauguration of each Jew's personal sanctuary that exists within his heart.

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 525) teach that Hashem did this in order to arouse Am Yisrael to fear His Name. This was because on that day the *Shechinah* had returned to them, and Hashem did not want to remove it from their midst ever again, even if they would sin. Therefore, anyone who would sin would immediately become liable for retribution. Through his punishment, he would achieve atonement. Thus, Hashem's *Shechinah* would be able to continue residing among Am Yisrael. This lesson was transmitted through the death of Nadav and Avihu. Bnei Yisrael witnessed how Hashem was true to His word and intended to continue resting His *Shechinah* among them despite their sins. From now on, the punishment would serve as atonement and the *Shechinah* would be able to continue residing among them.

However, why were they the ones to teach the nation this lesson? They were exalted tzaddikim, about whom Hashem says, "I will be sanctified

through those who are close to Me." Why did Hashem punish them if they were righteous? If we would be forced to say that Aharon's sons really did sin by committing the transgressions enumerated above, why did Moshe and Aharon not admonish them that they should get married and multiply, or that they should not enter the Mishkan drunk, or that they should not decide a law in front of their Rabbi?

The answer to these questions becomes more elusive because of what happened to Miriam. When she spoke *lashon hara* about her brother, Moshe, although she had good intentions, Hashem quickly punished her by inflicting her with leprosy, in order that it should purify her soul. Hashem did not want to wait until other sins would accumulate, surpassing the limit and thus causing her to be liable to die. Therefore, Hashem punished her immediately.

We would expect the same conduct toward Nadav and Avihu. When they said, "When will these two old men die so that we can lead the nation instead of them," why did Hashem not punish them immediately so that their iniquities would not accrue, causing them to deserve being punished by death? Since Hashem did not punish them when they said this, and since Moshe and Aharon did not admonish them for not marrying, we can conclude that these were not considered sins. Therefore, if they were innocent, why were they punished by a strange death? It seems that there was no accusation against them. As proof of this, the entire nation was commanded to mourn their deaths.

I sought to answer these questions, especially since I had to lecture on this parashah in my yeshiva in Lyon. Therefore, I prayed to Hashem that He should enlighten me. While still murmuring my prayers, my feet carried me, as if on their own, to the large bookshelf of the Beit Hamidrash. Among the hundreds of *sefarim* on the shelves, I pulled out the sefer *Kedushat Levi*, written by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. I opened to parashat *Shemini*, but did not find anything relevant to my topic.

However, while leafing through the pages, I noticed a beautiful explanation of a pasuk in Shir Hashirim that seemed to resolve all the questions I sought to answer. I realized that it was Divine intervention that caused me to reach specifically for this sefer, among the hundreds of others resting on the shelves. I had picked it up inadvertently, but amazingly, I found the answers to my questions. With assistance from Heaven, I had found what I had been looking for in the section expounding on the words of Shir Hashirim, in fulfillment of the maxim of Chazal (*Makkot* 10b): "In the way that a person wants to go, he is led."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev explains that when a tzaddik descends from his lofty level, it is for the purpose of raising lost souls of the lowest people. He quotes the words of the Maggid of Mezeritch, who describes the situation with a parable. It can be compared to one who attempts to extract his friend from mud and slime. He must first descend deep in the mud in order to lift his friend out. Likewise, the tzaddikim have mercy on the lost Jewish souls "drowning in mud." In order to save them, they are willing to descend into the "mud," lowering their lofty level. Upon their ascent from the slimy depths, the errant souls cling to them and are consequently lifted out together with them. This practice of tzaddikim stems from the principle that "all Jews are responsible for each other." Because of their sense of responsibility for their fellow, tzaddikim feel compelled to save the souls of sinners in this way.

According to these enlightening words, we can conclude that Nadav and Avihu intentionally sought to descend from their lofty level in order to benefit the Jewish nation by sanctifying Hashem's Name in their presence. In order to decline from their exalted position, they did not marry, and they entered the Mishkan drunk. They also spoke about Moshe and Aharon disrespectfully, and decided a law in front of their teacher. They did all this in order that their sins should exceed their limit, and they would become liable for death. In this way, they would demonstrate to Bnei Yisrael that there is a Judge Who implements justice. They would also impart the lesson that one might die as a punishment for

his transgressions, since the *Shechinah* was residing amongst them and it could not tolerate iniquity.

It is unlikely that the transgressions of Nadav and Avihu were considered sins before Hashem. As proof, Hashem did not punish them for each individual transgression, as would have been expected considering their elevated spiritual status, since it says (*Yevamot* 121b), "Hashem is particular with the deeds of tzaddikim to a hairsbreadth." Also, from Hashem's command to mourn their death, we learn that they were not considered sinners. As a result of their decline from their lofty level in order to benefit the people, they merited rising higher and higher, until their *neshamot* joined with Hashem and were taken to the Upper Worlds. [The Zohar does not agree with this explanation. It states that the fate of their souls was suspended until the incident of Zimri, when they joined the soul of Pinchas and were corrected through him. This is clarified in Zohar III, 115]. Because their sole intention was to raise Am Yisrael spiritually and instill the concept that there is a Judge Who implements justice, we mention them on Yom Kippur. We beg that in the merit of these two tzaddikim, who were willing to sacrifice their lives for their fellow Jews, Hashem should spare us from harsh judgment.

In the following pesukim it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: 'I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people'; and Aharon fell silent." We can infer from these words that Moshe and Aharon realized that the intention of Aharon's sons was to sanctify the Name of Hashem through their death. In this way, they would impart the lesson to Bnei Yisrael that there is a Judge Who implements justice. Also, from now on, instead of Hashem removing His *Shechinah* as a result of the nation's transgressions, He would take retribution from the sinners. Aharon, who recognized the righteousness of his sons, reacted with silence. Since this was the will of his righteous sons, which had been endorsed by Hashem, he had nothing to add.

As a reward for his silence, Aharon merited Hashem speaking to him individually, imparting to him the lesson of the prohibition of consuming

alcohol while serving in the Mishkan (*Vayikra* 10:8; *Rashi* 10:3). Why did Hashem not inform Moshe before the *Chanukat Hamishkan* of the prohibition of entering the Mishkan drunk? Because in this way, the drunkenness of Aharon's sons would not be considered a transgression, since Hashem had not yet commanded them about its laws. Their drunkenness would be considered only a slight decline from the lofty level of their Avodat Hashem. However, because they were outstandingly righteous, they were liable for death despite the fact that they had not transgressed an explicit prohibition. Since their intentions were of an elevated source, their decline caused a tremendous elevation among the people, ultimately making them worthy of learning a new parashah concerning the laws of alcohol consumption while serving in the Mishkan.

The *Kedushat Levi* describes this situation in his commentary on Shir Hashirim (1:3): "Like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of Your great deeds." This can be translated literally as: "The scent of your goodly oils are pleasant even upon being reduced; likewise is your good name." The oil refers to Torah and good deeds. Even when the oil is "reduced," its pleasant aroma is still detected. Likewise, the tzaddik's greatness in Torah and good deeds leaves a lasting impression. This impression influences its environment even when the tzaddik descends from his exalted position.

This pasuk can be applied to Nadav and Avihu. Even when they descended from their Torah, alluded to by the oil, they still had good deeds: the pleasant aroma that is left even after the oil dissipates. This is because their sole intention in descending from their high level was for the sake of Heaven. It was in order to raise Am Yisrael spiritually, just as the person who descends into the mud for the purpose of saving his friend.

Not only were Aharon's sons not considered sinners, on the contrary, they were considered righteous all their lives, and even more so upon their death. Therefore, in their merit, there are parshiyot written about

them in the Torah to commemorate them. Their deaths are also mentioned on the holy day of Yom Kippur.

This is similar to the sin of Tzelafchad, who transgressed for the sake of Heaven (*Shabbat* 96b; *Targum Yonatan, Bamidbar* 15:32). He intentionally gathered wood on Shabbat in order to get stoned as a punishment. He was not considered a rebel against Hashem, since his intention was to impress upon Bnei Yisrael the severity of desecrating Shabbat. Therefore, he merited that his daughters received a portion of land in Eretz Yisrael. Likewise, the laws concerning the inheritance of daughters were initiated through them. He was ultimately honored, since his decline in greatness was only for the purpose of raising Bnei Yisrael to greater heights in Avodat Hashem.

Chazal (*Berachot* 19a) say, "If you see a Torah scholar transgress at night, do not doubt his uprightness in the morning, since most probably [in the interim] he did teshuvah." It is assumed that a tzaddik would not go to sleep until he does teshuvah. This corresponds to the statement (*Mishlei* 24:16), "For though the righteous one may fall seven times, he will arise." It is because sometimes the decline of a tzaddik from his high level is orchestrated by Heaven in order that he should do teshuvah and thereby rise to even greater heights, even greater than the level that he enjoyed previous to his sin. Consequently, his descent is for the purpose of ascending. When the tzaddik does teshuvah and elevates himself, at the same time he elevates other errant souls together with him. This is possible as result of his good deeds, which are described as "the scent of your goodly oils are pleasant even upon being reduced; likewise is your good name."

The pasuk (*Vayikra* 4:22) says, "When (אשר) a ruler sins, and transgresses one of the prohibitions – unintentionally – and becomes guilty." Rashi comments that the word אשר is related to אשרי [fortunate]. Thus, the pasuk can mean: "Fortunate is the generation whose ruler sets his heart to bring atonement for his unintentional sin. All the more so, that he has regrets over his intentional sins." This signifies that it is tremendously praiseworthy when the leaders of the generation bring a

korban to atone for their sins, even when they sin unintentionally. In this way the Name of Heaven is sanctified through them. This is because when the people observe that their leaders do not refrain from admitting their sins and bringing a *korban* as atonement, they are encouraged to behave likewise and do teshuvah for their sins. They reason that if the leader is not embarrassed to admit his sins and atone for them, all the more so should they not be embarrassed to do so. Consequently, the *korban* of the leaders serves to arouse people to do teshuvah. In this way, the teshuvah of great people elevate other errant *neshamot* of Am Yisrael.

Most certainly Nadav and Avihu did teshuvah while approaching Hashem. This is hinted at in the words describing their death, saying that it was "before Hashem." This implies that they attained closeness to Hashem, which results from teshuvah. As proof of this, we read this parashah on Yom Kippur, a day when everyone does teshuvah for all their sins. Fortunate were Nadav and Avihu that they merited "standing before Hashem," and thereby purifying all generations until the coming of Mashiach. May Hashem forgive their iniquities.

In Summary

- Why did Hashem judge Nadav and Avihu with strict judgment, when He could have judged them more leniently? Chazal give several reasons for this. Even though their intentions were for the sake of Heaven, they exceeded their limit of sin and deserved to die. Hashem chose to punish them with death specifically on the eighth day, in order to transmit the message that He would not remove His *Shechinah* from Am Yisrael again. Instead, if a person would sin, he would ultimately pay for his deeds.
- However, we might still wonder why Hashem did not spare their lives. We are taught that anyone who accuses Nadav and Avihu for sinning is mistaken. If we were to suggest that they exceeded their limit of sin, why did Moshe and Aharon not admonish them? Moreover, why did Hashem not punish them immediately after their first sin of speaking disrespectfully about Moshe and Aharon, as He punished Miriam, in order that they should not exceed their limit of sin and deserve death?

- According to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, tzaddikim sin with the intention of descending from their lofty level. Through their subsequent teshuvah, they also elevate other errant souls. They extend themselves for the people because all Jews are responsible for each other.
- We may also suggest that Aharon's sons sought to descend from their lofty level intentionally, in order to elevate the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael by making them realize that there is a Judge Who implements justice. Since Hashem did not punish them for the transgressions listed above, we can infer that they were not considered sins at all.
- The pasuk says, "And Aharon fell silent." Aharon recognized that this was the will of his sons. Since he knew that they were outstandingly righteous, he remained silent. He was rewarded for his silence by being informed by Hashem individually concerning the laws of refraining from alcohol consumption while serving in the Mishkan. Why were these laws not transmitted through Moshe before the *Chanukat Hamishkan*? It seems that Hashem did not want Nadav and Avihu's drunkenness upon entering the Mishkan to be considered an explicit transgression. The descent of Aharon's sons from their lofty level elevated the people greatly, to the extent that they merited learning a new parashah as a result.
- Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev comments on the pasuk in Shir Hashirim: "The scent of your goodly oils are pleasant even upon being reduced; likewise is your good name," that even if a tzaddik, who is compared to aromatic oil, descends from his lofty level, his "pleasant smell" is still evident because of his good deeds. The mention of the death of Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur is proof of their outstanding righteousness.

Sanctifying Hashem's Name

"Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people; and Aharon fell silent"

(*Vayikra* 10:3)

The Torah conveys that the death of Aharon's sons was considered a *kiddush Hashem*, as it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." Their death resulted in magnifying Hashem's honor, since it proved that there is a Judge Who implements justice. Hashem had promised His people that He would never remove His *Shechinah* from them. Therefore, if they would transgress, He would punish them through death. Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 800) say that when Aharon's sons lit an alien fire before Hashem at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, and they were immediately punished, this served to arouse a great *kiddush Hashem* in the entire world since it was proof that Hashem was true to His word. He would never again remove His *Shechinah* from Am Yisrael as He promised. Hashem's *Shechinah* which rested upon His people would remain even after they sinned. However, when they would sin, Hashem would punish them through troubles and suffering, or in death, to atone for their sins.

There are two ways in which one can sanctify Hashem's Name: either through the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot in his lifetime, or through punishment by suffering and death, as in the example of Nadav and Avihu.

The first path is hinted to by the pasuk (*Tehillim* 95:8), "Even today, if we but heed His call! Do not harden your heart as at Merivah, as on the day of Massah in the Wilderness; when your ancestors tried Me." These words imply that the way to sanctify Hashem's Name is by heeding

Hashem's call and going in the ways of the Torah. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 98a) reveal that Mashiach will come either when the generation is entirely innocent or entirely guilty. This suggests that one way in which to merit the coming of Mashiach is through attachment to Hashem and following His Torah. We are guaranteed from Heaven that on the day that all of Am Yisrael will listen to Hashem's calling, they will merit sanctifying His Name in public. As a reward for this, Hashem will redeem them.

It is important to be aware that each person, according to his level, is granted from Heaven unique abilities in order to serve Hashem. A person must utilize his gifts to serve Hashem and sanctify His Name. Clearly, the level in Avodat Hashem of a simple laborer cannot be compared to the level of a holy tzaddik. Nevertheless, they must both sanctify Hashem's Name according to the abilities with which they were endowed. The greater a person is in Torah learning and *yirat Shamayim*, the greater are his obligations. Undoubtedly, all eyes are upon the tzaddikim of the generation. Therefore, they are obligated to examine their deeds to ensure that they do not mislead the people. This is because their actions and way of life serve as an example to the people. The responsibility that rests upon their shoulders is enormous (*Yoma* 86a). Through his actions, the tzaddik can sanctify Hashem's Name and glorify Him. This is especially true since people learn from his example and follow in his ways. Therefore, as a result of his exemplary behavior, he increases the amount of people devoted to serving Hashem.

The pasuk (*Tehillim* 95:8) recounts, "Do not harden your heart as at Merivah, as on the day of Massah in the Wilderness; when your ancestors tried Me." This refers to the occasions that Am Yisrael tested Hashem in the Desert. One of these times was when Bnei Yisrael cried and complained to Moshe Rabbeinu to supply water for them in order to quench their thirst. Ultimately, Bnei Yisrael merited receiving water from the Well in the merit of Miriam the Prophetess (*Ta'anit* 9a). The Well of Life is called on her name, "the Well of Miriam." When she stopped living, the water stopped flowing. When the people's thirst became unbearable, they cried to Moshe to save them from dying of thirst. When Moshe

sensed that the nation was about to rise against him to kill him, he turned to Hashem in prayer that He should supply water for Bnei Yisrael in the barren desert.

Hashem heard Moshe's pleas and told him to go speak to the rock, telling it to issue a flow of water. However, Moshe did not fulfill Hashem's instructions perfectly. Instead of talking to the rock, he hit it with his staff. Chazal say that although the stone was inanimate, it heard Hashem commanding Moshe to speak to it. Therefore, it did not want to issue water after being struck. Only when Hashem instructed the rock to fulfill Moshe's request did it finally agree to issue water to quench the people's thirst. There are several lessons that we can learn from this. If the rock, an inanimate object, did not yield to Moshe's beatings, but listened to the words of Hashem in order to fulfill His command to sanctify His Name in public, how much more are we obligated to listen to Hashem's commands. After all, we are created with intelligence and awareness through which we can improve our Avodat Hashem and thus cause Hashem's Name to be sanctified.

Since Moshe hit the rock instead of talking to it, he diminished the sanctification of Hashem's Name. Therefore, he was sentenced to die in the Desert and not enter the Promised Land. From the punishment that Moshe received, Bnei Yisrael witnessed that there is a Judge Who implements justice. They learned that any person who does not adhere to Hashem's command, even if he is on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu, would be prosecuted and punished for his actions. The very fact that Moshe died in the Desert and did not enter Eretz Yisrael caused Hashem's Name to be sanctified throughout the world. Everyone acknowledged the fact that Hashem is the King of the world, which obligates them to listen to Him, without deviating from His command. This belief is expressed in the pasuk (*Devarim* 32:4), "The Rock, perfect is His work, for all His ways are justice: a G-d, faithful, without iniquity. 'Righteous,' and it is proper."

Therefore, David Hamelech appealed to Am Yisrael and told them to listen to Hashem's commands and not alter them in any way. He did not

want them to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors in the Desert, who deviated from Hashem's order and were therefore prohibited from entering Eretz Yisrael.

We are given the choice as to which way we choose to sanctify His Name. *Kiddush Hashem* is one of the foundations that maintain the world; from it everything is sustained. One cannot escape his obligation to sanctify Hashem's Name. The only thing that is left for a person to decide is how he will do so. He can either fulfill his obligation by going in Hashem's ways and obeying His commands, or through punishment and death. The Torah teaches us this concept, saying (*Devarim* 30:19), "I call the heavens and the earth today to bear witness against you; I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring."

Nadav and Avihu were liable for death because they lit an alien fire, which they were not commanded to light. When Hashem descended to rest His *Shechinah* among Bnei Yisrael, the entire nation feared Hashem. Concurrently, they rejoiced with great joy that Hashem had returned to rest His *Shechinah* among them forever. They reached an extremely exalted state, whereby any additional contribution on their part would serve only to detract from their great loftiness.

Thus, in spite of their good intentions of lighting a fire on the Altar to sanctify Hashem's Name even more, Aharon's sons should first have consulted a higher authority to know if such an action was appropriate for the occasion, and not have decided on their own. Since they did not ask permission to light the fire, their additional contribution served to detract from the sanctification of Hashem's Name, and Hashem had to strike them with death. Their consequent deaths served to correct the defamation of Hashem's sanctity. However, since they were righteous tzaddikim and their intentions were solely for the sake of Heaven, as it says (*Vayikra* 16:1), "When they approached before Hashem," they merited that Hashem's Name was ultimately sanctified through them. Consequently, Am Yisrael was commanded to mourn their deaths.

Pirkei Avot teaches (4:17), "Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come." This seems surprising, since the continuation states, "Better one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the entire life of this world." How can we resolve the seemingly conflicting statements? The truth is that the ecstasy in the World to Come is unparalleled in this world. Even if we were to combine all the delights of this world, they would not compare to the pleasure experienced in the World to Come, which is eternal. Nonetheless, Chazal say, "Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come." They teach us that this world is the world of action in which we can do good deeds and fulfill many mitzvot in order to merit reward in the World to Come. After a person returns his soul to his Creator, he cannot add to his merits. It is only possible to accomplish in this world, whereas the World to Come is a place where one receives reward and punishment. Therefore, it is better to have the opportunity of achievement in this world than all the subsequent reward in the World to Come, where there is no opportunity to add merit. The value of this world is enormous, as expressed by Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 10b): "There are those who earn their World in one hour." There were people who all their lives were wicked and rebelled against Hashem and His Torah. However, prior to their deaths, they did complete teshuvah, to the extent that a Heavenly Voice declared that they were worthy of the World to Come (*Avodah Zarah* 17a).

The more a person toils during his lifetime to sanctify Hashem's Name, to that degree he increases his merits in the World to Come. Once, I was in Madrid in an airport, waiting for a connecting flight to Argentina. I had a twelve hour stop-over. Toward the end of my lengthy, exhausting wait for the flight that would take me to my final destination, I noticed that one of my fellow passengers had drifted off into a deep sleep. I was worried that after this fellow's extensive wait, he would miss his connecting flight, which was due to take off shortly. I was about to wake him up when I thought to myself that I had better leave him for someone else to wake up. I feared that my distinctly Jewish appearance, with a long white beard would frighten him.

This caused me to realize that we too are in a state of waiting. This world is like the stop-over on the way to our destination, which is the World to Come. In order not to be left sleeping in the "airport" when our plane takes off, we have to be on constant alert to seek ways in which we can increase Hashem's honor and sanctify His Name. Thus, when we reach the World to Come, we will not regret that we did not utilize our time appropriately.

It says in parashat Yitro (*Shemot* 19:3) "ומשה עלה אל האלוה-ים – And Moshe ascended to G-d." The letter ו' denotes a supplement or addition. This indicates that one does not have to wait until his death in order to ascend to Hashem. He can already do so in this world, during his lifetime, by coming close to Hashem through making a *kiddush Hashem* and glorifying His Name. Every Jewish *neshamah* is a *nitzotz* of Moshe Rabbeinu's *neshamah*. This pasuk hints that just as Moshe Rabbeinu merited ascending to Heaven during his lifetime and coming close to Hashem, every Jew is able to do likewise through working to serve Him.

When a Jew dies, he is wrapped in a tallit to be buried. This is the only garment that accompanies him to his final resting place. However, the tallit is not complete, because the fringes are first removed. Why is this so? This is because the fringes remind a person of the mitzvot (*Bamidbar* 15:39). Since the deceased does not have the option of performing additional mitzvot, the fringes are removed from the *tallit* to avoid mocking him. This procedure also imparts an important lesson. One should attempt to diligently perform mitzvot while he is still able to, before he dies. Afterwards, he will not be able to regain this opportunity, and he will be rewarded for those mitzvot that are accredited to him.

While I was visiting in the city of Marseille, a person began snapping many pictures of me. I asked him why he had to take so many pictures; why weren't two or three photographs sufficient? He explained to me that it was possible that of all the pictures that he took, only a few would come out nice and clear. Therefore, he preferred to snap many shots in order to be sure that in the end he would have some nice results. His words caused me to reflect about our mission in life. We attempt to fulfill

mitzvot, but frequently our mitzvot are not performed with the appropriate zest and appreciation, or are lacking in perfection. If so, who knows, after we pass on, how many perfect mitzvot will be credited to us? To ensure that we are not left with defective and flawed mitzvot, it is best to exert effort in this world, which is the world of activity, to increase our mitzvot and the *kiddush Hashem* that we make here, in order that we should not remain humiliated in the World to Come.

The Satan attempts with all his might to prevent a person from going in the ways of Hashem. He does not despair in his efforts to disturb a person from his Avodat Hashem. I recall a poignant scene I witnessed when I was in Ashdod. I saw a dove busily pecking at its food while a few feet away there lurked a hungry cat. The cat took advantage of the dove's involvement in its food and began to approach its prey. To the dismay of the cat, the dove sensed the threat and hurriedly flew away. After a few minutes, the dove returned to resume its meal. This time, the hungry cat tried a different strategy. He began to dig in the sand nearby indifferently so that the dove should not feel threatened. While the dove was engrossed in its food, the cat suddenly jumped at the dove and devoured it.

Likewise, the Satan tries again and again to divert us from the proper path. When he does not succeed with his original tactic, he attempts a second and third and fourth one, just like an animal hunting food. This is described by the statement (*Mishlei* 24:6), "For through [wise] strategies, you can wage war for your benefit." This pasuk is referring to the war of the *Yetzer Hara* (*Biur HaGra*, ibid.) This implies that a person is obligated to outwit the *Yetzer* so that he does not fall into his trap. He should continuously strive to improve his Avodat Hashem, coming closer to Hashem, as Moshe merited doing.

Regarding Moshe, it says (*Shemot* 19:3), "And Moshe ascended to G-d." This pasuk describes Moshe's ascent during his lifetime. It teaches us that Moshe always sought ways to come closer to Hashem despite his many troubles and tribulations. Moshe merited sanctifying Hashem's Name both during his lifetime and after his death. We can suggest that precisely

while experiencing hardships in Avodat Hashem, when one does not allow himself to despair, but strengthens himself as a lion in his Avodat Hashem, he merits that Hashem's Name is sanctified through his deeds. May the living take heed that the main objective is to sanctify Hashem's Name while he is alive.

In Summary

- Regarding Aharon's sons, it says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This implies that their deaths caused a *kiddush Hashem*. From the words of Chazal we learn that the fire that Aharon's sons lit was considered an unnecessary contribution, which ultimately detracted from their service. Therefore, Hashem caused them to die so that as a result of their deaths, His Name would be sanctified. This would atone for their diminishing Hashem's honor by lighting an alien fire.
- There are two ways in which to sanctify Hashem's Name; either through punishment by death, or by going in His ways. This is as David Hamelech states, "Even today, if we but heed His call." Likewise, David Hamelech warns us not to repeat the error of Moshe Rabbeinu, who hit the rock instead of talking to it and was ultimately punished for it.
- The punishment of Moshe Rabbeinu resulted in a great *kiddush Hashem*. Am Yisrael realized that there is a Judge Who implements justice, and every person, even the greatest tzaddik, must ultimately give an accounting for his deeds. Regarding this, David Hamelech says in Tehillim, "Do not harden your heart as at Merivah, as on the day of Massah in the Wilderness."
- It says, "Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come." This world is the world of activity, whereas the World to Come is the world of reward. This world is preferable to the World to Come since a person can only fulfill mitzvot in this world, and all the more so, because one can acquire his share in the World to Come in just an hour.

- We learn, "ומשה עלה אל האלוה-ים – And Moshe ascended to G-d." The letter ו denotes a supplement or addition. This indicates that one does not have to wait until his death in order to ascend to Hashem. He can already do so in this world, during his lifetime by coming close to Hashem through making a *kiddush Hashem*. Every Jewish *neshamah* is a *nitzotz* of Moshe Rabbeinu's *neshamah*. This pasuk hints that just as Moshe Rabbeinu came close to Hashem during his lifetime, every Jew is able to do likewise.
- It is customary to bury a dead person in his *tallit* without the fringes. This is because the fringes allude to the fulfillment of mitzvot. In order not to mock the deceased, who cannot perform mitzvot anymore, the fringes are removed. This inspires all those who escort the deceased to strive to fulfill mitzvot while they are still able to perform them.
- The Satan deviously attempts to prevent a person from sanctifying Hashem's Name. However, when one overcomes these obstacles and improves his Avodat Hashem despite them, his reward is endless.

And Aharon Fell Silent

"Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people; and Aharon fell silent"

(*Vayikra* 10:3)

When Aharon heard about the death of his two sons, his reaction was silence. He did not argue or ask any questions. Aharon's silence testified that he accepted the decree with serenity and did not seek explanations

for Hashem punishing his sons, especially on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, which was a day of joyous celebration. He understood that Hashem knew what was best for his sons. Therefore, if He had ordained that they die at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, it was most appropriate, even if it was hard to accept.

The silence of Aharon serves as a lesson for all future generations. One should not question Hashem's conduct. Even when one experiences challenges which are entirely beyond his comprehension, he should accept the decree from Heaven with equanimity. A person must even thank Hashem for the hardships, just as he thanks Him for the favors that He does for him. There are times when a decree from Heaven may seem entirely illogical. For example, a person who sought all his life to dispense charity among the needy may suddenly become impoverished. Similarly, a person who dedicated himself to honoring his parents may die suddenly, while still young. This contradicts the assurance (*Shemot* 20:12), "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened upon the land that Hashem, your G-d gives you." A person should train himself not to seek reasons clarifying why a tzaddik may seem to be inflicted with suffering, while a wicked person seems to enjoy pleasure. He should internalize the lesson that Hashem, Who scrutinizes a person's essence, knows what is best for him. It is impossible for us, with our shortsightedness, to grasp what is truly good.

All our lives we pray to Hashem that He should not bring difficult challenges upon us. We also beseech Hashem in our prayers to be blessed with upright children, substantial income, health, happiness, and the like. We should be aware that precisely when a person has everything that he needs and does not lack anything, it is an indication that Hashem does not desire connection with him, as it says (*Mishlei* 3:12), "For Hashem admonishes the one He loves." This implies that Hashem reproves and inflicts suffering upon those with whom He seeks connection and loves. Hashem longs to hear their supplications and pleas, drawing close to Him.

The curse of the Snake is an illustration of this concept. The Snake was cursed (*Bereishit* 3:14): "And dust shall you eat all the days of your life."

What is the curse of eating dust, which is readily available everywhere? Through this type of sustenance, the Snake would not have to exert itself to search for food. The reason why this is considered a curse and not a blessing is explained by the *ba'alei mussar*. Hashem intentionally ordained that the snake's food should be readily available. However, Hashem was so angered by the Snake that He did not want any connection with him, not even to hear his voice begging for his food. This is why Hashem provided for his sustenance in a plentiful way. Not everyone is worthy of the privilege of turning to Hashem.

Chazal (*Yevamot* 64a) say that Hashem desires the prayers of tzaddikim. Therefore, He inflicts them with suffering. Their supplications are so precious to Hashem, to the extent that He brings hardships and challenges upon them in order that they should turn to Him in prayer. As an example of this point, during the six days of Creation, Hashem created the vegetation on the surface of the earth (*Chulin* 60b). However, He did not bring down rain in order for the plants to grow. This is because He waited for man, who would pray for rain. Hashem longs for the prayers of tzaddikim. Chazal (*Ta'anit* 25b) disclose that it is not a good sign when rain descends before people pray for it. This indicates that Hashem is not awaiting the prayers of His people. Conversely, when rain falls after the people pray for it, it is a sign that Hashem originally intended to supply the rainfall, but because of His love, He waited for their supplications in order to bring it down.

In light of this, we see that the greatest problem for a person is when everything goes smoothly. Precisely when Hashem challenges a person and inflicts him with hardship it indicates that Hashem longs for the person to turn to Him and connect to Him. It indicates Hashem's great love for him.

This sheds light upon the pasuk (*Vayikra* 10:3) which states, "And Aharon fell silent," after the death of his sons. This suggests that he accepted the decree with equanimity. Prior to this, Moshe told him that Hashem sought to sanctify His Name through those who are close to Him. However, he did not know whom Hashem intended. Would it be

Moshe, or Aharon? After the two sons of Aharon died at the *Chanukat Hamishkan* and Hashem's Name was sanctified through their death, Aharon understood that his sons were greater than Moshe and himself. Therefore, he accepted the decree with equanimity.

All our lives, we pray to Hashem that He should not bring challenges upon us, since we are not sure of our abilities to withstand them. However, when Hashem chooses to challenge a person, he should accept it with equanimity and withstand it bravely. Hashem does not inflict a person with a test which he cannot withstand. Aharon did not seek trials. However, when Hashem tested him with the death of his two sons at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, he accepted it with serenity, knowing that the hardship testified to his sons' greatness and to Hashem's great love for them and for himself. Therefore, Aharon was silent, as it says, "And Aharon fell silent."

In conclusion, there is a parable that illustrates this lesson. A father and son were travelling through the forest. Suddenly the son let go of his father's hand and disappeared among the dense trees. The father called out to his son, and likewise, the son called for his father. After spending a harrowing hour searching for each other, they finally met. The father had remained close to his son all along. It was the son who had strayed from his father. After they met, the father hit his son, conveying his anger at him for not being careful and remaining close to him. While the father was striking his son, the son turned to him and told him, "Father, I am willing to receive all your blows. The main thing is that I am in your hands."

Similarly, Aharon Hakohen accepted his blow with equanimity because the death of his sons proved that Hashem was present and residing amongst Bnei Yisrael. Despite their sins, Hashem would not depart from them. Instead He would strike them, while remaining in their midst. As long as Hashem strikes His people while being among them, the blows reflect his love.

In Summary

- The words “And Aharon fell silent” indicate that Aharon accepted the decree of Heaven against his sons with equanimity. This is a lesson that we can learn for all generations. One should thank Hashem for the hardships that he experiences, just as he thanks Him for the favors.
- It says “For Hashem admonishes the one He loves.” This implies that if a person is not lacking anything, it may be a sign that Hashem does not desire his prayers and closeness. This is illustrated by the punishment of the Snake, who received the curse that he would be sustained by the dust of the earth, which is readily available everywhere. This was in order that the Snake should not turn to Hashem to ask Him to provide for his needs.
- Hashem longs for the prayers of the tzaddikim. Therefore, He brings suffering upon them. An example of this concept is the fact that Hashem did not cause the vegetation to sprout immediately after they were created. Hashem first waited for the prayers of Adam. Only after Adam prayed, did Hashem bring the rain, so that the world would flourish.
- Hashem does not give a person a test that he is not capable of withstanding. When Hashem tested Aharon with the death of his two sons at the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, he accepted it with serenity, knowing that the hardship testified to his sons’ greatness, and to Hashem’s great love for them and for himself. Therefore, Aharon was silent.

Torah and Science

"But this is what you shall not eat from among those that bring up their cud or that have split hooves: the camel, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split – it is impure to you; and the hyrax, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split – it is impure to you"

(*Vayikra* 11:26)

In parashat *Shemini*, the Torah informs Bnei Yisrael which animals are permitted for consumption. Only an animal that possesses the two signs of purity specified in the Torah is kosher. Animals that possess only one of the two signs are prohibited. The signs of a kosher animal are as follows: The animal must bring up its cud and have split hooves, which are completely separated. The animal is kosher only if all the requirements are fulfilled.

We find in the continuation of the pesukim that the Torah lists all of the animals that possess only one of the two signs. This is in order to remove any shadow of doubt about their non-kosher status. Among the animals that bring up their cud but do not have split hooves, the Torah lists the camel, the hyrax, and the hare. Among the animals that have split hooves that are entirely separated, but do not bring up their cud, the Torah lists the pig alone. This indicates that, of all the animals created, only the pig has split hooves that are completely separated, but does not bring up its cud.

Those who believe in the authenticity of the Torah do not require proofs to support it. However, even people who are far from Judaism and do not practice its mitzvot, harboring doubts of the Torah's origin, are inspired by the accurate classification that the Torah discloses regarding the type of animals that possess only one of the kosher signs. The

scientists have confirmed the accuracy of the Torah's categorization. Many Jews have returned to keeping Torah and mitzvot as a result.

For many years, scientists worked tirelessly to research the entire creation to see if additional animals exist, which the Torah did not list, that possess only one of the kosher signs. As much as they researched the matter, not sparing any means to fully check it out, they arrived at the conclusion that the words of the Torah are absolutely true. It is only the camel and the hyrax and the hare that bring up their cud but do not have split hooves that are completely separated; whereas the pig is the only animal that does not bring up its cud while sporting split hooves that are completely separated.

This provides tremendous proof for the authenticity of the Torah. It clearly demonstrates that the Torah that was given to Am Yisrael thousands of years ago has Divine origins. Only Hashem, Who created the entire Universe and knows the essence of Creation, can undisputedly declare that only these four animals possess one of the signs of purity, but not all, and are therefore prohibited.

The Mishnah says (*Niddah* 6:9), "Whichever [fish] possess scales also possess fins. [However] there are those that possess fins but do not possess scales." This indicates that all fish that have scales automatically have fins as well. However, not all fish that have fins have scales. When Chazal taught this subject according to what was revealed in the Torah, the equipment necessary to verify this fact had not yet been developed. There were neither submarines nor oxygen tanks to delve the depths of the sea. Despite this, Chazal were able to deduce through studying Torah how to identify if fish were kosher or not. In fact, thousands of years later, with the development of sophisticated equipment, researchers determined that all fish that have scales also have fins, but not vice versa. This lends legitimacy to the eternity and truth of the holy Torah that we received from Hashem.

The Gemara teaches (*Sanhedrin* 91a) that there is a kind of mouse whose body is comprised of half flesh and half sand. It is a phenomenon

that has no comparison in the entire Creation. There is a scientist who investigated all types of mice for many years. However he never came across this particular type of mouse. The scientist approached a Rabbi and asked him to clarify the Gemara. He told him, "You claim that your Torah is absolutely true and was given to you by Hashem. If so, then how is it possible that the mouse mentioned in the Torah has not been discovered up to date?" Upon hearing the argument of the scientist, the Rabbi explained that the particular mouse in question existed in Egypt. Indeed, a delegation of scientists that travelled to Egypt found this particular mouse there.

Likewise, top researchers labored for years to discover the duration of the pregnancy of a female snake (of the Zaaman species). After many years, they came to the conclusion that its pregnancy lasts for seven years. In fact, this historical discovery was revealed by the Torah (*Bechorot* 8a) decades earlier. Those who believe in the Torah and abide by its laws do not require such a study, which yields information that the Torah has already provided generations beforehand.

Chazal (*Chulin* 58a) say that all bugs and insects that fly, which do not possess a vertebra or spine, have a life span that does not exceed twelve months. Once a man came to a Rabbi and told him that he possesses a type of insect, which does not have a spine, but did live for more than twelve months. He questioned how it was possible that the insect lived longer than the lifespan given according to Chazal. When the Rabbi heard these words, he argued that it was impossible. He arranged to have the insect dissected in order to verify its composition. After checking the bug, they discovered that it did possess a thin spine.

During the Cold War, when the two world powers, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., vied in competition for outer space discovery, the Americans sent astronauts on a special mission. They wanted to determine if there was any life on other planets. On the same day that the delegation was supposed to publicize their conclusions, people approached the great *mekubal*, Rav Mordechai Sharabi, zy"a. They asked him if, indeed, there was life in outer space. Rabbi Mordechai wrote his answer on a note

and ordered his guest not to read it until the American delegation would publicize their conclusion.

On that fateful day, there was much tension among the public. Everyone waited to hear if indeed there existed life in the other galaxies that had not yet been discovered. After the Americans publicized their findings, that there was no life in outer space, the people read the note of the *mekubal*. They were astounded that even before the results of the research had been aired to the public, the *mekubal* had already affirmed that there was no life apart from life on Earth. He based his findings on the first pasuk in the Torah (*Bereishit* 1:1), "In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth." He noted that if Hashem would have created life on other planets, the Torah would have stated "in the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earths" in the plural form.

For many decades, as hard as they tried, no one was able to verify the shape of the world. After much investigation, it was finally concluded that the world is round. However, this information had already been clarified by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who recorded it in his *sefer* Hazohar (Part III, 1). Likewise, Rabbi Shimon was the first to conclude from the words of the Torah that when one half of the world is light, the other half is dark, and vice versa. This is dependent on the orbits of the sun and the earth and their rotation. Things that were clear to Chazal thousands of years ago were discovered by our contemporary scientists after much complex research, which cost fortunes. Our only condolence is that these scientists uncovered the truth and thereby reinforced the validity of the Torah. Since Hashem is the One Who created and fashioned the world, only He was qualified to reveal its composition already at *Matan Torah*. At that time, the truth had not yet been proven by scientists because they lacked the appropriate equipment. Only hundreds of years later did it become public knowledge. This proves that the words of the Torah are holy and testifies to the greatness and eternity of Hashem.

The Torah commands Bnei Yisrael to fulfill the mitzvah of *shemittah*. This requires them to abandon their fields in the seventh year. The Torah

assures that all those who adhere to the laws of the seventh year will reap double blessings from Heaven, as it says (*Vayikra* 25:21), "I will ordain My blessing." There are many farmers who tell amazing stories that demonstrate to what degree Hashem's blessings were realized.

The following is a famous story that occurred in a *Shemittah* year. A large swarm of locusts attacked many fields in Israel and consumed all the wheat of the kibbutzim that had not adhered to the laws of *shemittah*. To everyone's amazement, the huge swarm of locusts by-passed the fields of the Kommemiut settlement, in which the laws of *shemittah* were being upheld, and continued to the surrounding settlements. This occurrence was publicized, which resulted in a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*. Everyone was able to see clearly how Hashem fulfills His promise and protects those who adhere to His commands.

These episodes prove the validity of the Torah and clearly testify that the Torah was given to us by Hashem, the Creator of the world. Who could have dared to make such promises and succeed in fulfilling them other than Hashem? The fact the assurance (*Vayikra* 25:21) "I will ordain My blessing" materializes time after time in a most obvious manner clearly proves that the holy Torah was given to us from Hashem. Only Hashem, Who created the world, could guarantee such blessings. This is because only He possesses absolute control.

Similarly, regarding the *sotah* (*Bamidbar* 5:12-28), the Torah describes an extraordinary procedure. A man who suspected his wife of being unfaithful would bring her to the Kohen. The Kohen would make her drink bitter waters. If the woman was innocent, she would be blessed with easy births in the future, even if they had been difficult up to that point, and also with beautiful children. However, if she was guilty of having had relations with a stranger, the bitter waters would cause her to die an unnatural death.

The *sotah* also demonstrates that Hashem is the Supreme Ruler. Only He can execute what is stated in the Torah. Moreover, the Torah was given to Am Yisrael at Har Sinai, and the law of the *sotah* was practiced

when the Beit Hamikdash was built. Its validity was tested only hundreds of years after it had been commanded. If a woman who was accused of being unfaithful was really innocent, her true status was proven through the bitter, afflictive waters that she was given to drink. She would give birth easily and have beautiful children. The fulfillment of Hashem's words proved the absolute legitimacy of the Torah.

Because we are observant Jews, we do not require proofs and references for the truthfulness of the holy Torah. We strictly adhere to its commands only because Hashem commanded us to do so, regardless of whether we understand them. There are laws in the Torah whose logic seems obscure. Despite this, we fulfill them because Hashem ordered us to do so. The laws that we do comprehend, and other subjects written in the Torah whose validity has been proven throughout the years, only serve to strengthen our faith. Regardless, we believe what we already have known for thousands of years: that Hashem is the Creator of the world and there is no power other than Him.

In Summary

- There are two signs of a kosher animal, which are: The animal must bring up its cud and have split hooves, which must be completely separated. The Torah lists the animals which possess only one of these signs and are therefore prohibited. Only Hashem alone, Who created the world, could testify with certainty to these assertions, which have never been refuted.
- The signs of kosher fish are that they must have fins and scales. Chazal teach that every fish that has scales also has fins. However, not every fish that has fins also has scales. These facts have been verified over the years through technological developments.
- After much research, scientists have come to the same conclusion about many aspects of the natural world that Chazal already knew years earlier.
- It says, "In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth." Since it does not state "earths" in the plural form, our Rabbis conclude that there is no other life other than life on Earth.

- It is amazing to note, time after time, how the blessings of Hashem for those who keep *shemittah* are fulfilled. Likewise, the miraculous results of the bitter waters given to the *sotah* testify to the validity of the Torah that was given to us by Hashem.

Gems on Parashat Shemini

The Connection between Shemini, Tazria, and Metzora

There seems to be a connection between these three parshiyot of Shemini, Tazria, and Metzora, which follow each other. Parashat Shemini describes the Chanukat Hamishkan. It relates how Nadav and Avihu died on that day. Chazal explain (Tanchuma, Acharei Mot 6) that their death served as a punishment for abstaining from marriage. Thereafter, parashat Tazria (Vayikra 12:2) begins with the words "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male." This implies that since Nadav and Avihu did not marry, they prevented their potential wives from conceiving and giving birth to sons.

Hashem chose to take their lives specifically on the day of the Chanukat Hamishkan. This is because it was the day that Hashem rested His Shechinah on Bnei Yisrael in a concrete manner and came to reside among them. Likewise, when a person gets married and builds a family, he causes the Shechinah to rest upon his home. Since Aharon's sons did not get married, and as a result prevented the Shechinah from residing among them, they were punished measure for measure. Hashem took their lives on the day of the Chanukat Hamishkan, when the Shechinah descended upon Am Yisrael.

In parashat Tazria, there is another subject discussed. It says (Vayikra 12:3), "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." We learn that through the mitzvah of brit milah and the removal of the orlah, the Shechinah's presence is reinforced in the world. Nadav and Avihu also prevented this reinforcement of the Shechinah by not getting married, thereby making it impossible to have male offspring who would be circumcised on the eighth day.

The third parashah is parashat Metzora. Just as the metzora has to be isolated and reside outside of the camp, a person who does not build a home and marry a wife remains alone and outside the camp of the Shechinah. This is because the Shechinah resides only between a couple (Sotah 17a).

The Connection between Shemini, Tazria, Metzora, and Acharei Mot

There is no such thing as coincidence. If several parshiyot are contiguous, it means that there is something to be learned from this order. What is the connection between the four contiguous parshiyot of *Shemini*, *Tazria*, *Metzora*, and *Acharei Mot*? Why is parashat *Acharei Mot* written after parashat *Metzora*? According to the historical order of events, it should have been written after parashat *Shemini*, which discusses the death of Aharon's sons.

Aharon's sons died on the eighth day, which was the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, because they did not fulfill the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply. This is alluded to in parashat *Tazria*, (*Vayikra* 12:2), "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male." The Torah commands man to get married, because his wife has the ability to guard him from sin. However, Aharon's sons refused to get married. They wished to cleave to

the *Shechinah* in absolute holiness. Despite their good intentions, they ultimately sinned by deciding a law in front of their teacher and also by entering the Mishkan intoxicated (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6). This is because they lacked the protection that marriage would have afforded them.

There are commentaries that explain that the sin of Aharon's sons was that they spoke *lashon hara* against Moshe and Aharon by saying, "When will these two elders die so that we can lead the generation instead [of them]" (ibid.). Parashat *Metzora* hints at this by describing the punishment of *tzara'at* that inflicts a person who speaks *lashon hara*. It ultimately results in the punishment of isolation, having to reside outside the camp.

Thus, the connection between these parshiyot is as follows: Aharon's sons died on the eighth day, as described in parashat *Shemini*, because they did not get married, as discussed in parashat *Tazria*. As a result of refusing to get married, they lacked the protection afforded by a wife. Therefore, they ultimately sinned by speaking *lashon hara* about Moshe and Aharon, which is hinted at in parashat *Metzora*. Parashat *Acharei Mot* was written only after these three parshiyot, so that the three preceding parshiyot remain contiguous. Through this we can learn many important lessons.

The Death of Nadav and Avihu

"The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu… A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 10:1-2)

Why did Nadav and Avihu die? It says in the Torah (*Vayikra* 16:1), "When they approached before Hashem, and they died." Chazal (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6) say that this occurred because they entered the Mishkan drunk. Chazal also say (ibid.) that they died because they decided a law in front of their teacher, Moshe. This transgression is very severe, and is compared to theft, since the student "steals" the privilege of deciding the law from his teacher.

However, we need to clarify how the reasons that Chazal give for the deaths of Nadav and Avihu correspond to what is written in the Torah (*Bamidbar* 3:4). In the Torah it states that the sons of Aharon died because they lit an alien fire. Furthermore, regarding the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This implies that they were close to Hashem. If they sinned so greatly, how can they be described as "close to Me?"

It seems that the sins of Nadav and Avihu, both those described by the Torah and Chazal, were minor sins. Therefore, even after transgressing, they were still considered close to Hashem. Despite this, Hashem does not waive even the minor sins of great tzaddikim. This is why it says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

Each sin by itself did not make them liable for death. It was through all their sins combined that their fate was sealed. Lighting an alien fire, which

was their final transgression, was the sin that tipped the scale to their detriment. Therefore, the Torah states this specific reason for their deaths.

Hashem's Joy at the Erection of the Mishkan

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

The word השמיני (eighth) shares the same numerical value as the combination of the words נשמה (soul) and the Name א-ה-י-ה (including one for the word itself).

Chazal (*Megillah* 10b) say that the joy of Hashem at the *Chanukat Hamishkan* was as great as the joy at the six days of Creation. It seems that before Hashem created the world, the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael already dwelled under the Heavenly Throne. This implies that Hashem first created the *neshamot*, and thereafter created the world. The sefer *Sha'arei Ora* (Introduction) reveals that prior to the Creation of the world Hashem had a single Name, which is the Name א-ה-י-ה. Afterwards, more names diverged from this. However, the Name א-ה-י-ה remains the primary Name. This can be compared to a tree trunk, which is the main part of the tree, whereas the branches extend from it.

On the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, there was no limit to Hashem's joy, since the day on which the *Shechinah* descended was similar to the period prior to the Creation of the world. At that time, there existed only the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael and the Name of Hashem א-ה-י-ה. Likewise,

the joy of Hashem was complete, since Am Yisrael did teshuvah fully for the sin of the Golden Calf and thus merited Hashem returning to rest His *Shechinah* among them. Thus, the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael once again joined with the primary Name of Hashem.

Serving Hashem with Self-sacrifice

"It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and to the elders of Israel"

(*Vayikra* 9:1)

The word ויהי, with which the pasuk begins, denotes anguish, as is explained by Chazal (*Megillah* 10b). This teaches Am Yisrael that they should serve Hashem also through suffering, even sacrificing themselves in order to serve Him. This is described by the pasuk (*Devarim* 6:5) "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions." Chazal (*Berachot* 54a) clarify that one should love Hashem with everything that He metes out for him, whether good or bad.

Moshe Rabbeinu commanded Aharon and his sons to sacrifice the sin-offerings. This reflects the implication of the word ויהי. It indicates that they were prepared for the dangerous consequences of bringing the *korbanot*, to the extent that they were prepared to even sacrifice their lives to doing so. While sacrificing the offerings with intense devotion, their *neshamot* were liable to depart from them.

The sons of Aharon serve as an example for Am Yisrael of how one should serve Hashem with self-sacrifice. They died while sacrificing *korbanot* before Hashem, since they served with great self-sacrifice. The

sons of Aharon merited that through them the words of the pasuk "ויהי ביום השמיני – It was on the eighth day" were realized. The word שמיני has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul), which signifies the departure of their *neshamot*.

Rejoice with Trembling

"A fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed upon the Mizbeach the olah-offering and the fats; the people saw and they praised and fell upon their faces"

(*Vayikra* 9:24)

This pasuk indicates that the elation of Bnei Yisrael upon Hashem's descent to rest His *Shechinah* upon them was outstanding. In their great ecstasy, their *neshamot* almost departed from them. When Hashem saw that they almost died from joy, He hurried to restrain their euphoria by taking the *neshamot* of Nadav and Avihu. This is described by the words (*Vayikra* 10:3) "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This signifies that whenever additional sanctification of Hashem's Name is required, Hashem chooses to take the lives of tzaddikim instead of bringing tragedy upon the entire nation. If Bnei Yisrael had died from their intense jubilation in Hashem resting His *Shechinah* upon them, it could have created a *chillul Hashem*. It might have given people reason to believe that Hashem descended in order to cause their *neshamot* to depart.

Hashem sought to sanctify His Name only through tzaddikim who would atone for the entire generation. It seems that Nadav and Avihu, in their outstanding righteousness, sacrificed their lives for Am Yisrael.

Instead of the *neshamot* of all the people departing because of the intense *kedushah* and elation, Hashem took the *neshamot* of these two tzaddikim instead. This is the implication of "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

In addition to Nadav and Avihu sacrificing their lives in order to serve as atonement for Bnei Yisrael, they also imparted an important lesson of how to serve Hashem. This lesson is summed up in the words of the pasuk (*Tehillim* 2:11): "Rejoice when there is trembling." Since an overwhelming level of rejoicing, beyond the normal limits, may become uncontrollable and result in death, one should serve Hashem in joy combined with fear. In this way the ecstasy is contained. Conversely, it is prohibited to serve Hashem only in fear (*Yerushalmi, Sotah* 85:5) since fear alone can bring a person to despair. The correct conduct is joyousness; however it should be coupled with trembling, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), "Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song."

For this reason Hashem told Bnei Yisrael (*Vayikra* 10:6), "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." When Aharon's sons saw that Bnei Yisrael were overjoyed to a dangerous degree, they hurried to light an alien fire, which would result in their deaths. Through this tragedy, the elation of Am Yisrael would be mingled with sorrow and it would ultimately save them from dying due to excessive celebration. Therefore, all of Am Yisrael were commanded to mourn their deaths. In effect, Aharon's sons sacrificed their lives for the people. If not for their self-sacrifice in lighting an alien fire making them liable for death, Bnei Yisrael might not have withstood the intensity of the euphoria which they experienced upon the descent of the *Shechinah*, and they would have all died.

Similarly, a *chatan* breaks a glass cup under the chuppah to commemorate the *churban* of the Beit Hamikdash. At the peak of his joy, there is a danger that the *chatan* will be entirely overcome with ecstasy.

The breaking of the cup in memory of the *churban* serves to moderate his joy, so that his judgment should not become impaired by his extreme happiness.

The Reward of a Mitzvah Is Another Mitzvah

"Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people"

(*Vayikra* 10:3)

When Aharon Hakohen was informed of the death of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, his reaction is described in the pasuk with the words (*Vayikra* 10:3) "And Aharon fell silent." Aharon remained silent and did not express any resentment that Hashem chose to take his sons precisely on the most joyous occasion of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. Aharon could have questioned why Hashem exacted such severe judgment, and why He did not wait to punish them on a different day, but chose to kill them immediately upon sinning. Instead, Aharon remained silent and did not react at all, in order that it should not seem as if he doubted Hashem's judgment.

When Hashem perceived Aharon's heroic efforts in containing his emotions and remaining silent following the death of his sons, He wanted to express His appreciation for his meritorious conduct. Therefore, Hashem told Moshe to inform Aharon that from this point on he would merit speaking to Hashem directly, and he would be considered a Torah authority. All questions would be resolved according to Aharon's judgment.

Why did Hashem not grant Aharon additional children as a reward for his silence? It would have served to comfort him in his grief over the death of his sons. In fact, Aharon was only eighty-three years old at the time, and by the standards of his times he was still considered young enough to have more children.

It seems that Hashem wanted to grant Aharon a mitzvah as a reward for performing a mitzvah. Since Aharon sanctified Hashem's Name in public through his silence, he merited many additional mitzvot. By speaking directly with Hashem he would become a Torah authority. Through him the merits of Am Yisrael would multiply.

The Virtue of Silence

"Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people. And Aharon fell silent"

(*Vayikra* 10:3)

Rashi expounds that Aharon received reward for his silence. His reward was that Hashem spoke to him alone, by relating only to him the section of the Torah that deals with the laws of the consumption of wine while serving in the Mishkan.

When the two sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, died on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, Aharon accepted the decree from Heaven with equanimity. He remained silent and did not dispute Hashem's will in exacting severe punishment through the Attribute of Justice. Aharon's

silence was so beloved by Hashem that he was granted the privilege of personally hearing from Him the above mentioned laws. This private discussion that Aharon merited proved to Am Yisrael that Hashem no longer harbored any anger toward him for unintentionally causing Am Yisrael to sin with the Golden Calf. Because of his great level of purity, despite his meritorious intentions in assisting to fashion the Calf, he was expected to have considered the outcome of his involvement. The sin of Bnei Yisrael caused fury in Heaven, and until today we still suffer its consequences. However, when Hashem approached Aharon privately, informing him of the laws of alcoholic consumption during the service of the Mishkan, He demonstrated to him and to all the people that he was no longer considered blameworthy in this matter.

We learn from the silence of Aharon that at times a person can become elevated and holy, meriting closeness to Hashem, precisely through the virtue of silence. From the great honor that Aharon merited through his silence we can perceive its tremendous importance.

The Gemara teaches (*Bava Metzia* 37b), "Silence is akin to agreement." This implies that when a person remains silent, it demonstrates that he accepts the situation. If he would not accept it, he would protest. By remaining silent, Aharon demonstrated that he accepted Moshe's explanation and was at peace with it. Moshe told Aharon that since Hashem said (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me," it indicates that Nadav and Avihu were considered "close to Hashem," because they were the ones who merited sanctifying Hashem's Name on the day of the *Chanukat Hamishkan*. Previously, Moshe and Aharon did not know through whom Hashem would choose to sanctify His Name. Would it be through Moshe, or perhaps through Aharon? Despite Moshe and Aharon's great dedication in the preparations for the *Chanukat Hamishkan*, Hashem preferred Nadav and Avihu to them, and they were ultimately chosen as agents in causing Hashem's Name to be greatly sanctified (*Tanchuma, Shemini*).

Aharon reflected upon Moshe's words, and through his silence he acknowledged his agreement. He realized that Nadav and Avihu had

succeeded in reaching an exceptional level of Avodat Hashem. This was clearly evident by Hashem choosing them to sanctify His Name.

Moreover, Aharon did not question the judgment of Hashem. He did not ask why he was not chosen to die in sanctification of Hashem's Name instead of his sons, who had not yet established families.

While pondering this issue, I received a phone call from one of the grandchildren of the tzaddik, Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzeira, zy"a, who was visiting in France at the time. He informed me that his young son, who was only one-and-a-half years old, had suffered a sudden heart attack and was unconscious. He pleaded that I pray for him, and even added that he was prepared to die instead of his son. This is a clear demonstration of the love a father feels toward his son. Despite the love Aharon felt toward his sons, it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "And Aharon fell silent." Therefore, he merited great prominence.

The Outstanding Humility of Moshe and Aharon

> ***"Why did you not eat the sin-offering in the holy place, for it is that which is holy of the highest degree; and He gave it to you to gain forgiveness for them before Hashem? Behold, its blood was not brought into the Sanctuary within; you should have eaten it in the Holy, as I had commanded!"***
>
> **(*Vayikra* 10:17-18)**

These pesukim describe how Moshe Rabbeinu displayed anger at Elazar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aharon. He rebuked them for

not having eaten the sin-offering within the Courtyard of the Mishkan.

Aharon Hakohen did not accept Moshe's reprimand. Aharon responded emphatically (ibid., *Rashi*), as depicted by the words "וידבר אהרן – and Aharon spoke." The term דיבור always denotes force. Moshe Rabbeinu approved of Aharon's explanation and admitted that Aharon was right, as it says (ibid. 10:20), "Moshe heard and he approved."

From this we can perceive the outstanding humility of Moshe Rabbeinu. He did not insist upon enforcing his opinion, but admitted his error and accepted Aharon's argument. This was the uniqueness of Moshe Rabbeinu and the reason that he was chosen to be the leader of Am Yisrael. He merited his position because of his outstanding humility. He never displayed haughtiness, nor attempted to justify his errors, and always admitted when he was at fault.

In this parashah we learn of the greatness of Aharon and Moshe, the ones whom Hashem chose as His messengers. They merited their lofty position because of their outstanding humility. Hashem intentionally chose Moshe and Aharon to be His messengers and to lead His nation, in order that the people would learn the significance of accepting their fellow's opinion willingly in humility.

Tazria

The Woman's Role

"Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be impure"

(*Vayikra* 12:2)

"If she gives birth to a female, she shall be impure for two weeks, as during her menstruation period; and for sixty-six days she shall stay in blood of purity"

(*ibid. vs.* 5)

A woman who gives birth to a son remains spiritually impure for seven days. Afterwards, she observes the laws concerning her *tumah* for another thirty-three days in regard to the Sanctuary. In contrast, if a woman gives birth to a daughter, she remains spiritually impure for two weeks, and is considered impure regarding the Sanctuary for another sixty-six days. Why is there a difference between giving birth to a son and

giving birth to a daughter? Why does a woman retain her *tamei* status for double the time after giving birth to a daughter?

In addition, we need to clarify why women are exempt from learning Torah and performing mitzvot that are bound to a specific time limit (time-bound). The common reason given for their exemption is because women are involved with taking care of their children and running the home. However, this is perplexing because men are also occupied in providing a livelihood for their family. It requires them to chase after jobs and work long hours. Whey then are men commanded to study Torah and perform all its mitzvot without exception?

If one were to speculate that perhaps this is because women simply are incapable of learning Torah, this could be refuted by many examples of women throughout the generations who were outstandingly learned. Devorah, the Judge, was a Torah authority and a prophetess, and Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness, is also quoted for her keen understanding. Michal, the daughter of Shaul Hamelech is included in a list of exceptionally scholarly women, who even donned *tefillin* and would discuss complex issues in Gemara with the leaders of the generation. This would indicate that women do not lack the capacity to delve in Torah.

We may resolve these questions according to what is written regarding Tishah B'Av. On this day it is forbidden to study Torah, since the study of Torah brings joy and on that day the Jewish nation experiences mourning. Similarly, one who is in mourning may not study Torah. There is no joy comparable to that of learning Torah. Once I was in desperate need of funds. When the long awaited call came informing me that the money had materialized, I was very happy. However, I was not overcome with joy. In contrast, when I learned Torah one Shabbat morning, and succeeded in clarifying complex issues, my joy was boundless. This is because the Torah brings bliss and satisfaction to its scholars.

In Pirkei Avot it is written (2:12), "Rabbi Yose says: (a) Let your fellow's money be as dear to you as your own; (b) apply yourself to study Torah, for it is not yours by inheritance; and (c) let all your deeds be for the sake

of Heaven." The Ben Ish Chai explains (*Shanah Rishonah, Tazria, Taharot*) that every person should be careful with his fellow's money and guard it as if it was his own. For example, if one's friend entrusts him with a sum of money in order to make a purchase for him, one must carefully examine the merchandise to ensure that his friend ultimately gets the best deal, just as one would care for his own investments. Thereafter, the Mishnah adds the warning, "Apply yourself to study Torah." What is the connection between the first part of the Mishnah, which discusses guarding one's fellow's money, and its continuation, warning people to study Torah?

The Ben Ish Chai answers that the goal of a businessman is to make profit and ultimately increase his assets. Therefore, he buys merchandise cheaply, in order to sell it later at a higher price for a profit. Likewise, the Torah, which is more valuable than gold and silver, and is preferable to all other merchandise, was given to us from Heaven in order that we engage in its study. It is incumbent upon every Jew to toil in Torah and uncover its wealth of knowledge. Even sefer Vayikra, which is short in comparison to the other volumes, teaches countless important lessons. There is no end to the wealth and depth of knowledge that one gains from Torah.

The Ben Ish Chai adds that the money of one's fellow refers to his Torah, which is compared to money. One's "fellow" refers to Hashem, Whom we generally refer to in second person. This reflects a loving relationship, just as one has with his friends. For example, our most common declaration throughout the day is "Blessed are You, Hashem"… etc. The Mishnah teaches that the Torah of Hashem, which is compared to the money of one's fellow, should be valued as if it were your own. This implies that one should attempt with all his might to gain the most profits from Torah by expounding its words and uncovering new insights.

The Mishnah concludes with the words "for it is not yours by inheritance." This indicates that the Torah is not like an inheritance, which is acquired without investing any effort. It is necessary to toil and labor in Torah to acquire its knowledge. In addition, an inheritance is

generally passed from father to son, and only the heir enjoys the benefits. However, the Torah is not an inheritance for only a single individual. If one merits uncovering a novel insight in Torah, he does not guard it for himself, but transmits it for all generations to come. In this way, the study of Torah flourishes among Am Yisrael. This is indicated by the pasuk (*Devarim* 33:4), "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Jacob." The Torah is an inheritance for all of Am Yisrael and not limited to any individual person. Upon grasping the implications of this Mishnah, I felt a surge of joy, because there is nothing in the world that is able to instill blissful happiness other than Torah.

This introduction helps us understand the following reason for abstaining from studying Torah on Tishah B'Av. The Beit Hamikdash was destroyed due to lack of Torah study, and therefore Am Yisrael is obligated to correct this fault. Then, why would Hashem prohibit Torah learning on this day? This can be compared to a person who owns an expensive, fancy car, which is the only one of its kind in the entire world. One day the owner has an accident and his car is severely damaged. To everyone's astonishment, instead of taking his car to a mechanic for repairs, he abandons it. Such conduct defies all logic.

Am Yisrael is aware that their desertion of Torah caused the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Therefore, they have a strong desire to engage in the study of Torah specifically on Tishah B'Av, in order to correct their sin. Hashem, Who recognizes their longing and aspirations for Torah precisely on Tishah B'Av, prevents them from learning. This magnifies their guilty conscience and makes them feel even worse about the lack of Torah study, ultimately leading to renewed dedication toward it.

The challenges that Bnei Yisrael face in studying Torah do not end at the conclusion of Tishah B'Av. The next morning, the *Bein Hazmanim* vacation begins. It is a period when Torah study is generally diminished and the temptations for amusements and vanities are heightened, which increase *bitul Torah*. In this way, Am Yisrael loses out on all fronts and suffers greatly. Not only are they denied learning Torah on Tishah B'Av

because of Hashem's decree, but even in the period following, the *Yetzer Hara* prevents them from learning with appropriate zest.

Therefore, each person should make an effort to overcome the difficult challenges facing them during *bein hazmanim*. One should steadfastly establish fixed times for learning every day. In this way, he will be saved from the severe transgression of abandoning Torah studies during vacation, in addition to losing out in its study on Tishah B'Av.

After having expounded on the essence of Tishah B'Av, we can return to our earlier question. Why are women exempt from Torah study? This can be explained in the following way. Hashem originally created man with his wife attached to his opposite side (*Berachot* 61a). Man was not aware that he was composed of two bodies. Only after Hashem decided that it was not good for man to be alone did He separate the woman from the man and brought her before him. Hashem originally created them as one entity and only afterwards separated the woman from the man. This is because if Adam and Chava would have been created as two separate people on the same day, an ongoing feud would have begun regarding their status; which of them is more important than the other? Since Hashem wanted the man to be superior and dominate the woman, He created them attached, and only thereafter separated the woman from the man.

In fact, we see that this process in the creation of Adam and Chava during the six days of Creation has influenced all generations to come, up until our current generation. It is the husband who is *mekadesh* his wife; a woman is not *mekadesh* her husband (*Kiddushin* 4b). Likewise, it is the man who searches for his wife and not the woman who searches for her husband (ibid. 2b). This does not imply that the husband should be controlling or overbearing toward his wife. On the contrary, he must consider her judgment and attempt to fulfill her will. However, in order to maintain order in the world, the man heads the family since "two kings cannot rule simultaneously" (*Chulin* 60b).

When Adam and Chava were created, Hashem placed them in Gan Eden and commanded them not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. They were given only one mitzvah. However this mitzvah contained all 613 mitzvot within it. Chava violated this single mitzvah and also persuaded her husband to join her in her sin. Therefore, Hashem punished her measure for measure. Since she had caused her husband to sin by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which encapsulated all the mitzvot, Hashem denied her the assignment to study Torah and perform mitzvot that are time-bound.

Ultimately, the woman received a double punishment. She longs to delve in the study of Torah and fulfill all its mitzvot. She especially desires to increase Torah study and performance of mitzvot in order to atone for both her transgression and for persuading her husband to violate the single mitzvah that they were granted, which contained within it all 613 mitzvot. However, Hashem denied her the assignment to study Torah. This was in order to increase her grief and sorrow regarding both her transgression and her husband's transgression, for which she was to blame.

She can correct her misdeed by encouraging her husband to learn Torah, which would be for her sake as well. This is similar to the issue discussed in abstaining from studying Torah on Tishah B'Av. Hashem denies Am Yisrael the privilege of learning Torah, despite their longing to correct their fault of laxity in Torah. In this way, their grief is intensified. This is ultimately for their benefit, since suffering serves as atonement.

At the time of *techiyat hameitim*, all men who learned Torah while in this world will be resurrected in order to continue studying Torah with our holy forefathers. Then, the study of Torah will be pleasant and enjoyable, without the distractions of the *Yetzer Hara*. This is because in the future, Hashem will slaughter the *Yetzer Hara* and will entirely remove its evil influence from the world (*Sukkah* 52a). But what will become of the women? They are not assigned the task of studying Torah. How will they merit being resurrected?

Chazal (*Berachot* 17a) teach, "In what merit will women be resurrected? In the merit of waiting for their husbands and sons to return from Torah study, and escorting them to go learn Torah." This implies that the merit of women is dependent on their conduct of encouraging their husbands to learn Torah, freeing them to learn diligently while they take care of the children and household. In addition, women merit resurrection for encouraging their children to continue in the path of their forefathers.

There are many examples of great Torah scholars who achieved lofty positions in the merit of their wives and mothers. Rachel, the wife of Rabbi Akiva, sent her husband to learn Torah for twelve years. Upon his return, he overheard his wife telling her neighbor that she would be glad if her husband would continue learning for another twelve years. When he heard her wish, he did not even enter his house to greet her, but instead turned on his heels and went back to study for an additional twelve years. On the day that Rabbi Akiva returned, after twenty-four years, he was escorted by twenty-four thousand students. Rachel came out to welcome him and fell before his feet. The students tried to remove her from his path, but Rabbi Akiva stopped them and declared, "Mine and yours is all hers" (*Ketubot* 63a). Thus we see that the merit of Rabbi Akiva's and his students' Torah is referred to one woman, Rachel. Surely, at the time of *techiyat hameitim* she will rise in this merit.

In parashat *Yitro* (*Shemot* 19:3), Hashem commands Moshe, "So shall you say to the House of Jacob and tell to the Sons of Israel." The House of Jacob refers to the women. The softer term, "say" regarding the women, as opposed to the harsher word "tell" regarding the men, indicates that Moshe should persuade the women in a convincing manner to accept upon themselves the responsibility of encouraging their husbands to study Torah and educating their sons in Torah and mitzvot. Although they were not assigned the task of learning Torah, as a punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the Torah of the men is ultimately dependent upon the women. Therefore, it was necessary to command them separately regarding their role. Similarly, Shlomo Hamelech says (*Mishlei* 14:1), "The wise among women, each builds her

house." This implies that since the woman fortifies her home by encouraging her husband and sons to learn Torah, she creates a spiritual home in this world, and in the future, she will merit rising during *techiyat hameitim*.

Let us return to our original questions. Perhaps we can explain as follows the reason why the *tumah* of a woman who has given birth to a son is seven days, plus another thirty-three days concerning the Sanctuary. The number thirty-three is the numerical value of the word גל, which is a term that denotes גילה (joy). This implies that after the birth of a son, great joy prevails, since this child will study Torah his entire life. On the other hand, this joy is mingled with sorrow, since the woman issues blood while in her *niddah* state. The word דם (blood) has the numerical value of forty-four, and including one for the word itself, it equals the word אדם (man). Every time the woman has a *niddah* status, she is reminded of her original sin, and in addition, of seducing man to sin by eating of the forbidden fruit. Consequently, she caused his blood to be spilled by bringing death to mankind. The joy mingled with sorrow reflects both the joy of bringing a new *neshamah* down to this world, who will learn Torah and continue the chain of life despite the existence of death, and the sorrow of the sin of Chava.

When a woman gives birth to a daughter, she remains in a state of *tumah* for double the time, since the anguish over the sin of Chava is heightened, and the female born is a reminder that woman caused man to sin. The longer period of time for her *niddah* status also underscores the double obligation that rests upon the woman's shoulders. She is both obligated to encourage her husband and sons to study Torah, and also to educate her daughter from birth regarding her mission in life. Shlomo Hamelech listed all the virtues of the Woman of Valor (*Mishlei* 31:10), but did not mention the virtues of a man. This is because the success and status of a man is dependent upon his wife. The *gaon*, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, the student of the Vilna Gaon, said that he attained all his greatness in the merit of his mother's dedication for the sake of his Torah study.

Another example of this is the following. When a Kohen Gadol's wife died, he quickly married another woman before Yom Kippur. This is because a Kohen Gadol is forbidden to remain unmarried. The value of a wife is remarkable, to the extent that it says (*Vayikra* 16:6) that the Kohen Gadol should "atone for himself and for his household." His household refers to his wife, since the wife is the essence of the home. First the Kohen Gadol sacrificed a *korban* to atone for his sins and for the sins of his wife, and only afterwards did he sacrifice a *korban* to atone for Am Yisrael. Usually, the majority takes precedence over the individual. However, in this case, the wife of the Kohen Gadol precedes all others, which testifies to the importance of the woman.

In Summary

- Why is the period of impurity after the birth of a daughter double the period of impurity after the birth of a son? In addition, why are women exempt from learning Torah and performing specific mitzvot? After all, the men are also busy earning a livelihood.
- Likewise, why is it prohibited to learn Torah on Tishah B'Av? It would seem appropriate that specifically the sin for which the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed should be corrected on this day. The reason is that although Bnei Yisrael longs to learn Torah even more diligently on this day, Hashem prohibits it in order to intensify their grief over their sin. Consequently, they achieve atonement.
- The woman caused man to sin by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. This one mitzvah that they had been given represented all 613 mitzvot. Therefore, she strongly desires to correct her failing and to engage in the study of Torah. However, by denying her the role of studying Torah, her anguish is intensified. Consequently, according to Chazal, the suffering serves as atonement. This is similar to the reason for men being prohibited to learn Torah on Tishah B'Av.
- The period of impurity after the birth of a daughter is double that of a son because it hints to the woman's double obligation. She must both be concerned with the Torah study of her husband and sons, and also educate

her daughters in their mission in life. Likewise, the birth of a female is a reminder that the woman caused man to sin. Therefore, she undergoes a prolonged state of impurity.

- In the future, women will rise during *techiyat hameitim* in the merit of encouraging their husbands to study Torah and sending their sons to learn Torah.

The Essence of Tumah After Birth

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be impure. On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. For thirty-three days she shall stay in blood of purity… If she gives birth to a female, she shall be impure for two weeks, as during her menstruation period; and for sixty-six days she shall stay in blood of purity"

(*Vayikra* 12: 1-5)

This parashah begins by defining the period of impurity of a woman after giving birth to a son or daughter. It also mentions the *korban* that she is obligated to offer in the Sanctuary after she concludes her period of *tumah* and is purified. There is a significant difference in the length of the period of impurity following the birth of a boy, which is for seven days

and another thirty-three days of *tumah* in regard to the Sanctuary, than after the birth of a girl, when the woman remains spiritually impure for two weeks and another sixty-six days of being impure only in regard to the Sanctuary.

Why does the Torah differentiate between the length of the *tumah* state following the birth of a male and a female? Why does the impure state last double the time after the birth of a girl? In addition, why only for a boy is there a celebration after his birth, of *brit milah*? Regarding girls, there is no special mitzvah performed upon her birth. This seems to favor the birth of a male, which everyone celebrates with great joy, when he enters the covenant of Avraham Avinu.

Let us answer this last question first. When Hashem created man, He blew life into him, instilling a *neshamah* within his body. Thereafter, Hashem placed him into a deep sleep, and He took one of his ribs, with which He fashioned Chava, his wife. Why did Hashem not create them both simultaneously? Hashem, in His great wisdom, knew that in order for the couple to coexist in peaceful harmony, it was important that the male should be dominant. When the woman relates to her husband with awe and respect because of his precedence to her in Creation, it creates a harmonious rapport between them. She respects him and values his opinions; thus, peace reigns in their home.

Chazal (*Niddah* 45b) say that the woman merited receiving supplementary insight, more than the man. It seems that this is a compensation for the superiority that man was given over woman. Despite turning toward the man for leadership, there are certain matters in which the woman was given dominion over him. Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 59a) say that in issues regarding the home, one should accept the woman's decisions. It is customary to give women many gifts, because it is the nature of a woman to adorn herself and buy a large selection of clothing. This is because a woman has an inherent inclination for beauty. In contrast, men are satisfied with only the basic articles of clothing and do not feel the need to frequently change their wardrobes. Thus we see that women were granted specific things that correspond to her nature,

as opposed to the male's mitzvah of *brit milah*, which is designed for his needs.

Regarding the first question of why there is a longer period of impurity following the birth of a girl than for a boy, we can explain as follows. When Hashem created Adam and Chava and placed them in Gan Eden, He instructed them that they could enjoy all the fruits available, however, they were forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Hashem warned that if they were to eat from the Forbidden Tree, they would die. Since the woman persuaded man to eat from the Forbidden Tree, she caused his death and diminished his stature. Likewise, the entire Creation lost its original status after the sin, and the destructive forces were given permission to wreak havoc.

Before the sin of eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the *Yetzer Hara* did not exist. Therefore, the world did not require the Torah, which is an antidote to the *Yetzer Hara* (*Kiddushin* 30b). Similarly, the mitzvah of *brit milah* was given to Avraham Avinu and not to Adam Harishon. This is because Adam was born circumcised. Also, prior to the sin, since the *Yetzer Hara* did not exist, the mitzvah of *brit milah* was not necessary. *Brit milah* protects a person from the persuasions of the *Yetzer Hara*. This is because the act of the *brit* diminishes a person's obsession with materialism and lessens his attachment to the physical.

During the times of Avraham Avinu, the *Yetzer Hara* already existed. Therefore, the world required *brit milah*, which has the potential to diminish the lust of the *Yetzer*. This mitzvah assists man in his battle to overcome his *Yetzer Hara*. It was because of the woman that *tumah* was introduced into the world, and likewise, the existence of the Satan and the *Yetzer Hara*. Had Chava not caused her husband to sin, the world would not have required extensive protection against the *Yetzer Hara*. Since the woman is the one who brought devastation, she carries its responsibility on her shoulders. As punishment, the *tumah* following the birth of a daughter is longer, and even double, than after the birth of a son.

In addition, it seems that the man was commanded to learn Torah after the sin of the Tree of Knowledge in order to repair the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* that were flawed. The Torah that is learned while in a state of *tumah* and *keri* cannot be compared to the Torah learned in a state of purity. Therefore, a woman becomes *tahor* more quickly following the birth of a son. In this way, the male, who is nourished by his mother, will be affected for a shorter time by her impurity, in order that it should not decrease the quality of his learning. In contrast, the female was not commanded to learn Torah. Therefore, she is not affected by nursing from her mother while she is in a state of *tumah*, even for an extended period of time.

After the birth of a son, the woman remains spiritually impure for seven days. On the eighth day, a *brit milah* is celebrated with great joy. The seven days of *tumah* signify the seventy years allotted for a person to live. Each additional year is considered a supplementary gift from Heaven. This is alluded to in the eighth day following the seven days of *tumah*. The eighth day denotes the supernatural. There is an important lesson for man to learn from this. If he wishes to live his seventy years in *kedushah* and purity and thereby merit the "eighth day," signifying longevity, which is above nature as referred to by the number eight (*Maharal, Chiddushei Agaddot, Nedarim* 31b), he should make sure to have a *brit milah*. The removal of the *orlah* symbolizes refraining from immorality, which inhibits his Avodat Hashem. When a person does remove his *orlah* on the eighth day and is careful to distance himself from immorality all his life, he merits Hashem lengthening his days and granting him a good life.

The number of primary days of *tumah* for a woman following the birth of a child is seven days for the male and fourteen days for the female. This totals twenty-one, which corresponds to the numerical value of Hashem's Name א-ה-י-ה.

According to Kabbalah every Name of Hashem expresses a specific creation, for which the Name was called. For example, the Name ש-ד-י was given when Hashem concluded the Creation of the world and

proclaimed די (enough). But the Name א-ה-י-ה is the primary Name of Hashem, which expresses the perpetual existence of Hashem in the world. Before Hashem fashioned the Creation, only this Name existed in the world, since nothing else besides His reality existed. As Hashem created each successive creation, another Name of Hashem was specified corresponding to the new formation.

In the Kabbalistic sefarim (*Tanya, Iggeret Hateshuvah* 84; *Emunat Moshe* [Alexander] *Tazria* 6) it says that Hashem blew a spirit of life into man and infused him with the Name י-ה-ו-ה, denoting existence. Therefore, the essence of a Jew is an actual existence. Since an actual existence cannot be obliterated, the Jewish nation is eternal. Although they are persecuted, they succeed in flourishing. When Adam and Chava sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, they blemished their pure essence and brought *tumah* to the world. In order to remove this *tumah* and perfect the flaw caused in the Name of Hashem denoting actual existence, from which the Jewish *neshamot* were fashioned, Hashem brought the Torah to the world. By learning Torah, which is the ultimate remedy, the Name of Hashem is repaired.

Similarly, the sum of the primary days of *tumah* of a woman after the birth of a son and daughter equals twenty-one, which corresponds to the numerical value of the Name of Hashem א-ה-י-ה. Since this is the primary Name of Hashem, as a result of the woman's misery throughout her days of *niddah*, she also repairs the flaw in the Name י-ה-ו-ה caused by persuading her husband to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

The woman remains in her blood of purity after the birth of a son for thirty-three days, and after the birth of a daughter, for sixty-six days. The sum of these numbers is ninety-nine. After adding one (following the rule of *gematria* termed *kollel*), it amounts to one hundred. The number one hundred corresponds to the one hundred blessings David Hamelech ordained that we say each day (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21), based on the exhortation (*Devarim* 10:12) "What does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you but to fear Hashem." We are taught (*Ri"f, Berachot* 44b) that the word מה (what) can be interpreted as מאה (one hundred), since the one hundred

blessings said each day have the potential to instill fear of Heaven and bring man close to Hashem.

The sin of Adam and Chava created a distance between man and Hashem. This distance has affected, and continues to affect all generations to come. In order to draw close to Hashem once more, we have to say one hundred blessings each day, since they have the potential of intensifying one's *yirat Shamayim*. The one hundred blessings correspond to the ten *sefirot*, since each *sefirah* is composed of another ten *sefirot*, which totals the sum of one hundred (*Likutim, Lech Lecha* 13). Therefore, each blessing that a person utters brings him closer to Hashem through another *sefirah*. In this way, the sin of Adam Harishon is corrected through his offsprings' blessings.

The woman counts the days while in the blood of purity, which correspond to the one hundred blessings and the one hundred *sefirot*, as atonement for her sin. This is because as a result of her sin, she created a distance between man and Hashem. By counting the days of her purity, she contributes toward repairing the connection that had once existed between man and Hashem prior to her sin.

In Summary

- Why is the period of *tumah* following the birth of a daughter double the period of impurity following the birth of a son? In addition, why is only a son given a *brit milah*, whereas after the birth of a daughter there is no special mitzvah? This seems to favor male offspring.
- The answer to the second question is that the son requires the mitzvah of *brit milah*, which has the potential to protect him from the immoral influence of the *Yetzer Hara* all his life. Women were granted other things that correspond to their needs. For example, the woman decides on issues regarding the home, and she is lavished with many gifts to suit her nature.
- The explanation for the first question is the following. The woman instigated the sin of eating from the Forbidden Tree. This caused a flaw in Creation, bringing *tumah* to the world. Therefore, *brit milah* became

necessary in order to diminish the passion for immorality. Since the responsibility of the devastation rests upon the shoulders of women, as punishment for this, the *tumah* following the birth of a female is double the time than after a male.

- Following the sin, Am Yisrael were commanded to learn Torah in order to repair the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* that were flawed as its result. The man is commanded to learn Torah, whereas the woman is exempt. The Torah that is learned while in a state of *tumah* and *keri* cannot be compared to the Torah learned in a state of purity. Therefore, a woman becomes pure more quickly following the birth of a son. In this way, the male, who is nourished by his mother, will be affected for a shorter time by her impurity, in order that it should not decrease the quality of his learning. This does not apply to a female, who is not required to learn Torah.

- The combined sum of days of the woman's primary *tumah* after the birth of both a son and daughter has the same numerical value as Hashem's Name א-ה-י-ה. This Name is Hashem's primary Name, from which all other Names were derived. Adam Harishon was created through this Name. However, when he sinned by eating from the Forbidden Tree, he flawed this special Name. The suffering of the woman during her days of *niddah* atone for and correct the flaw in the Name א-ה-י-ה, which the woman caused by persuading man to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

- The sum of days in which a woman remains in her blood of impurity after the births of both a son and daughter equals one hundred. This corresponds to the one hundred blessings said each day, which have the potential to reinforce one's *yirat Shamayim*. Likewise, the one hundred blessings correspond to the ten *sefirot*, since each *sefirah* is composed of another ten *sefirot*, which totals one hundred. By counting the days of her purity, she contributes toward repairing the connection that had once existed between man and Hashem prior to her sin.

Planting the Seeds for Growth in Torah

"Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be impure"

(*Vayikra* 12:6)

Why does the Torah divide parashat *Tazria* and parashat *Metzora* into two parshiyot? Both parshiyot discuss the laws of the *metzora*. Parashat *Tazria* discusses how *tzara'at* affects one's home, clothing, body, and house. Parashat *Metzora* describes the purification process of the *metzora* and the *korbanot* that he brings to atone for his sin. In fact, during most years, besides for leap years, the parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora* are combined, because they discuss the same subject. Therefore, why are the parshiyot divided and given two different titles?

The first letters of the names of the parshiyot **תזריע מצורע** spell the word **מת** (dead). This word is included in the phrase **עיתים לתורה** (set times to learn Torah), since one should be "dead to the world" while learning. Chazal (*Shabbat* 83b) say regarding the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 19:14) "This is the teaching regarding a man if he will die in a tent" that "the Torah does not endure unless one is willing to die for it." When the set time arrives for learning Torah, one should disconnect from the vanities of this world and withdraw from all his business matters, in order to sit and study with intense concentration.

I know a Jew from Mexico, who strictly adhered to his fixed time for learning Torah in his office building. One day there was a major earthquake that toppled all the buildings of the factory where he worked. However, his building remained standing. This was in the merit of his studying Torah there consistently.

The first subject discussed in parashat *Tazria* can be explained as referring to Torah study. It says (*Vayikra* 12:2), "אשה כי תזריע זרע וילדה זכר – When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male." Literally this can be translated as "When a woman plants seeds and gives birth to a son." This hints that when one learns Torah and merits coming up with novel insights, as expressed by the term "planting seeds," other people will be able to expound on his novel thought and produce new insights, referred to as "giving birth to a male." This is compared to one who plants a small seed in the ground, which ultimately sprouts into a large tree with many branches. There are countless theories that were born from the novel insights of Rashi and the Rambam. Sometimes, from an idea expressed by a small child, one can be inspired and reveal new hidden depth. This has happened to me many times. I have built entire lessons upon novel ideas that I heard from my young sons.

There is an additional lesson to learn from this pasuk. One should raise his son to study Torah and "plant" spiritual seeds.

The first word in the pasuk, "אשה – woman," alludes to a person who aspires to be attached to Hashem, similar to a woman who aspires for her husband and wants him to take authority over her. The Torah is also referred to as a "woman" because we are, so to speak, married to the Torah. The person who dedicates himself to studying Torah merits planting seeds of novel insights, which can be expressed as giving birth to sons, in the male term (וילדה זכר), and also daughters, in the female term, because the word Torah (תורה) is in the female gender.

In this vein, perhaps we can suggest that the parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora* are separated to stress the importance of Torah. Parashat *Tazria* is called by this specific name to hint at the first issue mentioned, which is to plant seeds in Torah and raise sons to learn Torah. It also hints at the importance of establishing fixed times to study Torah.

These concepts are the foundation for the following lessons of the parashah, which deal with the issue of *tzara'at* striking those who speak *lashon hara*. *Lashon hara* and idle chatter are the complete opposite of

"planting seeds" of Torah. Therefore, the Torah teaches that one must strictly adhere to his fixed times for learning Torah and train his children to "plant seeds" of Torah, by producing their own novel insights. In this way they will distance themselves from *lashon hara*, which results from idle chatter, when a person is not engaged in Torah. Consequently, learning Torah diligently prevents a person from contacting *tzara'at*.

Along these lines, we can explain the juxtaposition of parashat *Shemini* to parashat *Tazria* and *Metzora*. The word שמיני contains the root word נשמה (soul). In addition, the number eight (שמונה) denotes the supernatural, referring to the World to Come. This teaches us that one who aspires for his *neshamah* to enter the World to Come, must set fixed times for learning Torah, sacrificing his life for it, and thereby plant seeds of Torah thoughts.

An example of the converse is Shelomit bat Divri. Chazal (*Rashi, Vayikra* 24:11) say that her name "Divri" alludes to her talkative nature. She most probably caused a lot of men to sin on her account. As a punishment, measure for measure, she was ultimately defiled by an Egyptian. She bequeathed her talkative nature to her son, teaching him to waste time in idle chatter instead of discussing Torah and planting seeds of new ideas. In the end, her son followed in her ways and ultimately cursed Hashem's Name. He was punished by stoning. When one does not sanctify his speech through studying Torah, he eventually engages in idle chatter and speaks *lashon hara*. He may even end up cursing Hashem's Name, *rachmana litzlan*.

Another example of this is the account of Miriam the Prophetess. She expressed to her brother, Aharon, her disagreement about Moshe Rabbeinu's divorce. She had noble intentions because she wanted to benefit her sister-in-law, Tzipporah, by convincing Moshe to return to his wife. Moshe had separated from her after ascending to Heaven to receive the Torah, because of his exceptional mission, which required a constant state of *kedushah*. Despite Miriam's good will, she was punished with *tzara'at* for seven days (*Avot d'Rabbeinu Natan* 9:2) because her words

were unnecessary. Superfluous speech does not have a good end. It is only words pertaining to Torah that endure forever.

Regarding this, it says (*Bamidbar* 30:3), "He shall not profane his word." This implies that a Torah scholar should not indulge in idle chatter. Every word that a Torah scholar is required to speak is not considered ordinary speech. Chazal (*Sukkah* 21b) say that even the simple words of a Torah scholar must be analyzed because there is a lot to be learned from whatever they say.

One who dedicates himself entirely to learning Torah, sacrificing himself for it, ultimately merits extraordinary Divine assistance. The Rishon L'Tzion, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, shlita, eulogized the late *gaon* Rabbi Nissim Rebibo. He related a story about an outstanding *gaon* in Torah, Rabbi Eliezer Dawilla, ztk"l, who lived during the previous generation in Morocco. He once came across a complex issue discussed in a sefer of the Maharsha, and he agonized over its meaning. He could not sleep because of his great distress in not succeeding to understand the point. He continued to ponder the issue throughout the entire night. Suddenly, a man entered the Beit Hamidrash and asked him why he was so troubled. Rabbi Eliezer confessed that he did not understand the issue discussed by the Maharsha and it was giving him no rest. The man began to discuss the matter with him at length, until the entire issue was clarified. Upon completing his mission, the man disappeared. This is what the Rishon L'Tzion recounted while eulogizing Rabbi Nissim. He wanted to illustrate the Divine assistance one receives when toiling in the study of Torah.

After he finished his eulogy, a relative of Rabbi Nissim, I refer to him as Rav Kakon because I believe that is his name, approached Rabbi Shlomo Amar and informed him that he had merited teaching Rabbi Nissim when he was still young. He related that when Rabbi Nissim was learning in the Yeshiva of Sunderland, he once encountered a complex issue while studying the sefer of the Maharsha. His confusion gave him no rest and he labored to clarify the matter throughout the night. Before daybreak, a man entered the Beit Hamidrash, which was not very unusual because many *meshulachim* and other guests would drop in to the Beit Hamidrash

at all hours. The man sat down to learn with Rabbi Nissim, and in the course of their discussion he clarified the entire issue that had been so elusive. Rabbi Nissim was amazed by the brilliant explanation and was about to ask the man his name, but all of a sudden he disappeared. Rabbi Nissim had confided the details of the miraculous encounter to Rav Kakon, but requested that he should not publicize it during his lifetime. From this we see similar series of events occurring to people living generations apart. This is because whoever toils in the study of Torah, sacrificing himself in it, ultimately merits extraordinary Divine assistance.

Once, I had to give a *shiur* on Shabbat in our yeshiva in Lyon. I encountered a perplexing matter in parashat *Shemini*, which, try as I might, I could not resolve. This issue was meant to be the foundation for my entire lesson, and I labored endlessly to shed light on the matter, but to no avail. I was greatly pained by my inability to resolve the difficulty. I was able to come up with all sorts of theories, but none of them were satisfying. I prayed to Hashem that He should enlighten me. Suddenly, as if being propelled forward, I stood up and walked toward the bookcase. I was guided by Heaven to the shelf with the sefer *Kedushat Levi* that the holy Rabbi of Berdichev wrote, and I withdrew it. Why was I drawn to this particular sefer? Precisely one week prior to this episode, I read in the sefer of the Ba'al Hatanya about the greatness of Rabbi Levi of Berdichev. Whereas the sefer, *Noam Elimelech*, is extremely difficult to comprehend, and even great scholars have a hard time grasping its meaning, the sefer of Rabbi Levi of Berdichev was written in a way that everyone is able to absorb its lessons.

I opened the sefer to parashat *Shemini*, but did not see anything relevant to the subject I was learning. I flipped through the sefer, and to my surprise, it opened to the section expounding on Shir Hashirim. My eyes fell on an interesting concept, which the author had heard in the name of the Maggid of Mezeritch, and was originally taught by the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Arizal. This idea resolved my questions wonderfully, and I have already expounded on it, filling pages of novel insights. My joy increased upon meriting uncovering new Torah thoughts.

In Summary

- Why are the parshiyot *Tazria* and *Metzorah* written as two separate parshiyot? After all, they both deal with the same primary subject of the *metzora*.
- The first letters of **תזריע** and **מצורע** spell the word **מת** (death). This hints to setting fixed times for learning Torah and sacrificing oneself to this end. This can be accomplished by disconnecting totally from all earthly matters, as a dead person, while learning.
- It says, "אשה כי תזריע." One who strives to be attached to Hashem has to fight to succeed. The person who dedicates himself to Torah merits planting seeds of novel insights. One should raise his sons to grow seeds of Torah.
- Since Shelomit bat Divri raised her son by her personal example of engaging in idle chatter, she caused him to ultimately curse Hashem's Name. In the end, he was stoned for his crime.
- Miriam's sin in discussing her brother Moshe was that she had engaged in unnecessary speech.
- There is a story told about Rabbi Eliezer Dawilla, and similarly about Rabbi Nissim Rebibo. When they were distressed by their inability to comprehend the words of the Maharsha, they were miraculously granted clarification from Heaven. Whoever toils in the study of Torah, sacrificing himself in it, ultimately merits extraordinary Divine assistance.

The Connection to Pesach

"Upon the completion of the days of her purity for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring a sheep within its first year for an olah-offering, and a young dove or a turtledove for a sin-offering, to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, to the Kohen"

(*Vayikra* 12:6)

The Torah teaches that a woman who gave birth to either a son or a daughter, is required to bring a sin-offering upon concluding her days of *niddah*. The sin-offering is generally brought in order to arouse mercy for the sinner and to atone for his transgression. Why should a woman need to bring a sin-offering after giving birth? Which sin needs atonement? The commentaries explain (*Niddah* 31b) that when a woman is about to give birth, and her labor pains intensify, she sometimes feels a surge of anger toward her husband for causing her to get pregnant and suffer the excruciating pains of childbirth. As a result of her pain and anger, she inwardly vows never to yearn for her husband again.

This anger that the woman feels against her husband disappears the moment that the baby emerges. When the woman holds her baby in her arms, she immediately forgets her previous anger and the promise that she made. A surge of joy engulfs her. This sensation is heightened when a woman gives birth to her first child after many years of childlessness. Despite the pain at the moment of birth, after the baby is born, the woman even blesses her husband for assisting her in ultimately meriting to have a child.

However, because of the resentment that the woman felt toward her husband and her promise never to yearn for her husband again, the Torah commands her to bring a sin-offering, in order to annul her vow and remove her sin. Although her irritation was temporary, and after the

birth vanished completely, being replaced by immense joy, she is obligated to bring a sin-offering. This is because the anger that she harbored in her heart against her husband is considered a sin. Moreover, if she also vowed never to yearn for her husband, her obligation to seek atonement is even greater.

However, this explanation requires clarification. It is clear that the anger of the woman against her husband during childbirth does not express true hatred. Very soon after birth, it passes. Why is the Torah so exacting with the woman, commanding her to bring a sin-offering? There are many people who occasionally get angry at others, e.g., their friends, family members, and children. Do we bring a sacrifice after feeling anger toward any other person?

We can clarify this point by explaining the dynamics of the *korban* Pesach. The *korban* Pesach is in memory of the sheep that served as the idol of the Egyptians. Am Yisrael tied the sheep to the foot of their beds for four days. Thereafter, they roasted it and ate its flesh in collective groups. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to slaughter the idol of the Egyptians in order to eradicate the abomination of the Egyptians from within them. Since from this point on they were obligated to cleave to Hashem alone, they had to remove any trace of the Egyptian belief by slaughtering their idol, which was the sheep (*Moreh Nevuchim* III, 46).

During the four days that the lamb was tied to the bed, the Egyptians monitored Bnei Yisrael's activity and threatened to kill them. However, Hashem did not allow them to carry out their threats. Chazal say (*Tur, Orach Chaim* 430; *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 5:17 (55); *Shemot Rabbah* 16:3) that the Egyptians were so infuriated at Bnei Yisrael that they gnashed their teeth in fury until their teeth became blackened. Afterwards, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to slaughter the *korban* and smear its blood on the door posts in order to distinguish their homes as being Jewish, so that Hashem would skip over them during the plague of the firstborn. In addition, Bnei Yisrael roasted the idol of the Egyptians. The smoke and pungent smell of the *korban* permeated the entire land of Egypt, increasing the Egyptians' rage. Aside from serving to punish the Egyptians

by having them witness their idol being slaughtered and eaten by Bnei Yisrael (*Eitz Hada'at Tov, Mas'ei*), it also served to uproot the notion of idolatry from the hearts of Bnei Yisrael.

The *korban* Pesach is exclusive in its requirement to be eaten in collective groups. Many times, a number of families would join together to share in the *korban*, since the entire *korban* had to be consumed, and leaving over a part of the *korban* until the morning was forbidden. Hashem intentionally commanded that nothing should be left over in order to bring families together. The union necessary in consuming the entire *korban* Pesach before daybreak drew people closer to each other, uniting them. This reflects one of the main points of Pesach: unity. In fact, Am Yisrael only merited being redeemed from Egypt in order to accept the Torah. However, they were worthy of receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai only after they camped by the mountain as "one man with one heart" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:9) and proclaimed: "We will do and we will obey." This indicates that the condition for receiving the Torah is unity. In order for the Torah to legitimately belong to Am Yisrael, they must be attached to each other with love. The medium for bringing Am Yisrael to experience unity and friendship is the *korban* Pesach. We, too, proclaim on the Seder Night, as written in the Haggadah, "Anyone who is hungry should come and eat with us, anyone who is needy should come and join us in [our *korban*] Pesach."

The *korban* Pesach is specifically termed a קורבן (*korban*) because the word קרבן (sacrifice) has the same root word as הקרבה (drawing close). This implies that in order to be unified with others, a person must sacrifice himself for his fellow. Only when a person waives his personal ambitions and concentrates on the needs of his fellow people is he able to achieve true unity. Thus, close friendship and mutual alliance is considered a *korban*. Therefore, the *korban* Pesach, which is eaten in unity, is termed specifically a "*korban*," rather than a Pesach "meal."

Just as the purpose of the *korban* Pesach is to unify Bnei Yisrael with each other and with Hashem, likewise the purpose of marriage is to increase love and unity between the couple. When a woman suffers birth

pains, she experiences the most agonizing pain imaginable. In those difficult moments, the woman becomes angry with her husband and distances herself from him in her mind. This loathing contradicts the entire purpose of marriage, which is harmony and unity between husband and wife. Although after the baby emerges, the woman is filled with happiness, blessing her husband for enabling her to have a child, the impression of the initial anger against her husband still lingers in the recesses of her heart. It leaves a mark, like a stain on freshly laundered clothing.

Just as one cannot compare a perfectly clean dress to a dress that is stained, likewise, the anger that the woman experiences blemishes the harmony between her and her husband. Therefore she is obligated to bring a sin-offering in order to remove it. Many years ago, I witnessed a man throwing a sefer at his friend in the Beit Hakeneset. Although many years have passed since then, and they reconciled their differences, people still recall this episode and comment, "In this spot a man once threw a sefer at his friend." Even though the anger passed and peace was achieved, the impression of the initial anger is extremely difficult to remove.

Parashat *Tazria* is read around the time of Pesach. This signifies the connection between the first issue discussed in this parashah, which is the sin-offering that the woman brings after birth, and the *korban* Pesach that Am Yisrael were commanded to sacrifice on Pesach. Just as the purpose of the *korban* Pesach is to increase love and unity among Bnei Yisrael, likewise, the purpose of the sin-offering brought by the mother of the newborn is meant to reinforce the harmony between her and her husband. It is supposed to remove any impression or "stain" left of the anger experienced in the throes of childbirth.

We may wonder why parashat *Tazria* is called by this name, since only the first part of the parashah discusses a woman who gives birth. The main part of the parashah deals with the issue of the *metzora*. The fact that the parashah is titled specifically *Tazria* and is contiguous to parashat *Metzora* hints to the essential connection between the two

parshiyot. Commentaries explain that when a woman experiences birth pains, she may get angry with her husband and even speak disrespectfully about him, accusing him that her suffering is his fault. The Torah wants to teach us how severe it is to speak *lashon hara*, for which one is stricken with *tzara'at*. If a woman who spoke against her husband with no evil intentions, but only as a result of her intense labor pains, is obligated to sacrifice a sin-offering, how much more obligated is a person who willfully speaks negatively about his fellow. His transgression is all the more severe. Therefore, he is stricken with *tzara'at* in order to atone for his sin.

However, only this woman is obligated to sacrifice a sin-offering. This is because a husband and wife are actually one unit, and therefore the Name י-ה, signifying the *Shechinah*, rests between them (*Sotah* 17a). When the woman speaks against her husband, she causes the *Shechinah* to depart. Thus, she is obligated to sacrifice a sin-offering.

These parshiyot are read close to Pesach, since the word פסח is a derivative of the words פה שח (a mouth that speaks). The Torah teaches us to be careful to sanctify our speech during Pesach by recounting the miracles of the Exodus. In this way, peace and harmony will reign, since we will not come to speak *lashon hara*, whose iniquity is too great to bear.

In Summary

- It is perplexing why a woman must bring a sin-offering after giving birth. What is her sin? Commentaries explain that from the intense birth pains, the woman becomes angry at her husband and swears never to yearn for her husband again. Because of her anger and swearing falsely, she is obligated to sacrifice a sin-offering.
- However, this raises a question. The anger that the woman feels is temporary. Why must she bring a sin-offering? We know that a sin-offering is not brought every time a person gets angry.
- This can be clarified in the context of the *korban* Pesach. Hashem commanded Am Yisrael to sacrifice a sheep in order to eradicate the abomination of the Egyptians from amongst them. The sheep served as

the idol of the Egyptians. Afterwards, Am Yisrael was commanded to eat the *korban* in groups to reinforce unity among the people, which is a condition for receiving the Torah. The sheep is specifically termed "*korban*" Pesach, and not a Pesach "meal" to teach us that unity requires self-sacrifice. Only when one is willing to sacrifice his personal desires in order to accommodate his fellow's needs is he able to acquire true unity. This is hinted to by the fact that the word קרבן (sacrifice) has the same root as הקרבה (drawing close).

- The purpose of marriage is to increase peace and harmony. Although the anger of the woman giving birth is momentary, it leaves a lasting impression, which must be removed. This parashah is read around the time of Pesach in order to teach us the connection between the sin-offering of the woman after birth, which is for the purpose of unity, and the *korban* Pesach, which is also meant to unify the people. Moreover, the word פסח (Pesach) is a derivative of the words פה סח (a mouth that speaks). This implies that one must be careful with the words that he utters, so that ultimately he should not be stricken with *tzara'at*.

- We may wonder why parashat *Tazria* is called by this name, since only the first part of the parashah discusses a woman who gives birth. The main part of the parashah deals with the issue of the *metzora*. However, the name *Tazria* alludes to an important lesson. The woman brings a sin-offering after giving birth because it is likely that while experiencing severe birth pains she spoke degradingly about her husband. If the Torah is so exacting of a woman who unintentionally lashes out at her husband from her agonizing pain, how much greater is the sin of one who deliberately slanders.

Tzara'at

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying: If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eit, or a sapachat, or a baheret, and it will become a tzara'at affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim"

(*Vayikra* 13:1-2)

A person is afflicted with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon hara* (*Arachin* 15b). The Torah relates (*Bamidbar* 12:1-10) how Miriam the Prophetess, the sister of Moshe Rabbeinu, was inflicted with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon hara* about Moshe, discussing his separation from his wife, Tzipporah. Miriam did not intend to disparage her brother; nonetheless, she was punished. How much more so will a person be punished for speaking derogatorily about his fellow with premeditated intentions.

The *tzara'at* does not immediately appear on the body of a person. First the disease afflicts the walls of his home. If the person does not awaken to do teshuvah from this ominous sign, then the disease begins to spread to his household appliances. If he still does not correct his ways, then it spreads to his clothing. Thereafter, the disease appears on his skin and flesh (*Rambam, Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10). From this progression, we observe the infinite compassion of Hashem. Hashem does not hurry to punish His children. He first awakens them to teshuvah through external factors. However, if people do not pay attention to the signs that Hashem is sending them from Heaven, the *tzara'at* gets closer and closer. This illustrates that Hashem is Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness. He does not immediately strike the sinner, but instead, seeks to grant him the opportunity to reflect on his deeds and do teshuvah to atone for his sins.

The Rav of Ponevezh, zt"l, says that one can learn an important lesson

from the disease of *tzara'at*. In the beginning, only small signs of the disease appear on the walls of his house. However, if the person does not do teshuvah, he will ultimately be excommunicated and be forced to remain outside of the camp for a long period of time until he repents completely. From this one can conclude that when a person does not make an accounting of his deeds, he will begin to deteriorate. There are times when a person transgresses in a trivial matter. However, because he does not immediately do teshuvah, he can easily become accustomed to transgressing and thus descend to the depths of corruption.

Therefore, a person should regularly examine his deeds and immediately do teshuvah for the sins he committed each day. In this way, the sins will not become strongly rooted within him and become a part of him, making it very difficult for him to do teshuvah.

There is an interesting connection between parshiyot *Shemini* and *Tazria*. The last letter of the word **שמיני** and the first letter of the word **תזריע** have the same numerical value as the word קדוש (holy). In addition, the first letter and the last letter of the word **תזריע** when read backwards, form the word עת (time). This signifies that each person should set aside a time to study Torah in order to become sanctified and removed from sin. By fixing a set time each day for Hashem that is totally dedicated for His sake through learning Torah, he merits becoming sanctified and rising to greater heights. He receives extraordinary Divine assistance in order not to stumble in sin, which includes being protected from *lashon hara*.

When one's mouth is occupied by learning Torah, he is not able to engage in idle chatter which leads to *lashon hara*. Consequently, a person profits doubly. First, he draws close to Hashem and His Torah, and second, he retains his sanctity by avoiding *lashon hara*.

In Summary

- *Tzara'at* inflicts a person for speaking *lashon hara*. This teaches that Hashem is Slow to Anger. First the disease strikes a person's house, afterwards his clothes, and only thereafter his flesh.

♦ We learn an important lesson from this. When a person transgresses, he should immediately do teshuvah. If he postpones it, his iniquity will be greater, and he may become accustomed to his evil ways. Consequently, he will become desensitized to sin.

The Force of Habit

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying: If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eit, or a sapachat, or a baheret, and it will become a tzara'at affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim"

(*Vayikra* 13:1-2)

The Torah lists all sorts of afflictions in this parashah; those that afflict a person directly, those that afflict his clothes, and those that afflict his house. The Rambam writes (*Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10), "The disease of *tzara'at* was a wondrous sign for Yisrael in order to warn them against speaking *lashon hara*. This is because when one spoke *lashon hara*, the walls of his house began to change. If he repented, his home became purified. If he persisted in his evil ways after his house was destroyed, the seats and beds made of leather belonging to his house began to change. If he repented, they became purified. If he persisted in his evil ways, they were burned… His skin began to change and became stricken with *tzara'at*. He would be isolated, and it became publicized, so that he would not engage in forbidden speech such as mockery and *lashon hara*."

We see from these words that *tzara'at* does not appear immediately on a person's body, but progresses step by step. When a person reached a

point where his house was destroyed in front of his eyes, how could he persist in his ways and not end his habit of speaking *lashon hara*? Moreover, after his clothes were afflicted with *tzara'at*, and he still did not correct his ways, until it even reached his body, he was ultimately obligated to be isolated, remaining outside of the camp.

This behavior can be explained by the force of habit. When a person becomes accustomed to something, he stops being impressed and affected by it. Certainly, at first, the person was alarmed when the disease afflicted his house. However, by the time he got around to consulting a Kohen, who was a Torah scholar, to see if it was really *tzara'at* and ask the Kohen to instruct him how to do teshuvah and gain atonement, he already cooled off. All his initial readiness and resolve to change had evaporated in the interim.

Conversely, habit can be useful to a person. This is because one is required to cope with difficult situations and become accustomed to them. One should also train himself to behave with fine conduct. Similarly, habit is useful in helping a person become accustomed to residing in the House of Hashem. This is in line with David Hamelech's statement (*Tehillim* 119:59), "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies." He explained that sometimes he intended to go to a certain place, but ultimately he ended up in the Beit Hamidrash, since he was so accustomed to going there.

Just as habit can be favorable and necessary for a person, it can also pose an obstacle for him. This is because if a man gets used to something, it can turn dull, and consequently he will not be awed by its sanctity. His life will turn into routine, lacking enthusiasm and idealism. Therefore, a person is obligated to ensure that he does not get used to things, and continues to be awed anew each day from them. David Hamelech expresses this idea as follows (*Tehillim* 27:4): "One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: Would that I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the sweetness of Hashem and to visit in His Sanctuary." This indicates that even though David would get used to residing in Hashem's Sanctuary all his life, he considered himself to be

"visiting in His Sanctuary." In this way, his continuous presence in the Sanctuary would remain as fresh as if it was an infrequent visit, and he would constantly retain his awe of the Sanctuary.

This issue is also alluded to in the *haftarah* of *Parashat Hachodesh*. It says (*Yechezkel* 46:9), "But when the populace comes before Hashem on the appointed days, whoever comes in by way of the northern gate to prostate himself shall go out by way of the southern gate; and whoever comes in by way of the southern gate shall go out by way of the northern gate. He shall not return by way of the gate through which he came in; rather he shall go out opposite it."

The reason for this is explained by the *Chassid Ya'avetz* in his commentary on Avot (1:4), "Hashem purposely intended that one should not see the same gate twice, since he may come to compare it to the gates of his house; and the walls of the Sanctuary to his walls." By entering the Beit Hamikdash through one gate and exiting through another, a person was awed each time anew. In this way, he would not become accustomed to the sight of the Sanctuary. The *Ya'avetz* adds that lack of renewed awe toward *kedushah* led to the sin of the Golden Calf, since "when the Tent was among the people, they spurned it and said, 'Let us make a god.' Moshe Rabbeinu sensed this and therefore pitched the Tent outside the camp, far from the camp."

A person should aspire to constantly serve Hashem with renewed enthusiasm, whether in Torah, or mitzvot, or in his home. For example, he should not become accustomed to married life, and take his wife's qualities for granted. Otherwise, he will not admire her virtues and will only notice her faults, since he already got used to her good nature. This is a recipe for disaster, and can lead to quarrels and discord. During an argument, one can easily say hurtful words that are not in place. Consequently, if the "voice" in the home is not the proper "voice of Yaakov," then the "hands" become the "hands of Eisav," resulting in conflict (*Eichah Rabbah, Pesichta* 2).

One should contemplate the worthy qualities of his spouse. He should thank Hashem for blessing him with such a partner. He should not easily get into quarrels with her. One should also strive to constantly remember the words of Rabbi Chaim Vital, zy"a, that a person who disrupts the harmony in his home causes the *Shechinah* to depart. This is because if man and woman are meritorious, then the *Shechinah* resides between them. However, if they argue and fight, then the *Shechinah* departs and a fire consumes them (*Sotah* 17a). He also warned that the husband should be aware that man is judged in the World to Come according to his behavior toward his family, and not how he dealt with strangers. There are men who concern themselves with others but abuse their family members. They will be judged harshly, relative to their behavior at home (*Ma'amarei Hadrachah L'Chatanim* of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, z"l, the second lecture, 3).

A husband should appreciate that when he goes to learn Torah, and even sets aside time for studying Torah at night, he leaves his wife and his family members alone. His wife remains in charge of supervising the children and running the home by herself. He should be grateful to her and thank her by compensating her with pleasant words. After all, his wife could have forbidden him to leave, and even requested of him to supervise the children at night so that she should be able to go visit her relatives. If the woman overcomes her personal desires, and despite the hardships, enables her husband to go learn Torah, it is a sacrifice on her part. Therefore, the husband should honor his wife for her selflessness and thank her with warm words.

A person who is wrapped up in himself does not notice his wife's self-sacrifice in sending him to learn Torah, and occasionally even waiting for him to return from the Beit Hamidrash with food and drink. In this way, he reinforces the negative aspect of acting through habit. By taking his wife's goodwill for granted, it can lead to conflict between them. Ultimately, they will begin speaking derogatorily of each other, causing the *Shechinah* to depart. As a result, they will be inflicted with *tzara'at* and consequently have to dwell in isolation outside of the camp.

The force of habit that a person acquires, which makes it seem natural to him that his wife sends him to learn, can destroy his home. As a result of the quarrelling and *lashon hara* that ensues, eventually his house is demolished, his flesh is inflicted with disease and suffering, and his clothing gets burned. Therefore, every time one is about to erupt in anger he should consider if it is worthwhile for him to create dissention in his home, which causes the *Shechinah* to depart.

Regarding *tzara'at* it says (*Vayikra* 13:2), "He shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen or to one of his sons the Kohanim." This implies that a man himself is not capable of evaluating his own affliction, even if he is a Kohen who is a Torah scholar (*Nega'im* 2:5). This is because it is the nature of a person to be oblivious to his own faults and only notice the faults of other people.

Likewise, the Torah prohibits a person from rendering judgment on a halachah that applies to himself (*Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 4a). A person is naturally biased to judge in his own favor since he cannot see his faults (*Ketubot* 105b). The word נגע (affliction) shares the same letters as ענג (pleasure) (*Dorshei Reshumot*, *Sefer Yetzirah* 2:7). This indicates that anything that brings a person pleasure automatically causes him to be biased. Thereafter, he cannot evaluate it impartially. This is why the Torah commands (*Vayikra* 13:2), "He shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen." He must go to a great person, who is able to instruct him how he should behave.

This teaches us the importance of consulting a Torah authority for guidance. Since a person is naturally biased, he is most likely to err when deciding halachot for himself. On the other hand, if he consults with a Torah scholar, he evades personal bias and merits hearing the truth. Similarly, it says (*Mishlei* 11:14), "But salvation [lies] in much counsel." This implies that one attains success by seeking counsel. By consulting with his Rav, he is guided by the wisdom that his mentor accrued throughout many years of learning Torah. When a person chooses to live by the values portrayed in the Torah, he is guaranteed that no harm will befall him. On the contrary, it will be most profitable for him. Since the

tzaddik cleaves to Hashem and His Torah, Hashem is close to him and guides him to give successful advice. Consequently, one who consults with a Sage does not fail (*Tanchuma, Shemot* 29). I can testify for myself that I, too, seek the advice of the great Rabbis in every matter, even trivial ones. I do so, because I fear that perhaps I have a personal bias which could mislead me.

This concept is described in *masechet Niddah* (27a): "Rav Pappa was sitting behind Rav Bibi in the shiur of Rav Hamnuna. Rav Hamnuna taught the reason for Rav Shimon's decision that every *tumah* that mixes into another type [of matter] becomes nullified. Rav Pappa commented that the same reason applies for the decision of Rav Yehudah and Rav Yossi. The other students smirked and asked what Rav Pappa was adding, since this was obvious. Rav Pappa said: Even if something seems obvious to a person, he should not remain silent, refraining from asking his Rav, as it says (*Mishlei* 30:32), "If you have been abused, remain aloof; and if you have thoughts [of responding in kind], put your hand to your mouth."

We see that Rav Pappa asked even about a simple and obvious law regarding purity. He was not embarrassed to do so, as it says (*Avot* 2:5), "The bashful person cannot learn." The other students smirked at him because his question seemed trivial; nonetheless, we learn from Rav Pappa that a person must ask his Rabbi's advice even regarding simple matters. Concerning this, it says in Mishlei "If you have been abused, remain aloof; and if you have thoughts [of responding in kind], put your hand to your mouth." This can be explained in the following way. The words, "If you have been abused" allude to a person who consulted with a Torah authority regarding simple matters. The pasuk continues: "remain aloof," signifying that ultimately he will become knowledgeable and have clear understanding in all matters. However, the pasuk continues: "if you have thoughts," but did not consult with Torah scholars, then "put your hand to your mouth," implying that ultimately he will not know how to answer questions and will be lacking in clarity (*Rashi, Berachot* 63b).

Once, a student approached me and asked me a question about behaving with added caution in the fulfillment of mitzvot. During our conversation, we touched on other topics. While innocently relating something that he was used to doing, I realized that this student was committing a severe sin without being aware of it. This illustrates the importance of consulting with a Rabbi. Because this student was not embarrassed to ask advice from a Torah scholar, he merited that through our conversation, we incidentally touched on a subject that needed much reinforcement. Had he not sought guidance, who knows for how long he would have continued transgressing unintentionally.

One of our great Rabbis said that the importance of studying in yeshivot is alluded to in the following pasuk. It says (*Shemot* 3:3), "Let me turn aside now and see this great sight – why will the bush not be burned." I wondered what the connection was between this pasuk and yeshivot. It seems that the fire symbolizes the holy Torah, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 23:29), "Behold, My word is like fire – the word of Hashem." Only when Moshe Rabbeinu drew close to the fire of the bush did Hashem reveal Himself to him and command him to redeem Am Yisrael. Had Moshe not moved toward the bush, it would have continued burning, and Moshe would have remained a shepherd. It was precisely his advance toward the fire that led Moshe to his great and exalted position of leading the entire nation and being the one to transmit the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

During *Bein Hazmanim*, a person is naturally inclined to neglect his Torah study, with the excuse that after months of learning diligently, he is entitled to relax and engage in other things without having to set fixed times for learning Torah. Certainly this is the persuasion of the *Yetzer Hara*, who attempts to corrupt people. This excuse is not acceptable, because the study of Torah needs constant reinforcement. When a person does not make an effort to learn Torah during *Bein Hazmanim*, he can become accustomed to sitting idle at home. Then, who knows where he may end up during these days and on which level he will find himself at the conclusion of *Bein Hazmanim*.

During this time, a person tends to convince himself that he needs absolute relaxation. However, we are well aware of what inactivity can lead to. This is described by Chazal (*Ketubot* 59b), "Idleness leads to boredom." Thereafter, boredom leads to sin. When a person neglects Torah study, he becomes unoccupied. Since his mouth is not engaged in the study of Torah, very soon he begins to get involved in vanity, *lashon hara*, and obscene language. The *Yetzer Hara* draws a person further and further downward, without him being aware of this happening. A short time later, he may find himself expelled from yeshiva, becoming isolated outside the camp of Torah. Conversely, a person who engages in learning Torah during *Bein Hazmanim* merits Hashem opening for him the gates of wisdom, and he will comprehend lofty ideas.

Yeshivot today are like the burning fire that ignites the spark of every Jew to turn to his Father in Heaven. Although there are many who learn Torah diligently today, there are lots of good people who have not merited this, despite the fact that they are aware of its advantages. The reason that they do not join in learning Torah is because they only observe the activity of yeshivot from afar. They do not progress to examine the "great vision" within the Torah centers. If they would only glance inward, they would immediately be drawn to the fire of the Torah. Since these people persist in their own ways and do not enter the yeshivot and kollelim, the fire continues to burn, but does not warm them.

In Summary

- *Tzara'at* inflicts a person in a progressive manner. First his house becomes afflicted, then his household items, and afterwards his clothing. If he still does not do teshuvah, then his flesh is inflicted. How can a person observe his house being demolished and not do teshuvah? It is because until a person gets around to going to the Kohen, he already becomes accustomed to his situation and continues sinning. This is the damaging force of habit.
- Conversely, one needs the force of habit in order to become accustomed to sitting in the House of Hashem all his days. It seems that habit can

affect a person both positively and negatively. A person must beware and choose the positive effects.

- It is a law that one who entered the Beit Hamikdash through the northern gate must exit through the southern gate. This is in order that he should not become accustomed to being in the Beit Hamikdash. Instead, he should always remain awed by it, as if it was his first time visiting there.
- Generally, a person gets used to good things. This is true regarding his home, as well. However, he should be careful to always take note and admire the virtues of his wife anew. This is to ensure that he does not get used to her good qualities and therefore neglect thanking her for her good deeds.
- It says, "He shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen," even if the afflicted person himself is a Kohen who is a Torah scholar. This is because a person gets accustomed to his ways and cannot judge himself objectively. The word **נגע** (affliction) shares the same letters as the word **ענג** (pleasure), indicating that anything that brings a person pleasure makes him subjective to it. Therefore, he cannot decide impartially concerning the matter.
- It says, "But salvation [lies] in much counsel." The reason for this is because a person is subjective. Therefore, it is advisable for him to consult with a wise person, who is able to enlighten him. We learn this lesson from Rav Pappa, who was not embarrassed to ask questions even about simple issues, as it says, "The bashful person cannot learn."

Purity of Thought

"He shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim"

(*Vayikra* 13:2)

Why does the Torah say "To one of his sons the Kohanim?" This seems to be repetitious, since the Torah already mentioned that Aharon is a Kohen. Obviously, his sons are, too. Why is this emphasized?

Aharon Hakohen was the symbol of peace. He personified the attribute of peace and was described as (*Avot* 1:12) "loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people, and bringing them closer to the Torah." How did Aharon achieve this attribute? It is because he was humble and conducted himself toward others in absolute humility. Therefore, when he reconciled conflicts among people, he would relate to each person in an objective manner; his sole intention being for the sake of Heaven.

Thus, the Torah emphasizes that the Kohanim are "the sons of Aharon" to teach them that when they judge a *metzora*, deciding whether his afflictions are *tamei* or *tahor*, their decision may not be affected by any personal bias. They must cleave to the ways of the original Kohen, Aharon Hakohen, who would judge the *metzora* objectively, untainted by personal bias. Only when the Kohen is entirely impartial, can he rise to his calling properly and fulfill his mission with success.

Chazal (*Shabbat* 119b) say that the mere vapor emanating from the mouths of children through their learning Torah is more significant than the Torah studied by great Torah scholars. This is surprising. What is the significance of the children's learning, since they have not yet succeeded in acquiring wisdom, compared to that of older Torah scholars, who are steeped in Torah?

Each person is composed of an inner layer and an outer layer. The inner layer of a person is influenced by the thoughts and speculations passing

through his head. Consequently, the more pure and refined are one's thoughts, the more sanctified and holy is his inner character. To our dismay, there are many people who study and debate complex issues in Gemara only as lip service. This is because their inner essence is corrupt, and their study of Torah is not for the sake of Heaven, but only for the purpose of gaining respect from other people for their Torah knowledge. Such study is despised by Hashem, because this type of person does not wish to fulfill Hashem's will. He only seeks honor from his peers for his Torah wisdom.

In contrast, the children learning Torah possess only pure intentions. Although they are not as proficient in Torah as the older scholars, the vapor emanating from their mouths accomplishes greater achievements in Heaven because of their innocence. It says (*Sanhedrin* 106b), "Hashem seeks a person's heart." Hashem prefers a pure heart and innocent intentions. Therefore, the Torah that is learned as lip service, which is not for the sake of Heaven, is not accepted by Hashem. However, children, who have never experienced sin are entirely pure, inside and out. Consequently, the vapor – the Torah learning – emanating from their mouths is absolutely holy. This is why it is so beloved by Hashem.

This is the reason that the Torah states that the *metzora* can also be brought "to one of his sons the Kohanim." Even though the Torah of the Kohen Gadol is extremely important, the Torah of his sons, the junior Kohanim, is of greater magnitude. This is because the vapor of their mouths emanating from within them is absolutely pure.

In Summary

- The Torah emphasizes that any person inflicted with *tzara'at* must go to Aharon, the **Kohen**, or to one of his sons, the **Kohanim**. This teaches us the importance of remaining impartial when judging others. A Kohen may not be biased when deciding whether the afflictions presented to him are *tamei* or *tahor*.

- Chazal say that the mere vapor emanating from the mouths of children through their learning Torah is more significant than the Torah studied by great Torah scholars. This is because the hearts of children are pure, and "Hashem seeks a person's heart." Similarly, the Torah states that the *metzora* can also be brought to "one of his sons the Kohanim," since the Torah learning of the junior Kohanim is most preferable.

Gems on Parashat Tazria

The Connection between Tazria, Metzora, and Acharei Mot

The connection between the parshiyot *Tazria*, *Metzora*, and *Acharei Mot* is as follows. When a person plants seeds of *lashon hara* and defamation about his friend, he is like a person who plants a seed in the ground, which sprouts many new seeds, as hinted to in the word תזריע. The *tzara'at* is the result of the seed of *lashon hara* planted, alluding to parashat *Metzorah*. While slandering his fellow, a person faces his victim, who was created in the image of Hashem, and causes him to turn his face away in shame, as alluded to in the word אחרי (turn away). The victim does not dare show his face again in public. The rectification for the one who spoke *lashon hara* is death. Since he harmed a person, who was created in the image of Hashem, the image of Hashem that he possesses will be removed from him. Chazal (Zohar I, 127a) teach that a person lacking the image of Hashem is considered as if he were dead. Therefore, one who defames his fellow, causing him death, is punished by being forced to dwell in isolation outside the camp, like a dead person who lies in his grave alone.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, zy"a, explains the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 14:9) "Their protection has departed from them" regarding this issue. It is discussed in the sefer *Degel Machaneh Efrayim* (*Parashat Shelach*) that Hashem

escorts a person who was created in His image, protecting him from all harm. However, when a person slanders his fellow, Hashem removes His protection. He becomes vulnerable to danger and may even lose his life.

This treatment is measure for measure. When speaking against his fellow, a person defames his friend, causing the victim to feel humiliated in front of others. It ultimately causes him to become isolated. Hashem then punishes the slanderer with *tzara'at*. Consequently, all the people around him distance themselves from him and are no longer interested in being in his company.

A True Message

The initials of the parshiyot **תזריע מצורע אחרי מות** form the word **אמת** (truth). This teaches the following lesson. After a person dies and leaves the world, the truth will ultimately come to light. The World to Come is called "the World of Truth." Those who seem wretched and unimportant in this world may ultimately be revealed to have been great tzaddikim. The converse is also true. After 120 years, when a person perceives absolute truth, he will be mortified for not having recognized it earlier. Alas, he was influenced by the tactics of the *Yetzer Hara*, who encouraged him to speak and listen to *lashon hara* concerning others. Instead of becoming humiliated in the World of Truth, it is preferable to reinforce the trait of loving-kindness and distance oneself from the sin of *lashon hara*. In this way, one will not have to stand humiliated in the Heavenly Court when truth is revealed.

The Seven Clean Days

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be impure"

(*Vayikra* 12:1-2)

According to the Torah mandate, a woman who sees blood remains impure for seven days, beginning the moment that she perceives blood. If after seven days she ceases to see blood, she may immerse herself in order to be purified. Chazal added the rabbinical law of counting seven clean days (*Rambam, Issurei Bi'ah* 11:1-4). This implies that only after the woman ceased to see blood can she begin her count of seven days in which she does not see any blood. This is why they are called "seven clean days."

Why is it not enough for a woman to conclude her period of impurity when she ceases to see blood? Why does she have to wait and count an additional seven days in which she sees no blood?

The *tumah* of *niddah* is a punishment, because the woman sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and also persuaded her husband to sin (*Eiruvin* 100b). The days in which the woman is distanced from her husband cause her suffering and agony. This is especially true during the days of *niddah* following a birth, in which she is weak and in need of her husband's support. Just as we count the *omer* in anticipation of receiving the Torah, likewise a woman counts the seven pure days until the day of her immersion, when she will be permitted to unite with her husband once more.

It was rabbinically ordained that the count of the seven days should be observed meticulously, without any sight of blood. Chazal offer an

explanation for this (*Sotah* 17a). The *Shechinah* resides between a man and a woman, since the letter **י'** of the **איש** (man) and the letter **ה'** of the **אשה** (woman) combined, form the name of Hashem, י-ה. When a man and a woman unite, then the *Shechinah* joins them. Therefore, the seven clean days that the woman counts are considered days of rectification for the sin which led to the punishment of *niddah*, which caused the *Shechinah* to depart.

Similarly, when Am Yisrael were in Egypt, they were submerged in the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Parashat Yitro*; *Shelah, Pesachim*, *Matzah Ashirah* 33). Therefore, Hashem commanded them to count the forty-nine days of Sefirat Omer. Each progressive day, they emerged from another level of *tumah* and entered a new level of *taharah*. Thus, the *Sefirat Haomer* was a count toward the rectification and preparation for Am Yisrael, who were redeemed from the forty-nine levels of *tumah* and were elevated to the forty-nine levels of *taharah* (Zohar III, 97a).

Thus, the seven clean days that the woman counts is considered as if she is counting days toward the rectification of the sin that the woman perpetrated. The sin ultimately caused the *Shechinah* to depart, since it is forbidden to cohabit during the woman's days of *niddah*, and thus the *Shechinah* residing between the couple cannot unite with them. However, at the culmination of her count, and following her subsequent immersion, she causes the *Shechinah* to join them once more.

Thoughts Lead to Action

"Upon the completion of the days of her purity for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring a sheep within its first year for an olah-offering, and a young dove or a turtledove for a sin-offering, to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, to the Kohen"

(*Vayikra* 12:6)

Upon completion of her days of purity after giving birth, the Torah instructs a woman to go to the Beit Hamikdash and offer a sheep within its first year as an *olah*-offering and a young dove or a turtledove for a sin-offering. Why does a woman have to sacrifice a sin-offering and an *olah*-offering after she gives birth? Chazal (*Niddah* 31b) explain that when the birth pangs peak and the woman experiences unbearable pain, she swears to Hashem that she will never yearn for her husband again, in order that she should not have to suffer such agonizing torture. However, Hashem created forgetfulness, and immediately upon the birth of the child, the woman forgets the pain and suffering that she experienced. She even wishes to give birth to another child in the coming year. Therefore, her vow is considered as if she swore in vain, and she is obligated to bring a sin-offering to atone for swearing falsely.

Why does the woman also have to offer an *olah*-offering? Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches (ibid.) that it is because of the disparaging thoughts that she entertained against her husband. As she was giving birth, she deemed all her pain and suffering to be her husband's fault. These negative thoughts caused her to swear that she would never yearn for her husband again.

Immediately following this issue, the Torah continues with the subject of *tzara'at*, as it says (*Vayikra* 13:2), "If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a *s'eit*, or a *sapachat*, or a *baheret*, and it will become a *tzara'at*

affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim." The connection between the sin-offering and the *olah*-offering of the woman and the affliction of *tzara'at* that come upon a person for speaking *lashon hara* teaches us an important lesson. Entertaining an offensive thought ultimately leads to a sinful act. The offering that the woman must bring is to atone for her offensive thought. Thereafter, the Torah describes the sacrifice of the *metzora*, which is brought for the sinful deed of speaking *lashon hara*.

The juxtaposition of these two parshiyot teaches us that a derogatory thought about one's fellow may easily bring him to transgress by speaking *lashon hara* about him. Therefore, at the onset of this bad thought, one must immediately uproot it by bringing a *korban* and do complete teshuvah. In this way, the bad thought will not develop into a sinful act such as *lashon hara*, which is punishable by *tzara'at*.

Similarly, this teaches us that every incident of *lashon hara* originates with an offensive thought. Had a person not thought disparagingly about his fellow, he would not have slandered him. When a negative thought about another person surfaces, it is wise to get rid of it immediately, in order that the thought should not evolve into *lashon hara* or other transgressions.

Just as an offensive thought leads to an offensive act, likewise a kindly thought leads to a kind deed. A person who trains himself to think positive thoughts is bound to follow with many good deeds. Hashem considers a favorable intention as if one actually performed the favorable act. This is because He knows that since the intention was virtuous, then the virtuous deed will not be long in following. If in fact the deed does not materialize, it is only because of mitigating circumstances, which prevented him from carrying out his positive intentions.

Codes and Insights

"All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall remain impure; he is impure. He shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp"

(*Vayikra* 13:46)

The initials of the words בדד ישב (he shall dwell in isolation) is י"ב, and the initials of the words מחוץ למחנה (outside the camp) is מ"ל. This indicates that one who speaks *lashon hara* about his fellow ultimately blemishes his *milah* (מילה), his *oht brit kodesh* (*Megaleh Amukot, Shelach*). He also detaches himself from the society of the Twelve (י"ב) Tribes of Hashem, which comprise Am Yisrael. This is because he is compelled to dwell in isolation outside the camp.

The word תזריע when divided forms the words רזי - עת. This signifies that when a person sets fixed times (עת) for learning Torah, the secrets (רזי) of the Torah are revealed to him. He thereafter merits giving birth to a son and a daughter, which correspond to the novel insights in Torah which he reveals. If, *chalilah*, one does not set fixed times for learning Torah, he will resort to idle chatter, which leads to *lashon hara*. Consequently, he will be afflicted with *tzara'at*.

Metzora

The Severity of Lashon Hara

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen"

(*Vayikra*, 14:1-2)

In the parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora*, the Torah specifies the punishment of *tzara'at*, which inflicts a person who speaks *lashon hara*. One who slanders must consequently leave the camp and dwell in isolation until his afflictions are healed. Chazal explain (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra,* 556; *Even Ezra, Devarim* 24:9) that the term *metzora* denotes one who defames others by singling them out. Likewise, Rashi (ibid. 13:46) cites the Gemara (*Arachin* 16b), "Why is he different than other impure people that he has to dwell in isolation? Since through his *lashon hara* he separated between man and his wife, or man and his fellow, he, too, will be separated from other people."

Miriam, the Prophetess, spoke *lashon hara* about her brother Moshe. She asked Aharon (*Bamidbar* 12:2), "Did He (Hashem) not speak with us, as well?" She argued that even though Hashem spoke to them, they did not have to divorce their spouses. Why then should Moshe leave his wife Tzipporah?

Miriam truly had good intentions. Since Moshe was the leader of the nation, she feared that others would follow his example and attempt to sanctify themselves by divorcing their wives. This is contrary to the way of the Torah, since the Torah commands a person to get married and have children. Therefore, the separation of Moshe was liable to cause harm. It might cause the Jewish nation to decrease, because many people would follow Moshe's example. Although Miriam had worthy intentions and did not mean to degrade Moshe Rabbeinu at all, she was inflicted with *tzara'at*. The entire nation had to wait seven days for her to heal from her disease (*Bamidbar* 12:15-16).

There are commentaries (*Ramban, Bamidbar* 12:3) that assert that Miriam spoke in front of Moshe Rabbeinu himself. If so, it is difficult to understand why it was considered *lashon hara* at all. After all, Moshe heard her speak, and she did not intend to disparage him in public. It seems that she was not punished for the words that she uttered. She was only guilty of comparing her own level of prophecy to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu, her brother, by telling Aharon, "Did He not speak with us, as well?" There was a vast difference between the level of prophecy of Miriam and Aharon to that of Moshe. While Aharon and Miriam merited occasional revelations, Moshe could experience revelations at any time. Additionally, Hashem would reveal himself to him on the exalted level of "face to face." He even merited being shown the back of Hashem's *Shechinah*.

Therefore, Miriam was not justified in comparing the level of her prophecy and Aharon's prophecy to the level of Moshe's. Regarding Moshe it says (*Devarim* 34:10), "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face." For this reason, Miriam's words about her brother were considered *lashon hara*. It was as if she minimized his exalted level of prophecy and placed herself on his level. Therefore, it was an offense to Moshe's honor to argue "Did He not speak with us, as well?" Because Moshe was the most humble of all people, he would not respond to her argument.

Despite her good intentions, whether for the benefit of Tzipporah or of Am Yisrael, by ensuring their perpetuation, Miriam was afflicted with *tzara'at*. She was judged severely for having compared her level of prophecy to that of Moshe. Even though Miriam definitely did not consider herself on the same level as Moshe, she was not careful enough with her words and ultimately offended the honor of Moshe. Therefore, the Attribute of Justice prevailed and caused her to be afflicted with *tzara'at*. She was consequently obligated to dwell in isolation outside the camp.

We may wonder why Hashem was so exacting with Miriam, the Prophetess, inflicting her with *tzara'at*, despite her noble intentions, whereas Chava, who listened to the *lashon hara* of the Snake and even repeated it to Adam, was not afflicted with *tzara'at*. Upon analyzing the slander of the Snake, we see how greatly his words were an affront to the honor of Heaven. He said (*Bereishit* 3:5), "For G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like G-d, knowing good and bad."

Rashi explains (*Bereishit* 3:5) that the snake convinced her that Hashem, so to speak, ate from the Tree of Knowledge and thereby created the world, *rachmana litzlan*. Moreover, the Snake asserted that since every craftsman hates others who pursue his craft, Hashem forbade them from eating of the Tree of Knowledge, so that man should not acquire the powers and intelligence to create and fashion worlds as He did.

Not only were these words unfounded and nonsense, they were also an affront to the honor of Heaven and a breach in the foundation of the belief in Hashem. It seems that since Chava listened and repeated these words to her husband, she accepted them. Therefore, she should have been punished accordingly, and even more stringently than Miriam.

Before we can resolve this question, let us describe the severity of *tzara'at*. The Gemara *Nedarim* (64b) states that there are four types of people that are considered as if they were dead: a pauper, a *metzora*, a blind person, and one who is childless. A pauper is considered dead, as

it says (*Shemot* 4:19), "For all the people who seek your life have died." This is referring to Datan and Aviram, who lost their fortunes and were therefore considered as if they had died. A *metzora* is referred to as a dead person, as it says (*Bamidbar* 12:12), "Let her not be like a corpse." This pasuk is discussing the *tzara'at* of Miriam. Regarding a blind person, it says (*Eichah* 3:6), "He has placed me in darkness like the eternally dead." The gift of sight gives a person joy, as Shlomo Hamelech says (*Mishlei* 15:30), "Enlightened eyes will gladden the heart." One who cannot see experiences no joy. And whoever lacks joy is like a man without life. Also one who is childless is considered as if he was dead, as it says (*Bereishit* 30:1), "Give me children – otherwise I am dead." This is referring to Rachel Imeinu, who longed for children. She told Yaakov, her husband, that if he would not pray on her behalf to be blessed with children, then she would be considered as a dead person.

The *metzora* may have everything one's heart can desire. He may have children, money, and vision. Why, then, is he included in the list of those who are considered dead? This is because the *Shechinah* departs from him, as indicated by his obligation to dwell in isolation outside the camp. Since Hashem's *Shechinah* is the Source of life, the *metzora*, who must leave Hashem's camp and thus is disconnected from this Source, is considered lacking life. From this we learn the severity of *lashon hara*. Even though a person may possess everything he desires, he is considered dead, because of his detachment from the Source of life, Hashem.

Although Miriam's intentions were worthy, she was immediately punished for her words, as it says (*Bamidbar* 12:10), "Aharon turned to Miriam and behold! She was afflicted with *tzara'at*." As soon as the words were out of her mouth, the *Shechinah* departed and the *tzara'at* appeared. This was in order to emphasize the inappropriate nature of her words and the fury of Heaven aroused by her argument against her brother, Moshe. Not only was Miriam afflicted with *tzara'at*, but Hashem also admonished her, saying (ibid. vs. 6), "Please hear My words. If there shall be prophets among you, in a vision shall I make Myself, Hashem, known to him; in a

dream shall I speak with him. Not so is My servant Moshe; in My entire house he is trusted. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a vision and not in riddles, and at the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak about My servant, about Moshe?" Because of Hashem's great wrath, the *Shechinah* departed immediately from Miriam, as it says (ibid. vs. 9), "The wrath of Hashem flared up against them, and He left."

Now we shall clarify why Hashem did not inflict *tzara'at* upon Chava, despite her transgression of *lashon hara*. Since *tzara'at* renders a person dead and results in excommunication, Hashem avoided punishing Chava in this way so that she should not become revolting in her husband's eyes. Since Chava was the only woman on earth, and she was destined to be the mother of mankind, it was not feasible to punish her in this way. It would have caused her to be despised by her husband. Consequently, man's perpetuation, and thereby the world's existence, would have been in danger.

Instead, Hashem brought upon Chava the blood of *niddah*, which obligated her to separate from her husband temporarily, from time to time. This was in order to remind her that she was the cause of the detachment from Hashem as a result of her *lashon hara*. However, this type of separation did not cause her to be revolting. During her menstruation, Chava was supposed to reflect upon the devastation that she had caused, which ultimately led to separation from her husband during her days of *niddah*.

The Gemara (*Eiruvin* 100b) says that the woman was cursed with ten curses. One of these curses is the blood of *niddah*, which causes her to be forbidden to her husband and distanced from him. Throughout all generations, when women separate from their husbands during their *niddah* status, it helps to rectify the damage caused by Chava for listening and repeating to her husband the words of the Snake.

This is the reason for the juxtaposition of the parshiyot *Tazria* and *Metzora*. The Torah first discusses (*Vayikra*, 12:2), "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be

impure." This is followed by the subject of the *metzora*, because the punishment of being rendered a *niddah* replaced the punishment of *tzara'at* that Chava should have been afflicted with. Only because Hashem did not want Chava to become despised by her husband did He bring upon her a less degrading separation through the blood of *niddah*.

As we said, if Chava would have become revolting to her husband as a result of being afflicted with *tzara'at*, Adam may have distanced himself from her. This would have caused a separation in the Name י-ה, which resides among man and his wife. Hashem created man and woman with the Name י-ה, and therefore the *Shechinah* resides between the couple (*Sotah* 17a). Had Chava been afflicted with *tzara'at*, causing Adam to separate from her, it would have caused a schism in the Name י-ה. Consequently, the world would not have been able to continue existing, since it, too, was created with the Name י-ה (*Menachot* 29b), as it says (*Yeshayahu* 26:4), "כי בי-ה ה' צור עולמים – for in G-d, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds."

How terrible! Sinning with *lashon hara* is worse than sinning with the three cardinal sins of the Torah. Not only does one become detached from Hashem by causing the *Shechinah* to depart, he also blemishes the image of Hashem, in which he was created. When standing in prayer in the Beit Hakeneset, such a person is as if praying to sticks and stones. This is because a mouth that uttered words of *lashon hara* cannot merit speaking with the *Shechinah*. Consequently, his pleas will not be accepted. However, the *kelippah* benefits from his prayers, because it takes control of the prayers and demands remuneration for them. As a result, a person gets a double penalty. Not only are his prayers unanswered, he also increases the power of the *kelippah* through them.

The Chafetz Chaim (*Sha'ar Hazechirah, Perek* 7) quotes the words of the Zohar (*Parashat Pekudei*, 263b), which says, "From that evil spirit there stem several other prosecutors, which are appointed to grasp derogatory speech or flattery that a person utters. Afterwards, when he utters holy words, woe to them and woe to their lives; woe to them in this world, and woe to them in the World to Come. This is because those impure spirits

take control of the impure speech; and when the person thereafter utters holy words, the impure spirits precede these words and take out the impure words he uttered and defile the holy words. Consequently, the person does not gain merit through his holy words, and it is as if the power of *kedushah* is diminished."

Not only does the person blemish and harm himself with his derogatory words, he also creates a severance between the two worlds, the World to Come and this world. The reason for this is because (*Menachot* 29b) the World to Come was created with the letter י of Hashem's Name י-ה, whereas this world was created with the letter ה. When there is peace and harmony, the two worlds join and unite with each other and the *Shechinah* is increased. On the other hand, when there is discord and strife, the two worlds disconnect, thus causing a schism in the Name of Hashem, since the letters ה and י separate from each other. We should take this lesson to heart, because much suffering and misfortune occur as a result of the detachment of this world from the World to Come. When the two worlds are divided, Hashem arouses us to draw close to Him by bringing harsh decrees upon us.

This is hinted by the words of the pasuk. The numerical value of the word בדד (isolation) is ten, which is the *gematria* of the letter י. This implies that when a person speaks *lashon hara*, and as a result is obligated to dwell in isolation outside the camp, then also the World to Come, which was created with the letter י, becomes distant and disconnects from this world. Consequently, one who speaks *lashon hara* both harms himself and also the entire world with his derogatory words. One should shun this dreadful sin. Conversely, through avoiding conflict and increasing loving-kindness and peace, one unifies the letters comprising Hashem's Name. In this way, the two worlds join together, completing Hashem's Name.

In Summary

- Miriam was afflicted with *tzara'at* despite her good intentions when speaking about Moshe. Since Moshe was the leader of the nation, Miriam

feared that the people would learn from his conduct and divorce their wives. There is an opinion that claims that Miriam spoke in the presence of Moshe. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why she was afflicted. However, by saying, "Did He not speak with us, as well?" she compared her own level of prophecy to the level of Moshe, and that is why she was guilty. She minimized the level of Moshe's prophecy and thereby offended his honor, which is considered *lashon hara*.

- The Torah relates that Chava listened to the words of the Snake, which were an affront to the honor of Heaven. Thereafter, she repeated them to Adam. Since Chava repeated the words, it indicates that she accepted them. Therefore, it is surprising why Chava was not afflicted by *tzara'at*, whereas Miriam, who had worthy intentions, was afflicted.

- The *metzora* is considered to be dead, because he is obligated to dwell in isolation outside the camp, and the *Shechinah* departs from him. Hashem knew that if He would inflict Chava with *tzara'at*, she would become revolting to Adam. Then, what future would there be for the world? Therefore, Hashem rendered Chava a *niddah*, which temporarily separated her from her husband, instead of inflicting her with *tzara'at*. The *tumah* of *niddah* is a lesser degree of *tumah* than that of *tzara'at*, and it had the potential to arouse Chava to do teshuvah for her sin.

- The state of *niddah* is one of the ten penalties with which the woman was punished. Throughout all the generations, women atone for the sin of Chava through their suffering because of the *tumah* of *niddah*. There is a hint to this by the juxtaposition of the pasuk, "as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be impure" to the subject of the *metzora*.

- Hashem did not want Chava to become despised by her husband in order not to create a schism in the Name of י-ה, since **איש** (man) and **אשה** (woman) have the *Shechinah* residing between them.

- One who speaks *lashon hara* causes his prayers not to be accepted. Instead he assists the *kelippah* in gaining power through them. Similarly, one who speaks *lashon hara* creates a division in the two worlds, which were

created with the Name י-ה. Consequently, he causes a schism in the Name of Hashem.

The Connection between Parashat Metzora and Pesach

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen"

(*Vayikra* 14:1-2)

A person is afflicted with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon hara* (*Arachin* 15b). This punishment is measure for measure. Just as a person who speaks disparagingly about his fellow causes him to be excommunicated from society, likewise the slanderer is punished with *tzara'at*, which obligates him to dwell in isolation outside the camp far from his relatives and friends. In this way he makes reparation for tarnishing the name of his fellow and isolating him from his environment (ibid. 16:2).

The Torah relates that when a person notices the affliction of *tzara'at* beginning to spread on his body, he goes to the Kohen in order to decide whether the affliction renders him impure or not. The words of the pasuk raises a question. Why does it state "זאת תהיה **תורת** המצורע – This shall be the *torah* (teaching) of the *metzora*" and not "אלו הם חוקי המצורע – These are the laws of the *metzora*?" Since the Torah is exact in its words, and every term used has specific intentions, we must examine what lesson this teaches.

Similarly, why does it say, "He shall be brought to the Kohen," rather than, "And he came before the Kohen." This seems to imply that they

used to forcibly bring the person to the Kohen against his will, in order to hear his decision. Why is this so?

In order to resolve these questions, we must recall that parashat *Metzora* is read close to Pesach. Pesach is called by this name because Hashem "skipped over" the houses of the Jews during the plague of the firstborn, killing only the Egyptians. When Hashem saw a house with its *mezuzot* smeared with the blood of the *korban* Pesach, He skipped over it and left its inhabitants alive (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot* 100).

Chazal (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Mikra Kodesh* 4) say that Pesach is called by this name because the word Pesach is composed of the words פה (mouth) and סח (speaks). This indicates that the main objective of Pesach is to speak about the miracles of the Exodus that Hashem performed for us. He redeemed us from our enemies with His powerful hand and outstretched arm. The essence of the day is (*Shemot* 13:8): "And you shall tell your son." We are also obligated to discuss with our children the miracles that Hashem performed in His great mercy for us by taking us out from darkness to light, redeeming us from the forty-nine levels of *tumah* (*Zohar Hachadash, Parashat Yitro*), and elevating us to the forty-nine levels of purity (*Zohar* III, 97a).

Conversely, he should "skip over" any forbidden speech, which contains derogatory words and may harm others. This is the reason that parashat *Metzora* is read close to Pesach. It teaches us that the mouth must always be occupied with speaking words of Torah. When a person engages in idle chatter, he will ultimately speak disparagingly about his fellow. Consequently, he is afflicted with *tzara'at*.

Each person should carefully consider which words are worthwhile to state and which ones should be skipped. He should prefer silence, which is termed "golden." When a person fulfills the words of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 119:97), "O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation," it will prevent him from engaging in idle chatter, which results in *lashon hara*.

The obligation to recall the Exodus from Egypt does not apply only once a year. All the days of the year revolve around this event. It is mentioned each day while laying tefillin, in Kriyat Shema, and in Birkat Hamazon. The fact that we mention the Exodus frequently, each and every day, testifies to its importance. In fact, it bears an implication on every moment of our lives. Its importance is magnified by the warning that it poses. It compels us to examine anew the words we utter and check if they should be voiced, or whether it is preferable to remain silent. The word "Pesach" reminds us to carefully consider the words we speak and skip words that should not be said.

According to this, we can resolve our original questions. The Torah chose to write "זאת תהיה **תורת** המצורע – This shall be the *torah* of the *metzora*," because it presents an admonishment for people. The word "Torah" is specifically used to imply that when a person's mouth is not occupied in Torah, he consequently engages in idle chatter, which leads to *lashon hara*. By involving himself in Torah, he will not speak negative words or gossip.

This is the lesson that is hinted at in this pasuk. One must immerse himself all his days in the study of Torah, in order that he should not get a chance to speak *lashon hara*. While engaging in Torah and discussing its issues, one never comes to gossiping and slandering.

The Torah states, "He shall be brought to the Kohen" and does not say "And he came before the Kohen." This implies that when a person discovers his affliction of *tzara'at*, he is immediately brought by others to the Kohen, without waiting for the person himself to decide that he is ready to go. This is because when a person notices the *tzara'at* beginning to spread, and he realizes that he must go to the Kohen to decide his status, he can easily come to disparage the Kohen and say, "Who is this Kohen who will decide my fate?" In order to prevent him from criticizing the Kohen, which would serve to magnify his sin, he is brought immediately to him, without having a chance to add to his iniquity.

Bringing the person to the Kohen without waiting for him to come by himself served to curb his arrogance. Haughtiness is the source of all sin, and it is one of the causes of slandering (*Chafetz Chaim, Sha'ar Hatevunah* 14). When a person feels superior to his fellow, he will easily come to denigrate him. In order to correct the root of haughtiness that causes him to speak *lashon hara*, he is brought to the Kohen. In this way, he is humbled and thereby corrects his sin.

The word הובא (he is brought), when adding one for the word itself, has the numerical value of twenty-one, which is equivalent to the Name of Hashem, א-ה-י-ה. The Zohar says (I, 15a) that the Name א-ה-י-ה is the original Name given for Hashem.

Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to reveal himself to Bnei Yisrael, telling them (*Shemot* 3:7-14): "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt, and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters." Therefore, "I shall descend to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey." Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem, "And if they say to me, 'What is His Name?' – what shall I say to them?" Hashem answered that he should tell Bnei Yisrael "א-ה-י-ה אשר א-ה-י-ה – I Shall Be What I Shall Be." And He said, "So shall you say to the Children of Israel, I Shall Be has sent me to you."

Why did Hashem specifically use this Name to redeem Bnei Yisrael? The question is further strengthened by the following point that the Rambam raises (*Moreh Nevuchim* I, 63). Since Hashem told Moshe to tell Am Yisrael "א-ה-י-ה שלחני אליכם – I Shall Be has sent me to you," it implies that they already recognized this Name. For otherwise, what purpose would it have served for Moshe to reveal it to Am Yisrael? If so, why would they ask for Hashem's Name? On the other hand, if Bnei Yisrael, in fact, did not recognize the Name of Hashem, then what purpose would there be in answering them "I Shall Be has sent me to you?"

Moshe Rabbeinu was asking Hashem which Name he should reveal to Bnei Yisrael in order to arouse them to fulfill their true purpose in this

world: learning Torah. The Torah and the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael already existed before the Creation of the world (*Shabbat* 88b; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Tehillim* 809). During the six days of Creation, Hashem created only the physical aspect of the world. Man was infused with a *neshamah* from the Upper Spheres, which existed already prior to the Creation of the world. The Torah, as well, preceded the Creation by 974 generations (*Shabbat* 88b). Chazal (ibid. 89a) say that before Hashem created the world, He delighted in the Torah. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael were in essence connected to Hashem and to the Torah, as it says (*Zohar* II, 90b; ibid. III, 4b), "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one."

According to Kabbalah (*Zohar* III, 11a), before the Creation of the world, Hashem was called by only one Name, א-ה-י-ה. This was Hashem's original Name. Ultimately, more Names stemmed from this Name as a result of the Creation of the world. With each new creation in the world, another Name was added to express the purpose and Hashem's connection to that specific formation. Since the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael already existed before the Creation of the world, they instinctively recognized the Name א-ה-י-ה, which was Hashem's only Name prior to Creation. Therefore, when Moshe was asked by Hashem to reveal to Bnei Yisrael that Hashem would redeem them, he asked Hashem's permission to reveal the Name א-ה-י-ה, because it was the Name that the *neshamot* of Bnei Yisrael inherently recognized from before Creation. This would encourage them to follow Hashem and ultimately be redeemed from Egypt, which would lead to the receiving of the Torah.

Therefore, when Moshe would mention the Name א-ה-י-ה to Bnei Yisrael, the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael would immediately sense their connection to this Name, which was familiar to them from the time that their *neshamot* existed under the Heavenly Throne. While recalling those days prior to Creation, when Hashem delighted in the Torah, they would aspire to once again experience those special moments would accept the Torah. As a result of their arousal to receive the Torah in the world below, consequently, it would provoke an arousal from Above.

As mentioned before, the word והובא (he was brought), has the same *gematria* as that of the Name א-ה-י-ה (adding one for the word itself). When a person disconnects from the Torah, he is easily led to speaking *lashon hara*. He must be forcibly brought to the Kohen in order to humble him, so that he should return to the Torah, reconnect to Hashem, and thereby repair the damage that he wrought. Once he is humbled, he restores his connection with Hashem, whose primary Name is א-ה-י-ה. The Torah binds a person to Hashem.

While Hashem was speaking to Moshe at the burning bush, telling him to redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt, Moshe said to Hashem (*Shemot* 4:1), "But they will not believe me and they will not heed my voice, for they will say, Hashem (י-ה-ו-ה) did not appear to you." Moshe Rabbeinu feared that because of the brutal labor that they were forced to execute, even the Name י-ה-ו-ה would not evoke Bnei Yisrael's belief. Moshe's doubts in Bnei Yisrael were not viewed favorably by Hashem. Therefore, he was punished with *tzara'at*, as it says in the pasuk (ibid. vs. 6; *Rashi*, ibid.) "And he brought his hand to his bosom; then he withdrew it and behold, his hand was stricken with *tzara'at*, like snow."

Moshe's mission was in preparation for the redemption from Egypt. Even before Bnei Yisrael were redeemed, Hashem punished Moshe with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon hara* against Bnei Yisrael, in order to emphasize the essence of Pesach. Its main purpose is relating and speaking about the miracles of the Exodus and being careful to skip over offensive words of *lashon hara*. Because of the significant connection between Pesach and the punishment of *tzara'at*, parashat *Metzora* is read on a Shabbat close to Pesach.

In Summary

- Why is "*torah*" used when describing the laws of the *metzora*, as it says, "**זאת תהיה תורת** המצורע – This shall be the *torah* of the *metzora*?" In addition, why does it state "He shall be brought to the Kohen?" This implies that he was brought to the Kohen against his will. Why did he not come on his own?

- The word "Pesach" is a derivative of the words פה (mouth) and סח (that speaks). This signifies that the mouth of a person should speak about the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt and discuss words of Torah. In this way, a person will avoid speaking disparagingly. This is why parashat *Metzora* is read close to Pesach. It underscores that a mouth that is not engaged in speaking about the miracles of the Exodus and discussing Torah ultimately begins speaking *lashon hara*. Consequently, a person is punished with *tzara'at*. This is the reason why the Torah specifically wrote "זאת תהיה **תורת** המצורע – This shall be the *torah* of the *metzora*." It teaches a person that if he occupies himself in discussing words of Torah, he will not come to speak words of *lashon hara*.
- The slanderer is brought to the Kohen against his will in order that he should not have the opportunity to begin slandering the Kohen. If he would wait to come on his own, his mouth would begin spouting *lashon hara* against the Kohen in the interim. This is a severe transgression. Bringing the person to the Kohen also serves to humble him, eliminating the trait of haughtiness, which is the cause of *lashon hara*.
- The word והובא (and he is brought), has the same *gematria* as the Name א-ה-י-ה (adding one for the word itself). This name is the source of all the holy Names, which stem from it. Hashem revealed His Name א-ה-י-ה to Am Yisrael prior to the redemption. This is because He knew that this Name would be familiar to Bnei Yisrael. However, if this Name was known to them, why did Moshe suspect that Bnei Yisrael would ask for Hashem's Name? Conversely, if Am Yisrael did not recognize this Name, then what purpose would be served in revealing it to them?
- Moshe wanted to know which Name to use when introducing his mission to Am Yisrael, in order to stimulate them in fulfilling their purpose of ultimately accepting the Torah. Prior to Creation, Hashem had only one Name, א-ה-י-ה. At that time, the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael and the Torah already existed. Therefore, the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael already recognized the Name א-ה-י-ה and the Torah. Moshe requested permission to reveal the Name א-ה-י-ה to Am Yisrael, which would remind the *neshamot* of Yisrael of their existence prior to Creation, when they

witnessed Hashem delighting in the Torah. This would serve to stimulate them to eagerly anticipate receiving the Torah.

- Moshe Rabbeinu was punished with *tzara'at* because he spoke disparagingly about Bnei Yisrael. *Tzara'at* served as a warning to Am Yisrael that they should be careful to skip offensive words of *lashon hara* and concentrate on speaking words of Torah. Guarding one's tongue ultimately leads to brotherhood and unity, which is also the essence of Pesach.

Accepting Affliction with Love

"This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen"

(*Vayikra* 14:1-2)

Chazal say (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 556; *Even Ezra*, *Devarim* 24:9) that the *metzora* is called by this name because he defamed his friend. The word מצורע (*metzora*) is a derivative of the words מוציא שם רע (defamation). This implies that a person is afflicted with *tzara'at* as punishment for *lashon hara*, by which a person defames his fellow (*Arachin* 15b).

There is an additional lesson to be learned from the affliction of *tzara'at*. The Gemara teaches (*Berachot* 5b) that *tzara'at* serves in the same way as the Altar, bringing atonement to the slanderer. This indicates that suffering serves to purify a person from his sins. This is one of the reasons for the juxtaposition of parashat *Metzora* to parashat *Tazria*, which discusses *brit milah*. For, just as the mitzvah of *milah* connects the infant to his Father in Heaven, likewise, the pain and suffering that comes

upon a person afflicted with *tzara'at* purges him from all negativity and draws him close to his Father in Heaven.

Suffering that afflicts a person is for his benefit, since ultimately it cleanses and purifies him from sin and connects him to Hashem. The Ramban (*Shemot* 20:17) expounds upon the concept that a person is afflicted for his own benefit, and concludes that he should therefore accept the King's decree with love.

The *tzara'at* did not afflict a person immediately; it appeared progressively. First the affliction spread over the walls of his house and on his furniture. Afterwards, it appeared on his clothing. If after all this, the person was not aroused to do teshuvah, ultimately his flesh was afflicted (*Rambam, Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10). This teaches a person to be alert to what is happening around him. When Hashem sends signals from Heaven, it is in order to arouse a person to do teshuvah. However, when a person does not pay attention to these signs, there is no other choice but to bring upon him harsh decrees with the hope that they succeed in bringing him back to the proper path. Upon witnessing the affliction spreading over the walls of his house, the person who speaks *lashon hara* should repent his sin. He should not wait until the *tzara'at* spreads closer to him, affecting his clothes and his flesh.

The Gemara (*Berachot* 61b) relates the details of the death of the *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva: "The time that he was taken out to be executed was the time when Kriyat Shema is recited. As they were combing his flesh with combs of iron, he accepted upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His students said to him, 'Rabbeinu, to this extent?' He said to them, 'All my days I would anguish over the pasuk (*Devarim* 6:5) *With all my soul* – even if He would take your soul. I said to myself, 'When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this?' Now that I have the opportunity, should I not fulfill it? He called out lengthily, '*Echad*', until his *neshamah* departed. A Heavenly Voice called out and said, 'Fortunate is Rabbi Akiva that his soul departed while saying '*Echad*.'"

What did Rabbi Akiva mean by saying, "All my life I would anguish over this pasuk, pondering when will I have the opportunity to fulfill it." Did Rabbi Akiva aspire that his life should end with a strange death and not with a peaceful one, which is the aspiration of all people? Rabbi Akiva meant that whenever he would say the pasuk (ibid. vs. 5) "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, etc.," he would intend to sacrifice himself for the sake of Heaven. Despite this, he would still doubt if he truly was prepared to sacrifice his life to sanctify Hashem's Name. He agonized that perhaps his recitation was purely lip service. Who could guarantee that he was entirely prepared to die in the sanctification of Hashem's Name?

When the Romans captured him and were combing his flesh with burning iron combs, Rabbi Akiva accepted upon himself the yoke of Heaven with great joy. When his students saw his intense happiness despite his terrible pain and suffering, they said to him, "Rabbeinu, to this extent?" Does one have to be joyful even while enduring unbearable pain? Rabbi Akiva answered them, "I am joyful to see that I truly reached the level of self-sacrifice for Hashem's sake. All my life, when I would recite Kriyat Shema and intend to sacrifice my soul for the sanctification of Hashem's Name, I did not know if my intentions were pure, and if I was truly capable of this accomplishment. However, now that I am actually experiencing the situation, and I am sacrificing my soul for the sanctification of Hashem's Name, there is no one more joyful than I, since I, undeniably, merited acquiring and reaching this level.

The exalted level that Rabbi Akiva achieved was apparent. He was prepared to joyfully endure torture, in order to fully fulfill Hashem's commandment under all circumstances. Similarly, Chazal (*Menachot* 29b) relate that when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven, Hashem showed him a vision of Rabbi Akiva expounding on every point protruding from each letter in the Torah, even on the smallest letter *yud*, learning countless new lessons. When Moshe observed his greatness, he asked Hashem why He intended to give the Torah to Bnei Yisrael through him,

rather than through Rabbi Akiva, who he thought was more worthy. Hashem answered that this was His plan.

The Midrash (*Masechet Kallah* 1) relates an unbelievable story, which illustrates the outstanding greatness of Rabbi Akiva. Once, Rabbi Akiva approached Rabbi Tarfon, who was very wealthy. Rabbi Akiva asked him if he was interested in investing his money in a successful business venture, which could potentially bring him great profits. When Rabbi Tarfon acquiesced, Rabbi Akiva told him that he would purchase either one or two cities and give him the profits from the investment. Rabbi Tarfon entrusted Rabbi Akiva with four hundred gold coins.

When Rabbi Akiva received the money, he proceeded in dispersing it all for *tzedakah*. One third of the money he gave to the poor and the remaining two thirds to students learning Mishnah, those learning Torah, and to scribes. After a while, when Rabbi Tarfon noticed that he was not receiving any profits from his investment, he sought out Rabbi Akiva and asked him what had become of his money. Rabbi Akiva told him that the business venture was immensely successful. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Tarfon asked to see the results of his investment.

Rabbi Akiva brought him to the Beit Hamidrash, opened a sefer Tehillim, and read out loud (112:9) "He distributed widely to the destitute, his righteousness endures forever." Thereafter, he pointed to the students absorbed in the study of Torah and said, "This is the city that I bought for you." When Rabbi Tarfon grasped his intentions, he stood up and kissed Rabbi Akiva on his head and told him, "My Rabbi and my superior, you are my Rabbi in wisdom and my superior in proper conduct." Moreover, he entrusted him with an additional sum of money to be dispensed for *tzedakah*.

From this account, we learn of the greatness of Rabbi Akiva. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu believed that he should be the one to bring the Torah to Am Yisrael. However, despite his righteousness, he agonized whether he could fully fulfill the commandment, "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources" to the

extent of self-sacrifice. If Rabbi Akiva agonized over this all his life, how much more so should we worry about the level of our *yirat Shamayim*. We should ask ourselves if our inability to fulfill a mitzvah troubles us, even when, according to the letter of the law, we are not obligated to perform it. Also, are we tormented about our lack of self-sacrifice in our Avodat Hashem, as Rabbi Akiva worried all his life?

We should also learn from Rabbi Akiva's love for Hashem. It was manifested by his enormous desire to draw close to Hashem and cleave to His ways, as it says (*Shabbat* 133b), "Just as He is compassionate, so too should you be compassionate." For this reason, Rabbi Akiva sought to assist Rabbi Tarfon in meriting to fulfill the mitzvah of *tzedakah*, which is a fulfillment of "You shall love Hashem, your G-d… with all your resources" (*Devarim* 6:5), meaning his money (*Berachot* 54a). Because of Rabbi Akiva's compassion and kindness, he brought merit to his friend, Rabbi Tarfon, and to the students of Torah, in order to fulfill the statement of Chazal (*Sifra, Kedoshim* 4) "You shall love your fellow as yourself; this is a fundamental principle of the Torah."

Although Rabbi Akiva loved Hashem with all his resources, he worried all his life whether he had fully acquired the level of (*Devarim* 6:5) "You shall love Hashem, your G-d… with all your soul." Woe to us from the Day of Judgment, when we will be shown the things that truly worried us. Was it loss of money and physical acquisitions, which are transient? How great will our shame be when we will realize that we did not worry at all about the loss of a mitzvah, or about our lack of *yirat Shamayim* and closeness to Hashem. Money is the lifeblood of a person, and one who parts with his money by giving *tzedakah* is considered as if he has sacrificed his life. The above story about Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon illustrates that Rabbi Akiva acted along these lines. Notwithstanding, all his life, he continually agonized over whether his intentions in sacrificing his soul for Hashem were perfect. In light of this, what should we say?

The gradual progression of *tzara'at* discussed in this parashah teaches us two important lessons (*Rambam, Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10). First, (*Mishlei* 3:12), "For Hashem admonishes the one He loves." If troubles come upon

a person, he should view them as a sign from Heaven that Hashem loves him. Therefore, he should accept them with joy and not spurn them, thereby fulfilling (*Devarim* 6:5) "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources."

The second principle is that the purpose of *tzara'at* and affliction is to cause a person to rectify his sin (*Tanchuma, Metzora* 4). When one sees the affliction spreading over his house, on his clothes, and on his flesh, he should not ignore them. Instead, immediately upon identifying the affliction, he should go to the Kohen, in order to receive guidance on how to do teshuvah and achieve atonement. If a person ignores the signals that Hashem is sending him, he is liable to deteriorate spiritually until he loses his *tzelem Elokim*. He will ultimately have to sit in isolation outside the camp.

In Summary

- *Tzara'at* is an affliction that purifies a person from his sin. This is the reason for the juxtaposition of parashat *Tazria*, which discusses the mitzvah of *milah*, to parashat *Metzorah*. Just as *brit milah* connects the infant to the covenant of Avraham Avinu with Hashem, likewise *tzara'at* purifies a person and reconnects him to Hashem.
- *Tzara'at* does not appear immediately upon a person's flesh. It spreads progressively. A person must awaken to doing teshuvah upon the first signs of the affliction in order to avoid worse punishment.
- When the students of Rabbi Akiva saw their teacher accepting the yoke of Heaven with great joy as he died, they asked him to what extent must one give up his life joyfully. Rabbi Akiva explained to them that all his life he agonized whether he would be able to fulfill the verse "You shall love Hashem, your G-d… with all your soul" with the proper intentions, sacrificing his life in sanctification of Hashem's Name, or whether his recitation was only lip service. However, when the opportunity to sacrifice his life presented itself, and he, indeed, accepted the decree with love, he was overjoyed with the confirmation that his intentions when reciting this pasuk had always been absolutely sincere.

♦ It says, "For Hashem admonishes the one He loves." Therefore, a person should accept the affliction of *tzara'at* and all other troubles with love. He should realize that suffering comes upon a person in order to arouse him to do teshuvah. Because of Hashem's love of him, He presents him with the opportunity to awaken and draw close to Him.

The Rectification for Lashon Hara

"The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop"

(*Vayikra* 14:4)

Rashi expounds that a bird was brought as a sacrifice measure for measure. A person is punished with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon hara.* This is an act of verbal twittering, thus, in order to purify him, he must bring a sacrifice of birds, which constantly twitter and chirp.

When a person speaks *lashon hara* and defames his fellow, his rectification is death. This is measure for measure. Since he slandered his fellow, who possesses the image of Hashem, embarrassing him and causing this image to vanish, likewise, Hashem removes His image from him.

Death does not refer to literal death. The Ba'al Shem Tov, zy"a, explains the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 14:9) "Their shadow has departed from them," which is also discussed in the sefer *Degel Machaneh Ephraim* (*Parashat Shelach*), that Hashem is the shadow of a person, escorting him wherever he goes, and protecting him from harm. When Hashem removes His

shadow from a person, the destructive forces are able to damage him. Who can guarantee the fate of a person who speaks *lashon hara*?

In truth, one who speaks disparagingly about his fellow causes him to lose favor with people. Measure for measure, Hashem brings upon the person that spoke offensively afflictions that serve to distance people from him. He is also obligated to dwell in isolation outside the camp. Just as he caused his fellow isolation by the damaging words that he said while defaming him, and caused him to become distant from people, so too, he is obligated to dwell in isolation outside all three camps (*Arachin* 16b).

The Gemara (*Ketubot* 112b) says that in the generation that Mashiach will come there will be prosecution against Torah scholars. Rashi explains that the wicked people of the generation will rise against them and falsely accuse them. At this time, the tzaddikim will suffer harsh decrees and suffer meager conditions of "eating bread with salt and drinking measured amounts of water." The wicked people will add to their suffering by mocking them.

The Gemara concludes that in the future, even the barren trees will grow fruit. Tosafot explains that this is in order that it should end off on a positive note. Therefore, it informed us of the wonderful event that in the future the barren trees will change the course of their nature and grow fruit. However, we may wonder, why did Hashem decree that in the future there will be many troubles and hardships for the Torah scholars, and they will have to suffer shame and degradation from evil people? It seems that in the generation prior to the coming of Mashiach it would have been fitting if Hashem would open the eyes of the people and instill in their hearts appreciation and esteem for the Torah scholars. What is the purpose of the disgrace and accusations that tzaddikim will suffer precisely during the times that love and peace should reign?

In addition, why does the Gemara conclude specifically with the happy tiding about the barren trees giving fruit? Any other good news would have been appropriate, such as the promise that Hashem would

return His *Shechinah* to dwell among Am Yisrael in an obvious manner. Why did the Gemara choose this specific example?

In order to resolve these issues, I will first relate what I heard from my friend Rabbi David Levi, who heard it from Rabbi Nissim Rebibo, ztk"l. He asks why Hashem is so exacting with one who speaks *lashon hara*, to the extent of labeling him one who "defames" others. In most cases, a person says derogatory things about his fellow that are true. Therefore, it is perplexing why Hashem judges the slanderer so strictly, afflicting him with *tzara'at* and obligating him to dwell in isolation outside the camp.

The Rav explains that the Torah is exacting with the person who speaks *lashon hara* because he should have attempted to view his fellow's actions in a positive light, even though they seemed unacceptable. There is a proverb that sums it up: "There are two sides to every coin." This indicates that every situation can be assessed in two ways, either positively or negatively. The way a person perceives an action is dependent on how he looks upon his fellow and what he thinks of him. If a person feels that his fellow did something wrong, it is because he does not like him, or because he is jealous of him. If he would truly love his fellow and appreciate him, he would attempt to judge him favorably. However, because of his prior prejudice against him, all his fellow's actions seem lacking.

Thus, even though he did not fabricate the scene that he witnessed, he should have tried to view his fellow's actions in a positive light. His negative speech was the result of his choosing to disparage his fellow. Since he did not consciously seek to justify him, the Torah blames him for defaming him. This is the explanation that Rabbi Rebibo offered.

According to this, we can explain the following. Hashem created His world with the Attribute of Truth. This is hinted to by the first three words of the Torah: the last letters of the words **בראשית ברא אלוקים** (In the beginning of G-d's creating) form the word **אמת** (truth) (see *Ba'al Haturim, Bereishit* 1:1; *Megaleh Amukot, Va'etchanan* 96). Similarly, it says (*Tehillim* 85:12), "Truth will sprout from the earth." This signifies that the

earth is founded upon the Attribute of Truth because it the very basis for the world. It was Hashem Who created the world, and Hashem's seal is truth (*Yoma* 69b).

The world is created in perfect harmony. This is because Hashem is the epitome of truth, and He created the world with the Attribute of Truth. Therefore, every creation comprising the world is in essence entirely flawless. If a person cannot appreciate its perfection, and he thinks that it is lacking, it is only because his outlook is not correct, which causes him to assess reality in a negative way. Thus, everything is dependent upon one's outlook. A person should work on improving his viewpoint and his character traits in order to be able to perceive the world truthfully, as it was created by Hashem.

The Gemara recounts the following story. The daughter of the Emperor asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah, who was a great Torah scholar and highly respected in the royal palace, why he was not blessed with beauty. She felt that it would be befitting of his great wisdom to be clothed in a handsome body. It was inappropriate for such brilliant wisdom to reside in an ugly exterior.

Rabbi Yehoshua explained to her that his beauty could be compared to expensive wine. Normally wine is stored in earthen barrels and not in vessels of gold. This is because the simple earthen barrels preserve the wine's taste and even improve it. The golden vessels not only do not improve its taste, but also cause the wine to turn sour. Rabbi Yehoshua countered that similarly his wisdom is better preserved within an ugly exterior. This is because his external appearance prevents him from becoming haughty about his wisdom. Since Hashem recognizes the nature of man and wanted Rabbi Yehoshua's wisdom to endure, He created His wise scholar with an ugly body.

In a similar vein, the Gemara tells about the incident when Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon chanced upon an ugly person. He asked him why he was so unbecoming. He was surprised that this man's face was not beautiful and perfect, since Hashem created everything with the Attribute

of Truth and with absolute perfection. The man answered him, "Go ask the One Who created me why He created me in this way." A person notices only what his eyes see, since a person sees with optical vision. But Hashem sees through one's heart. Therefore, if Hashem created a specific person unbecoming, it indicates that it is the most appropriate and ideal way for him to appear. It is only because of our shortsightedness that we do not always succeed in comprehending the reason for things.

When Rabbi Elazar heard the man's response, he immediately concluded that it was possible that Hashem created the man ugly because his conduct was contemptible. Hashem created him with an ugly exterior in order that his despicable actions should not influence others to follow in his ways, by repelling people so that they should not be drawn to him. This was a manifestation of supreme compassion by protecting them from sinning. Thus, everything just depends on how one looks at it.

Hashem created man righteous and honest. However, man chooses to ruin and flaw his ways by being drawn to corruption. Instead of seeing the truth and perfection in the world, he chooses the path of falsity and notices the negative aspects while ignoring the positive ones, as it says (*Kohelet* 7:29), "G-d has made man simple, but they sought many intrigues."

We see clearly how people distort truth until it seems to them that falsity is truth. Man is ultimately blamed for not perceiving the truth, because he turns falsity to truth and goes in its path.

It says in *Niddah* (30b) that before a person comes down to this world, he is made to swear that he will be a tzaddik and not a rasha. This is surprising. At that time, a person does not possess a *Yetzer Hara*. How can he be obligated to swear that he will be a tzaddik when the *Yetzer Hara* does not exist within him, and he has no idea how powerful and enticing his evil inclination is? In fact, it seems unfair to make man swear that he will cling to the proper path when he is on an exalted and pure level and does not know what he will have to cope with in this world. After

all, the World to Come is entirely blissful and there is no struggle with the *Yetzer Hara* there.

The Torah and all its mitzvot are considered an oath. Therefore, when the Torah states a positive command or a negative command, they are considered vows. For this reason, the festival of the Giving of the Torah is called *Shavuot* (swearing). This is because the Torah is considered a pledge. Before a person's *neshamah* descends to this world, it is told to cleave to the holy Torah. In reality, this is considered as if he was made to swear by it, since the commandments of the Torah are considered vows. In the World to Come, a person does not engage in idle speech but speaks only words of Torah. Therefore, he is warned to swear by the oath of the Torah, which signifies that he is obligated to fulfill the mitzvot of the Torah and avoid transgressing its prohibitions. This is because the very same mouth that does not engage in the study of Torah will ultimately speak *lashon hara* about his fellow and even about Hashem, *rachmana litzlan*.

Disregarding one's obligation to study Torah causes the *Shechinah* to depart from him. If he speaks *lashon hara* about Bnei Yisrael, he thereby obliterates the image of Hashem from them. Even if he says critical words which are true, since his words cause the listener to scorn the person spoken about, and often cause him to add his own words of criticism to what he heard, the words spoken are no longer words of truth and are considered defamation. When the words circulate, every additional person who hears them adds their own disparaging words, until they are not considered true at all and are rendered words of defamation.

The slanderer is punished with *tzara'at* because of the pleasure that he had in relating the derogatory information about his friend. After all, if it would not cause him pleasure, he would not judge his friend's actions in a negative way. Moreover, he would not hurry to speak derisively about him. The word עונג (pleasure) shares the same letters as the word נגע (affliction). This indicates that he is repaid measure for measure. Because of the pleasure (עונג) that he had in speaking disparagingly, he is afflicted with the affliction (נגע) of *tzara'at*.

In addition, the word נגע (affliction) is composed of the letters ג' נע (three – in motion). This signifies that there are three partners involved in the transgression of *lashon hara*: the speaker, the listener, and the one spoken about. All three are left unsettled as a result of the slander. Either it is because of the shame and degradation suffered by the victim or because of the punishment of exile imposed upon the one who transgresses.

The Torah was given to man in order that he should engage in its study and not be involved in vanity and *lashon hara*. This is why a person must fix a *mezuzah* on the doorpost of his house. If a person does not dedicate himself entirely to Torah, he can easily sin and speak *lashon hara*. Ultimately, he will be punished by being obligated to uproot himself and go into exile. When we separate the word מזוזה (mezuzah) into two words, we get the words מה - זוז (move – *mah*). The word מה shares the same numerical value as the word אדם (man). This is because the mezuzah constantly reminds a person to "move" to the rhythm of Torah in order that he should not ultimately be obligated to move out of his home into exile.

It is important to recall that the Jews were exiled in Egypt because of *lashon hara*. The brothers of Yosef spoke *lashon hara* about him because Yosef spoke unfavorably about them to his father (*Bereishit* 37:2). Yosef was condemned to exile because he did not judge his brothers favorably, but instead viewed their actions negatively. Since Hashem is exacting with tzaddikim to a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b), it was considered as if Yosef had pleasure in relating to his father his brothers' unfavorable conduct. Therefore, they were punished with exile and suffering.

Bnei Yisrael were not redeemed from Egypt until they slaughtered the idol of the Egyptians and smeared the blood of the sheep on the doorpost, which is the place of the *mezuzah*. This symbolized that they were finally prepared to accept upon themselves to move (זוז) in rhythm only to the study of Torah.

Yeshayahu Hanavi accused Bnei Yisrael before Hashem and said (*Yeshayahu* 6:5), "And I dwell among a people with impure lips." Since he related unfavorable information about the Jewish people to Hashem, he was punished that his grandson Menashe killed him with his words (*Yevamot* 49b). We may wonder about this; did Yeshayahu not say the truth? We could not even consider that he would lie about Bnei Yisrael to Hashem. Yeshayahu intended to say that Bnei Yisrael defiled their mouths by stopping to learn Torah and engaging in vanity and *lashon hara*. Consequently, they were exiled. Although Yeshayahu spoke words of truth, he was punished for his words, and Hashem judged him exactingly for not seeking to view Am Yisrael in a favorable manner.

The generation of King Achav merited extraordinary protection. His soldiers would return in peace from every battle, despite being idol worshipers. On the other hand, the soldiers of Shaul Hamelech died in battle despite being tzaddikim and Torah scholars. Chazal (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:9) explain that Hashem judged them exactingly and condemned them to death. In contrast, the people in the generation of King Achav were very careful in honoring their fellow by not speaking unfavorably about them despite worshipping idols. Therefore, Hashem granted them special protection, and they merited returning in peace from battle.

We see how repulsive the sin of *lashon hara* is to Hashem. While Hashem forgoes His own honor and grants protection to idol worshippers, He does not forgo the honor of Bnei Yisrael, His children. Hashem punishes those who speak *lashon hara* about others. Yeshayahu witnessed the people of his generation worshipping idols and neglecting the study of Torah. In addition, they also engaged in *lashon hara*, which is regarded severely and repulsively by Hashem. Yeshayahu worried about the future of his generation and feared that they would be condemned to death, as were the soldiers of Shaul Hamelech who fell in battle. Therefore, he turned to Hashem to decry the appalling conduct of Bnei Yisrael.

Hashem revealed His wrath and anger to Yeshayahu regarding his accusations. Hashem explained to him that Bnei Yisrael's scandalous

behavior was clear to Him. In fact, it was incumbent upon Yeshayahu, as Bnei Yisrael's prophet, to attempt to justify their conduct, in order not to arouse the Attribute of Justice upon them. When the Heavenly Courts witness Am Yisrael behaving corruptly and going in the ways of the foreign nations, they resolve to punish them. However, before executing judgment, they must first obtain the consent of the courts on earth. The courts below must agree with the punishment decreed upon Am Yisrael, which would atone for their sins.

During the days of Yeshayahu, the Attribute of Justice was drawn over Bnei Yisrael. The Heavenly Courts had already decided that they deserved severe punishment for departing from the ways of the Torah and mitzvot. They were also held accountable for speaking *lashon hara*, which is equivalent to the three cardinal sins of idol worship, murder, and immorality. When Yeshayahu turned to Hashem and said (*Yeshayahu* 6:5), "And I dwell among a people with impure lips," although his intentions were pure, ultimately his words served as a consent of the courts below that Am Yisrael had, indeed, deteriorated spiritually and were deserving of punishment. Hashem was angry with Yeshayahu because his words served as a confirmation of the earthly courts to Bnei Yisrael's sins, arousing accusation against them at this most difficult time, when they were in desperate need of having the Attribute of Mercy aroused upon them.

This teaches us how important it is to justify the conduct of our fellows. We should not rush and judge them unfavorably because we do not know what is decreed upon them by the Heavenly Courts. It is possible that our negative thoughts and speech will serve as confirmation of the courts below. Thus, it would give the destructive forces the permission to cause harm, *rachmana litzlan*.

Sefarim kedoshim say (*Shemot Rabbah* 46:1) that the Torah is compared to a *ketubah* between Hashem and Am Yisrael. Hashem is like the *chatan* (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 40), and Am Yisrael is like the *kallah* (ibid.) The Torah binds them. When Am Yisrael engage in Torah and it is the focus of their lives, Hashem commits Himself to sustain and support them so

that they can continue studying Torah. This is because it is the *chatan's* responsibility to support his *kallah*, as he pledges under the chuppah, "And I will support and sustain, etc."

Before the coming of Mashiach, the world will undergo a sorting by Hashem. This is similar to the situation in the past when the call was sounded (*Shemot* 32:26), "Whoever is for Hashem, to me!" The sorting will be in order to determine who are the ones that adhered to the Torah and will merit inheriting eternity and rising at the resurrection. Therefore, specifically in the generation prior to the coming of Mashiach, when Mashiach will reveal himself to Bnei Yisrael, the *Yetzer Hara* for *lashon hara* is immense. The transgression of *lashon hara* is so severe that the Torah considers one who slanders as if he violated the three cardinal sins.

It is painful to note that the most accepted *lashon hara* is the slander of Torah scholars. People stray from the path of Torah and mitzvot by arguing that if Torah scholars behave in an unacceptable manner, the Torah they teach is not credible. Once the leaders of Torah are discredited, their guidance in Torah will be discredited as well. The *Yetzer Hara*, in his craftiness, devises devious plans to trap people in his net. He expends great efforts in causing people to slander Torah scholars.

Am Yisrael was scattered in exile as a result of baseless hatred and *lashon hara*. (*Chafetz Chaim*, Introduction). The rectification for this is fostering unconditional love and reinforcing peace and harmony between man and his fellow. This is the reason why the *Yetzer Hara* tries with all his might to prevent improvement in this area. By instigating feud, especially just before Mashiach comes, he succeeds in delaying the redemption.

In light of this, we can resolve our question of why the Gemara chooses to conclude that, in the future, the barren trees will bear fruit. This serves to admonish the wicked people who spoke disparagingly about Torah scholars. Even though they considered Torah scholars to be like barren trees, the truth is not so. The Torah scholars are, and always were, the

tree of life, full of luscious fruit. In the future, everyone will see clearly that those trees, which refer to the Torah scholars, are full of fruit and not barren, as they are accused of being by the wicked.

In order that this message is transmitted in a tangible manner, the barren trees will truly begin to grow fruit. It will symbolize to Am Yisrael that all the accusations of the resha'im, blaming tzaddikim for learning Torah only for their pleasure, is based on lies. In fact, the tzaddikim are like fruit trees in every respect. Even though they were compared to barren trees, everyone will witness that they are truly "trees of life," giving fruit.

In Summary

- The rectification for one who embarrasses his fellow, who was created in the image of Hashem, is that Hashem removes His image from him. Consequently, the person is considered dead. One who speaks *lashon hara* causes his victim to lose favor with others. For this reason, one who slanders is afflicted with *tzara'at*. Consequently, he loses favor with people and is obligated to dwell in isolation outside the camp.
- At the end of *masechet Ketubot* it states that in the days preceding Mashiach's arrival, the resha'im of the generation will unfairly accuse the tzaddikim. Thereafter, the Gemara concludes with the happy tiding that in the future the barren trees will give fruit. We might think that precisely in the days prior to Mashiach's arrival it would be more appropriate for the resha'im to recognize the righteousness of the tzaddikim instead of slandering them. Also, it is perplexing why the Gemara concludes specifically with the message that the barren trees will give fruit.
- We may wonder why the Torah is exacting with one who speaks *lashon hara*, since his words are true. Moreover, why is he considered as one who defames his fellow? The reason is because there are two sides to every coin. Everything can be viewed either in a negative way or in a positive way. If a person chooses to see the negative aspects of his friend, it proves that he is envious of him. Therefore, the Torah is exacting with his

judgment and considers his words defamation. He could have focused on the positive side of his fellow. Because he thought negatively, it is considered as if he defamed him.

- Hashem created the world with the Attribute of Truth. If a person sees flaws in Hashem's creations, it indicates that the flaw is within him and not in that Creation, which has been formed with precision and reflects absolute truth.

- Before a person descends to this world, he is made to swear that he will adhere to the oath of the Torah, which is absolute truth. When a person speaks *lashon hara*, he violates his oath. The exile of the Jews in Egypt was caused by the *lashon hara* of Yosef's brothers about him. Their rectification was to be slaves in Egypt and thereafter slaughter a sheep and smear its blood on the doorpost (מזוזה). This was in order to remind them to move (לזוז) to the rhythm of the Torah, in which it states, "You shall not go about gossiping among your people."

- Yeshayahu Hanavi told Hashem, "And I dwell among a people with impure lips." For this he was punished that his grandson, Menashe, killed him through his words. Hashem was exacting with Yeshayahu despite the truth of his words and his having good intentions. This is because he should have attempted to notice the favorable aspects of the people. This was especially important because at that time the Attribute of Justice was drawn over Am Yisrael, and Yeshayahu's words served to confirm the accusations of the Heavenly Court against them, thereby sealing their fate.

- Since the reparation for baseless hatred is unconditional love, the *Yetzer Hara* tries with all his might to obstruct this love by persuading people to gossip, especially about Torah scholars. This is the reason why in the End of Days, the *resha'im* of the generation will increase their accusations against the scholars.

- The Gemara concludes with the message that the barren trees will give fruit, since the resha'im mock the Torah scholars that they are purposeless, like the barren tree. Hashem will prove to them that their accusations are unfounded and the scholars are actually laden with fruit, which signify

their many good deeds. In order to demonstrate this point, at the End of Days, the barren trees will actually give fruit.

The Purification Process of the Metzora

"The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar wood, a crimson [tongue of] wool, and hyssop. The Kohen shall command; and the one bird shall be slaughtered into an earthenware vessel over spring water. The live bird, he shall take it and the cedar wood and the crimson [tongue of] wool and the hyssop, and he shall dip them and the live bird into the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the spring water. Then he shall sprinkle seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara'at; he shall purify him, and he shall set the live bird free upon the open fields"

(*Vayikra* 14:4-7)

The *Metzora* had to come before the Kohen and perform the following procedure of purification. The *metzora* brought to the Kohen two birds, cedar wood, a tongue of crimson wool, and hyssop. The Kohen slaughtered one of the birds and placed some of its blood in an earthenware vessel containing spring water. Afterwards, the Kohen dipped the crimson wool, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the live bird in it. He then sprinkled this mixture upon the *metzora* seven times. He would set the live bird free.

Certainly, the secrets of the Torah are known to Hashem, and we cannot fully understand why the *metzora* was purified in this way. However, with our limited understanding, we may try to explain why the Torah commanded that the purification of the *metzora* should be accomplished by slaughtering a bird and sprinkling its blood seven times on the *metzora*. Also, why does the Torah command that the live bird should be dipped in the blood of the slaughtered bird? This surely causes the bird distress, and seems to contradict the injunction not to be cruel to animals (see *Bava Metzia* 32b).

Why is the living bird set free after dipping it into the blood? Also, it is perplexing why the blood of the slaughtered bird was mixed with the living water in an earthenware vessel. Whichever way one views this subject, he will be stumped, and the hidden secrets exceed the explanations.

We may shed some light on the subject in the following manner. A person who speaks *lashon hara* against his fellow and defames him is considered as if he spilled his blood while enjoying doing so. He gained honor by degrading his fellow. A person who transgresses with *lashon hara* is afflicted with *tzara'at*. The rectification of the *metzora* is to go to the Kohen to determine if he is either *tamei*, obligating him to remain isolated for seven days outside the camp, or if he is clean and pure. After seven days, the *metzora* has to again be in contact with the Kohen, because only he has the authority to determine if the *tzara'at* disappeared from his body completely.

The Torah intentionally commands the *metzora* to come before the Kohen, as opposed to visiting a doctor, a halachic authority, or a member of Sanhedrin. This is because it was part of the Kohen's job to receive gifts and *terumot* from the people. This may have aroused jealousy, which could lead to offensive thoughts about the Kohen. Likewise, when a person sins and offers an animal as a sin-offering in the Beit Hamikdash, he came in contact with a Kohen. This contact was unpleasant, and may also have caused him to think negatively about the Kohen. Even though the person did not verbalize his thoughts, he got accustomed to thinking

derogatory thoughts about those around him, which ultimately led him to speak degradingly about his fellow. Thus, going to the Kohen helps the person realize the source of his sin.

The *metzora* brings two birds to the Kohen in order to remind him that his behavior is compared to a bird that twitters and flits from place to place, chasing its friends and pecking at them. While the bird pecks at its fellow bird, it continues its incessant chatter, totally oblivious to its fellow's pain. This is similar to one who speaks offensively about his friend, robbing him of his honor while ignoring his pain and trampling his feelings. The Kohen slaughters the bird in front of the *metzora* in order to hint to him that through his derogatory speech he similarly robbed his friend of his honor and spilled his blood. We are taught that whoever embarrasses his fellow is considered as if he spilled his blood (*Bava Metzia* 58b).

Afterwards, the Kohen dips the living bird in the blood of the slaughtered fowl. This is in order to hint to the *metzora* that although he is now purified and free, the man that he slandered remains destroyed. This is symbolized by the living bird being dipped in the blood of its fellow and afterwards flying off freely over the fields. Sometimes the offensive words are so damaging that they cause extensive harm to the victim, making his life miserable. While the person who spoke *lashon hara* became entirely healed from his *tzara'at* and returned to his routine schedule, his fellow continues to suffer and to wallow in his blood that was spilled as a result of his friend's damaging words.

The Ramban explains (on *Vayikra* 1:9) that the purpose of bringing the *korban* is in order to arouse the person that this is what was meant to be done to him. However, because of Hashem's infinite compassion, the *korban* is sacrificed instead of him. Likewise, when the *metzora* observes how the bird is dipped in its fellow bird's blood and thereafter is set free, it makes an impact on him, and he resolves never to speak *lashon hara* again.

My esteemed brother, Rabbi Yaakov Pinto, shlita, related to me the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Shemot* 29) explaining that Bnei Yisrael are compared to a dove. Just as a bird without wings cannot fly, likewise, Bnei Yisrael cannot progress without a Rabbi to guide them. This is the reason the living bird is set free. It causes a person to reflect that if he speaks derisively about his fellow, it demonstrates that he departed from the teachings of the Torah scholars, distancing himself from them. When a person sees the living bird flying with its wings outstretched, he is reminded that he must be attached to Torah scholars, who are compared to the wings of a bird, since a bird without its wings cannot succeed in flying.

We may add that if a person is attached to his Rabbi and follows in his ways, he will not decline to the level of speaking *lashon hara* and being afflicted with *tzara'at*. Therefore, the *metzora* is brought specifically to the Kohen to decide his status. This reminds a person that he must be attached to tzaddikim and learn from them how to perfect his Avodat Hashem. By observing their actions, he learns to avoid speaking *lashon hara*, for which he was afflicted with *tzara'at*.

We should not assume that the process done to the bird reflects cruelty to animals, since our Compassionate Father ordered us to perform it. Therefore, one should not doubt it at all. This is similar to what we learn regarding the *korbanot* of Yom Kippur. While one he-goat was sacrificed as a *korban* for Hashem, the other he-goat was sent to *Azazel*. The Kohen pacifies the he-goat by telling it that it is fulfilling the will of Hashem. Hashem commanded us to do this in order to arouse people to do teshuvah for their misdeeds, since whatever was done to the he-goat should really have been done to the one who transgressed.

The Kohen would place the blood of the slaughtered bird specifically in an earthenware vessel, since earthenware symbolizes humility. Likewise, the *metzora* subjugates himself to the Kohen when coming to him for purification. Another reason why earthenware is used is that when earthenware is defiled it is impossible to purify it through *tevilah*, torch fire, or other methods. It can only be broken in order to become purified

(*Keilim* 2a). This signifies that a person must break his negative character traits and thus be saved in the future from sin.

The Kohen mixes the blood with the spring water, since water is compared to the Torah, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 55:1), "Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water." Chazal (*Bava Kama* 17a) say that water refers to the Torah. This is meant to inform the *metzora* that since he sinned with *lashon hara*, it is a sign that he was lacking in his Torah study and had not learned with the requisite humility and dedication. The Torah brings one to positive action. If he spoke disparagingly about his friend, displaying lack of sensitivity to his feelings, it proves that his Torah was lacking in some way. A person should correct this lack by dipping himself in spring water, which is an allusion to the study of Torah. In this way he will remove the "blood," referring to the shame of his friend that is attributed to him.

The cedar wood hints to the important people. This is because it was expensive wood that was imported from Lebanon. Kings used this wood to build their palaces. On the other hand, the hyssop alludes to the common people. Just as the hyssop grows wherever there is moisture and is not confined to a specific area of growth, so too, common people are found everywhere.

The Torah teaches us that after 120 years of a person's life, it does not matter at all if the person was prominent or just a simple man. In the end, his body is destined to be buried in the ground where worms will consume his flesh. Therefore, he has no reason to become haughty and speak disparagingly about his fellow. This is why the Torah commanded to also bring a tongue of crimson wool. This wool is referred to as תולעת שני, which is literally translated as a "worm" of wool. It hints to the worms that will consume the body of a person in his grave. Therefore, one should not dominate over his fellows, gaining honor by disgracing them.

In this essay, we attempted to elucidate some of the lessons learned from the purification process of the *metzora*. However, there are many more deep mystic secrets about this subject.

In Summary

- There are many extraordinary procedures concerning the purification of the *metzora*. First of all, why is a bird slaughtered and its blood sprinkled seven times? Why is the living bird dipped in the blood of the slaughtered bird? This seems like cruelty to animals. Why is the living bird set free? What is the point in mixing the blood of the slaughtered bird with spring water? Why does the defiled person have to come specifically to the Kohen and not go to another Torah authority? Without doubt, we do not fully understand the words of the Torah, but we may attempt to explain this subject.
- The Torah commands that the purification be done via the Kohen, since the Kohen would receive gifts from the nation. Often, a person would feel pangs of envy for the Kohen. Thinking negatively about his fellow is what ultimately leads one to speak *lashon hara*. Therefore, his rectification is executed only by the Kohen.
- The purification process required two birds to indicate that just as birds twitter and peck at one another, likewise, the slanderer behaves in this way as well. One bird was slaughtered, and the other bird was set free to signify that the one who spoke *lashon hara* spilled his fellow's blood and continued on his merry way. Therefore, the living bird is dipped in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered so that the person should realize that the blood of his fellow was spilled because of him.
- Another reason for setting the bird free is that Bnei Yisrael are compared to a dove. The dove can fly only because it possesses wings. The wings of Bnei Yisrael are their Torah scholars, because without the Torah scholars it is impossible to advance spiritually. A person who distances himself from Torah scholars will end up speaking *lashon hara*.
- The Kohen places the water in an earthenware vessel, which symbolizes humility, since there is no method to purify earthenware other than breaking it. This indicates that a person who sins should correct his character traits by becoming humble, breaking the trait of arrogance. Humility prevents a person from speaking *lashon hara*.

♦ The reason for the spring water is that the Torah is compared to water. This implies that lack of Torah causes a person to sin.

The Purpose of Tzara'at

"When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzara'at affliction upon a house in the land of your possession"

(*Vayikra* 14:34)

Upon entering Eretz Yisrael, Bnei Yisrael were commanded about the issue of *tzara'at*. A person who saw his house afflicted would call the Kohen to decide if the affliction was indeed *tzara'at*. If the Kohen would decide that the house was afflicted with *tzara'at*, it would have to be demolished completely. Its stones would be carried to a distant area and would be declared impure. Rashi adds that, ultimately, this was a happy tiding for Am Yisrael. This is because when the house would be demolished, they would discover the treasures that the Amorites had hidden before Am Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael. The Amorites assumed that they were abandoning their houses temporarily and that they would eventually return to their homes. Therefore, they hid their treasures in the walls of their houses, in the hope that they would later reclaim them.

This is perplexing. Surely, if the purpose of *tzara'at* was in order to uncover the treasures of the Amorites, then upon discovering the affliction on his house, every person would immediately have demolished his home even before calling the Kohen, in the hope of finding treasures in the walls.

The reason for *tzara'at* was in order to arouse a person to do teshuvah for the transgression of *lashon hara*. First, the affliction would appear in the walls of his house. If he did not do teshuvah, then it would spread to his clothes. If he still did not do complete teshuvah, then the *tzara'at* would afflict his flesh (*Rambam, Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10).

This is confusing. What is the purpose of *tzara'at*? Is it in order to arouse a person to teshuvah for sinning with *lashon hara*, or is it in order to uncover the hidden treasures?

The Torah deals with caution concerning the money of a Jew. For example, the moment a person suspected that his house was afflicted with *tzara'at*, even before calling the Kohen, he had to remove his furniture and belongings from his house, especially earthenware vessels. This is because if earthenware becomes *tamei,* it cannot be purified, but must be broken. Since the Torah is careful with a Jew's money, upon the first signs of *tzara'at*, a person was commanded to remove his belongings from his house before it was too late (*Nega'im* 12:5).

Precisely because the Torah is cautious with a Jew's money, we may deduce that the main point of *tzara'at* was not in order to find treasures. If this was the case, every person would have hurried to destroy the walls of his home. It is possible that in the end he would have come up with no treasure and would also have lost his house.

The purpose of *tzara'at* is to awaken people to the devastation of *lashon hara*. However, it is the way of Hashem to lavish abundance and blessing upon those who follow in His ways. As compensation for following the laws of *tzara'at*, which may have caused them monetary loss, and rectifying their misdeeds, Hashem rewarded Bnei Yisrael with treasures.

One should not confuse issues of secondary importance with those that are of primary importance. The primary goal of *tzara'at* is meant to bring a person to do teshuvah for his sin of *lashon hara*. As a secondary consideration, Hashem disclosed the good tiding concerning the treasures. Certainly, not everyone was worthy of receiving the treasures.

Only one who truly feared Hashem and adhered to the Torah would be rewarded accordingly.

In Summary

- One who speaks *lashon hara* is afflicted with *tzara'at*. Rashi comments that after one's house is afflicted and he consequently demolishes it, he will find treasures in its walls. Why does he merit this?
- Certainly, the primary purpose of demolishing the house is because of the *tumah* of *tzara'at*. This serves as a punishment for one who slanders. Notwithstanding, Hashem arranges that he should then find the treasures hidden by the Amorites as compensation.

The Connection between Parashat Metzora and Shabbat Hagadol

Parashat *Metzora* is generally read close to Shabbat Hagadol. What is the connection between them? In addition, why is the Shabbat preceding the Seder Night called Shabbat Hagadol? There are other Shabbatot that are also great and important, such as Shabbat Shuvah. What is special about Shabbat Hagadol?

On this Shabbat a great miracle was performed for Bnei Yisrael. They tied a sheep, which was the idol of the Egyptians, to the foot of their beds and intended to slaughter it. They did so despite the wrath of the Egyptians, who wielded their spears to strike Bnei Yisrael for desecrating their idol and preparing to slaughter it. Miraculously, the Egyptians became paralyzed, unable to harm Am Yisrael (*Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 5:17). Upon reflection, it was an extraordinary miracle that Am Yisrael, who were still enslaved by the Egyptians, were saved from their sword

and were not harmed, despite informing the Egyptians that they intended to slaughter their idols.

When Bnei Yisrael perceived the great miracle done for them, they were filled with gratitude to Hashem, Who saved them from the hands of the evil Egyptians. Despite still being under their authority, they merited being saved from their wrath with Divine intervention. Because of their overwhelming gratitude to Hashem for the tremendous miracle that He wrought for them, and their tremendous love for Him, Bnei Yisrael were inspired to draw close to Hashem. Their *emunah* and love of Hashem were so great at that time that they even followed Hashem into the Wilderness, into an unsown land (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). From where did Am Yisrael draw their strength to follow Hashem into the Wilderness, a parched land with no water? It was in the merit of Shabbat Hagadol, on which a great miracle was performed for them, when the Egyptians did not succeed in harming them.

This was the turning point in Am Yisrael's relationship with Hashem, and this is why Shabbat Hagadol is called by this unique name. It was the catalyst to bring Am Yisrael close to Hashem, while casting off all traces of idol worship. This ultimately enabled them to disengage from the forty-nine levels of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Parashat Yitro*) and become elevated to the forty-nine levels of purity (*Zohar* III, 97a). Then they were able to receive the Torah and enter Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat Hagadol is a preparation for Pesach and serves as a spiritual springboard for the entire year. This is alluded to in the name "Pesach" which denotes a leap forward and progress. The Shabbat prior to Pesach is the beginning of this advancement and spiritual ascent. The Ben Ish Chai says (*Shana Sheniyah, Shemot*) that Shabbat was given to Am Yisrael for the purpose of learning Torah. One cannot compare the Torah learned on Shabbat, without distractions, to the Torah learned in the weekday, when people are occupied with their business. When Shabbat enters, it brings with it serenity. Therefore, the Torah learned on Shabbat possesses a supreme quality, and its influence is felt throughout the entire week. An ordinary Shabbat has the capacity to elevate a person to

great heights through the study of Torah. All the more so, Shabbat Hagadol has the potential to sanctify and elevate a person, drawing him close to Hashem the entire year.

There are two main themes indicated by Shabbat. Shabbat has the message of unity. This is hinted to by the word שבת, which is the same word used in the pasuk, "שבת אחים גם יחד – The dwelling of brothers, moreover, in unity." This is why it is customary to greet one another on Shabbat with the words "שבת שלום – Shabbat Shalom." Second, the word שבת (Shabbat) is from the same root as the word ישיבה (dwelling). This indicates that on Shabbat one should dwell upon his behavior during the past week and examine his deeds to see what needs to be rectified. Since a person is free from business and other obligations on Shabbat, he should dedicate this day for the study of Torah (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 290b) and for self-examination.

Thus, Shabbat Hagadol, which is prior to Pesach, is a time of self-examination and awakening, since the essence of Pesach is to leap forward and advance in Avodat Hashem. On this Shabbat, one should evaluate if he made progress from the last Pesach to the present one, or if he regressed. A person does not remain stagnant. Either he becomes elevated, or he falls from his previous level. One should never leap forward, advancing in physical pursuits while regressing spiritually, *rachmana litzlan*.

When Am Yisrael celebrated Shabbat Hagadol, they progressed spiritually and were worthy of being freed, not only from slavery in Egypt, but also from being subject to the vanities of this world. By tying the idol of the Egyptians to their beds and afterwards offering it as a sacrifice, they disconnected from the idol worship of the Egyptians. The Shabbat Hagadol in Egypt, which served as a source for our spiritual awakening, continues to influence us every year. On this Shabbat it is necessary to conduct self-examination. This will ensure that we succeed in preserving the same spiritual awakening for the rest of the Shabbatot during the year. Thus, it will not remain a one-time event that occurred only in Egypt.

Shabbat Hagadol serves as an example of how we should utilize Shabbat for self-examination. This is in order to realize the inherent potential of Shabbat to achieve sanctification. When a person sanctifies himself on Shabbat Hagadol, his spiritual acquisition escorts him throughout the Shabbatot of the rest of the year. His reward is unimaginably great. In this way, a person becomes elevated in his *emunah*, as the word Pesach indicates. He leaps forward and makes great strides in his Avodat Hashem. By reflecting on the great miracles that Hashem performed for our forefathers in Egypt on Shabbat Hagadol, a person will become devoted to Hashem during the entire year.

Shabbat Hagadol occurs close to the time when parashat *Metzora* is read. This implies that if during all the Shabbatot of the year a person engages in the vanities of this world and gossips, he will certainly not be aroused on Shabbat Hagadol, which has the message of unity. However, if a person guards his mouth firmly throughout the year, and especially on Shabbat, when we are careful to increase unity by greeting others with "Shabbat Shalom," it will assist him to awaken spiritually on Shabbat Hagadol. This ultimately has the potential to influence his entire year.

Shabbat is a time of peace and tranquility. Unfortunately, there are those who do not take advantage of this day of rest in order to learn Torah with greater dedication and devotion. They seek to busy themselves with slander and gossip. Specifically because of their free time, their tongues roll loosely, and there is no one that escapes their tongue lashing. Therefore, parashat *Metzora* is read close to Shabbat Hagadol. It arouses people to examine their deeds and check themselves in how they spent their day of rest. Was it with renewed dedication to the study of Torah, or with *lashon hara* and gossip?

The seven days of the week correspond to the seven days in which a *metzora* dwells in isolation outside the camp. This signifies that when a person does not utilize the exclusive potentials of the week and of Shabbat, and does not conduct self-examination on Shabbat Hagadol by scrutinizing his deeds, he can deteriorate spiritually, ending up slandering his fellows. When a person speaks *lashon hara*, he is afflicted with *tzara'at*

and has to dwell in isolation outside the camp for seven days. These days have the potential to awaken him to the true purpose of Shabbat, which is the seventh day, and especially to the essence of Shabbat Hagadol.

By awakening on Shabbat Hagadol, a person will approach Pesach, which signifies a leap forward in Avodat Hashem, with sanctity and spiritual elevation. He will celebrate Pesach as a truly free man, uninhibited by all the vanities of this world. Therefore, a person who does not awaken on Shabbat Hagadol, will celebrate Pesach in a purely physical way, like common people, who eat, drink, and pursue physical pleasure without experiencing spiritual bliss. Our mission in this world is to burn from within our hearts the *chametz*, which symbolizes lust and physical pursuits. This is true not only on the eve of Pesach, but also during the entire year. Whoever does not awaken to this during the year should at least awaken and strengthen his convictions prior to Pesach, on Shabbat Hagadol. In this way he will be able to celebrate Pesach as a truly free man.

In Summary

- Parashat *Metzora* is generally read close to Shabbat Hagadol. What is the connection is between parashat *Metzora* and Shabbat Hagadol? Why is precisely the Shabbat prior to Pesach termed "Shabbat Hagadol"?
- Shabbat Hagadol is called by this name because of the great miracle that occurred on this day. Although Bnei Yisrael tied the idol of the Egyptians to the foot of their beds, intending to slaughter it, the Egyptians could not harm them. This Shabbat and the miracles that occurred on it were a turning point. They led Bnei Yisrael to seek Hashem's closeness.
- Shabbat Hagadol precedes Pesach, since it serves as a spiritual springboard for the *chag*, whose essence is leaping forward and advancing in Avodat Hashem. The Ben Ish Chai says that the Torah learned on Shabbat is of supreme quality. However, the quality of the study of Torah on Shabbat Hagadol is paramount.

- Shabbat Hagadol is a time of self-examination to check if we succeeded in preserving the inspiration of the original Shabbat Hagadol in Egypt. This is to insure that it does not remain just a one-time awakening. Likewise, a person who succeeds in awakening himself on this Shabbat and advancing spiritually enhances all subsequent Shabbatot of the year.
- The connection of Shabbat Hagadol to parashat *Metzora* is in order to arouse a person to examine how he utilized his day of rest. Was it for the purpose of learning Torah, or for speaking in a prohibited manner? If his mouth is engaged in *lashon hara*, it cannot absorb the *kedushah* of this Shabbat, which has the potential to enhance all the Shabbatot of the year.
- The seven days that a *metzora* is obligated to leave the camp correspond to the seventh day of Shabbat. This is meant to awaken one to utilize the *kedushah* of Shabbat, and especially the *kedushah* of Shabbat Hagadol.

Acharei Mot

Achieving Eternal Perfection

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:1-2)

The parshiyot *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* are contiguous. There is a proverb that people use regarding this order: "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)." This implies that after one dies, he is sanctified. This is because he is separated from his physical body and is not subject to its passions. As long as a person lives, his physical and spiritual aspects are intermingled, confusing him in his perception of good and evil. He is not sure where his inclinations are leading him; is it to the right path, or the wrong one? Since the battle between the *Yetzer Hara* and *Yetzer Tov* is constant, and lasts as long as a person lives, Chazal

(*Avot* 2:4) warn, "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die." One can never be sure of his final outcome.

We learn of great sages, such as Elisha ben Avuyah, among others, who despite their initial righteousness, ultimately departed from the proper path. Sacrilegious and heretical literature was discovered in their possession (*Chagigah* 15b). How can we explain this? Chazal suggest a few reasons (*Tosafot*, ibid. 15a). Ultimately, it is clear that as long as a person lives, his spiritual status is not guaranteed. He must constantly battle with himself, day after day, hour after hour, to maintain his *kedushah*, as well as elevate it.

Perhaps this is the reason that people say, "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)." This implies that after a person dies and is separated from his physical aspect, he no longer sins since his essence is his spiritual, holy soul. This is true because the World to Come is the world where one receives his reward, and is not a world of action (*Eiruvin* 22a). Therefore, the perfection of man is only after his death. Similarly, Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:21) say that only after death is one capable of reaching the fiftieth level of *kedushah*. As long as he lives in this world, he can only reach the forty-ninth level (*Rosh Hashanah* 21b) because of the physical forces that he embodies.

The parshiyot in Chumash *Vayikra* educate a person how to sacrifice himself for Hashem. In this way, he merits to be sanctified and achieve perfection upon his death. It is an established custom to teach young children the parshiyot discussing *korbanot* (*Tanchuma* 96:14), despite the fact that they are difficult to comprehend. This is in order to train them in the concept of self-sacrifice in their early years. Just as an infant automatically places everything in his mouth without thinking about it, likewise, when children are taught the parashah of *korbanot* at an early age, they become accustomed to automatically subjugating their own desires to Hashem's will. They are trained to constantly mouth words of Torah, and to fulfill its commands with the proper dedication.

If we were to ask a G-d fearing person, who was raised in this way from birth, if it is difficult for him to keep the laws of Shabbat, he would certainly answer, without hesitation, that keeping Shabbat is his pleasure, and he does not experience any hardship in doing so. This is because he was trained in this way since infancy. Likewise, we train young children to cleave to Hashem with self-sacrifice so that this conduct becomes second nature to them, and it would not occur to them to behave otherwise. When a person lives his life with self-sacrifice, he merits dying in sanctity and achieves perfection upon his death.

In the same way that a child can be easily trained to acquire *emunah*, one can lose it easily, as well. Therefore, one must be extremely cautious and constantly examine himself to ensure that his faith is unwavering and that he entertains no doubts that could cool off his dedication in serving Hashem. On one of my trips to Venezuela, an older person with a full beard, wearing *tzitzit*, approached me. He confessed, with regret, that his *emunah* had weakened. Truthfully, I had not anticipated hearing such words from a person who looked so steeped in *yirat Hashem*. However, it was a lesson for me that one cannot know how G-d-fearing a person really is, even one who looks G-d-fearing on the outside. One must constantly guard himself not to lose the faith that he nurtured.

When I asked the elderly man if there was a specific reason for his loss of faith, he answered that for a period of time he began to be lax in observing mitzvot. In the wake of his laxity, he began to feel his faith wavering. This is similar to a machine. Even the most sophisticated motors, when not used for an extended period of time, become rusty and impaired. Likewise, if a person does not scrupulously fulfill Hashem's mitzvot, his *emunah* will become corroded and waver. This man confided in me that his doubts in faith arose after he had moved to a different location, surrounded by green country expanses, with a stream of water running by. Since he was drawn to the physical attractions of his surroundings, he neglected his spiritual obligations, and shortly after, he lost his faith.

The last letters of the title of the parashah אחרי מות (after death) has the numerical value of four hundred and ten. This is the equivalent of the *gematria* of the word קדוש (sanctified). If we would pause for a moment to contemplate how a person achieves perfection, we would realize that it is the split second decisions of choosing to do good and abandoning all evil. Many people can testify that they are often faced with an internal conflict whether to act in a way that is correct, or whether to act improperly but gain instant pleasure. These battles are extremely difficult, throwing a person into throes of indecision. However there are those who earn their World in only one hour (*Avodah Zarah* 17a). These are people who in one instant decide to forgo instant gratification and choose instead everlasting pleasure, which is the lot of those who fulfill Hashem's will.

Megillat Rut discusses at length the story of Orpah and Rut. They were both daughters-in-law of Naomi, who were left widowed and forsaken after the deaths of their husbands. When Naomi saw that she had nothing to gain from remaining in the land of Moav, she turned to her daughters-in-law and told them that she was planning to return to Eretz Yisrael. Orpah, at first, intended to follow her mother-in-law. However, after her discussion with Naomi, she decided that her father's luxuriant lifestyle was more tempting, and she decided to stay in Moav. On the other hand, Rut chose to cleave to the ways of her mother-in-law, Naomi, at all costs. She went with her to Eretz Yisrael despite the hardships that it entailed (*Rut* 2:11). The Gemara relates (*Sotah* 42b) that Goliat descended from Orpah, and Rut merited having David Hamelech as her offspring. We learn (*Shmuel* I, 17:49-51) that Goliat was defeated by David Hamelech in combat and was killed. Even though David Hamelech was much shorter than Goliat, because of his brave and fearless spirit and his unwavering faith, he succeeded in overcoming Goliat.

How did Rut merit having David Hamelech descend from her, making her the mother of Mashiach? In contrast, her sister-in-law, Orpah, had Goliat, who was ultimately defeated by David, come from her. We can conclude that what distinguished between Orpah and Rut was those few

seconds in which each of them decided in which direction they wanted to go. One decided to go one way and the other, the opposite. Orpah decided to choose luxuries and the comfort of her father's house, and Rut willingly gave it all up in order to live a Jewish lifestyle. Since Rut preferred eternal life as opposed to fleeting, momentary pleasures, she merited eternal royalty by having Mashiach descend from her. Because Orpah preferred material gains as opposed to eternal life, she had Goliat, a powerful giant, descend from her. However, all his strength was short-lived, and he quickly fell into the hands of David Hamelech.

When the Satan approaches a person and persuades him to transgress, he shows him only the physical, instant gratification that he will gain from sinning. He intentionally conceals the eternal spiritual bliss the person would attain by overcoming his evil inclination. During the course of my life, I have met many people who in a moment of passion were not able to control themselves and chose instant gratification over eternal, spiritual pleasure. However, by following this instant gratification, they were left with a deep sense of disappointment and emptiness.

I recall how all the dignitaries of the world came to the funeral of the King of Morocco to give him his last honor. Although the King of Morocco was known for his vast wealth, he was buried naked, leaving all his riches behind. It is important to reflect upon escorting the deceased how they are buried only with shrouds, and nothing else. All their worldly possessions that they labored to amass are left in this world, and they are unable to take anything with them to the World of Truth.

On the other hand, a wise person, who considers the future and dedicates himself entirely to toiling in Torah, merits that the Torah escorts him to the Heavenly Court and testifies on his behalf. As mentioned earlier, the choice of which road to take is dependent on split second decisions. It is these seconds that determine what will be the final outcome of the person. Will he merit people saying about him, "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)?" Will he merit achieving perfection? Or will he miss his opportunity?

Once a person came to me and asked me to promise him that in the World to Come he will receive all the pleasures and gratifications that were denied to him in this world. Upon hearing his request, I smiled at him and said, "Who am I to promise this?" Afterwards, I asked him to which pleasures was he referring; was it to money or delicacies? After all, the pleasures in the World to Come are exclusively spiritual. How can one compare a momentary pleasure of wealth and good food to the eternal bliss of the World to Come? Our enjoyments in this world are limited and transient. Chazal (*Iggeret HaGra; Mivchar Peninim*) say that the pleasures of this world are compared to drinking salty water. A person can never feel satiated from it and will always remain thirsty. Conversely, the eternal spiritual happiness of the World to Come is a spiritual bliss, which brings deep satisfaction and fulfillment for the *neshamah* of a person and revives him.

As mentioned, the *Yetzer Hara* lured Orpah with the physical comforts that she could enjoy in this world if she would return to her father's house. However, he intentionally concealed the ensuing satisfaction of cleaving to the path of her mother-in-law and dedicating her life to go in the ways of Hashem. Conversely, Rut succeeded in overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. Therefore, he did not have the power to prevent her from realizing the truth and understanding that there was no comparison between the physical gratification she could have in her father's house, with all his wealth, and the deep satisfaction reserved for her if she would cling to her mother-in-law and accept upon herself the yoke of Torah and mitzvot.

The sefer Yehoshua (2:1) tells of an outstandingly beautiful woman whose name was Rachav. Everyone would visit her house in order to enjoy her beauty. However, she did not allow her beauty to blind her. She opened her eyes to observe what was happening around her. She decided to abandon her old ways and adopt a moral lifestyle (*Yehoshua* 2:9-11). She understood that the extraordinary miracles which Bnei Yisrael enjoyed proved the existence of a Master of the World, Who rules and sustains it. Her recognition was followed by action, and she abandoned

all the vanities and physical pleasures to dwell under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Ultimately, she married Yehoshua bin Nun. Her descendants include Yirmeyahu Hanavi, who awakened Am Yisrael to return to Hashem, as well as many other righteous offspring (*Megillah* 14b, *Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* 771).

It is important to note that Rachav merited the exalted stature of being the wife of the leader of Am Yisrael because she observed the truth and did not let her beauty blind her. Instead of living a life of satisfying one's passions, she embraced the truth. This is an example of a momentous decision that changed a person's life. A single resolution made in a crucial moment may change one's fate from one extreme to another.

I knew a certain man who habitually bore a gloomy expression, with lines of worry creasing his face. One day, he came to me, and I noticed his face was lit up with joy. When I saw his joyful countenance, I asked him if he had received a happy tiding or perhaps won the lottery. He confided to me that on his way to see me, he was suddenly faced with a temptation to sin. However, he hesitated because he felt that he would not be able to face me after having sinned. Because of this thought, he ultimately overcame his temptation. Thereafter, he was filled with elation at having subdued his *Yetzer Hara*. He was overjoyed at succeeding to conquer his evil inclination and avoid sinning. When I observed his ecstasy, I realized how much satisfaction one gains in overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. It is incomparable to any other pleasure.

In contrast, there has never been a person who committed a sin and felt fulfilled afterwards. In fact, it is quite the opposite. His conscience bothers him that he did not succeed in overcoming his challenge. A person should take heart and not continue in his sinful ways. He should consider the pasuk (*Tehillim* 51:5) "And my sin is before me always. Against You alone did I sin, and that which is evil in Your eyes did I do."

If a person will conduct himself in this way, at the end of his life, when he will stand in judgment before the Heavenly Court, he will be pure. He

will merit achieving: "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)."

In Summary

- There is a proverb that people say: "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)." This implies that after a person dies, he achieves completion and cannot sin anymore. It says, "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die." This world is a world of constant battle with the *Yetzer Hara* in order to guard one's purity. When a person succeeds in defeating his *Yetzer Hara*, he acquires a greater level of purity. In this way, he can eventually reach the fiftieth level of *kedushah* upon arriving at the World of Truth.
- It is customary to teach young children the parshiyot of *Vayikra* in order to train them to act with self-sacrifice. Just as it is easy to acquire the trait of self-sacrifice when trained in it from youth, so too, it is easy to lose this attribute. Therefore, one must constantly strive to renew his dedication to Avodat Hashem.
- The last letters of the words אחרי מות (after death) have the same *gematria* as the word קדוש (holy). This indicates that a person who sanctifies himself during his life will ultimately also die sanctified and thus achieve perfection.
- A person merits holiness by making split second decisions, when he decides to abandon evil and go on the right path. As an example, we are taught the story of Rut, who cleaved to her mother-in-law and gained eternal life. In contrast, Orpah attained only momentary pleasure by choosing to return to her father's house.
- Similarly, we learn about Rachav, who merited marrying Yehoshua bin Nun, and ultimately having Yirmeyahu descend from her. This is because in a fateful moment she chose to dedicate her life to eternal truths instead of momentary pleasures.

The Name of the Parashah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

Why is this parashah named in memory of the death of Aharon's sons? This seems surprising since their death is mentioned only in the first pasuk of the parashah, whereas it is more extensively recounted in parashat *Shemini*. The rest of this parashah discusses the subject of the Mishkan. Thus, it would seem more appropriate to call the parashah *Parashat Hamishkan*, or something similar.

Chazal give various reasons (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6) why the sons of Aharon deserved to die. There is one opinion that they were punished for serving in the Mishkan while unmarried. There is another opinion that they entered the Mishkan intoxicated. There are others who explain that they offered a strange fire not commanded by Hashem. There are yet others who say that they were punished for deciding a law in front of their teacher. Also, there is an opinion that blames them for speaking brazenly about Moshe and Aharon, saying, "When will these two elders die so that we can lead the nation instead?"

It seems that each incident in itself did not make Aharon's sons liable for death. However, since their cumulative liability made them deserving of punishment, they were condemned to death.

Nadav and Avihu offered incense for Hashem without being commanded to do so. They transgressed intentionally because they wanted to impart an important lesson to the nation. They feared that Bnei Yisrael would become accustomed to the *Shechinah* of Hashem residing among them and within the Mishkan, just as they had become accustomed to the presence of Moshe and Aharon in their midst, and therefore dared to make demands which seemed to go beyond the

bounds of proper respect toward Hashem. This would lead Bnei Yisrael to behave carelessly in matters regarding the Mishkan, and they would be severely punished for this. Therefore, in a show of outstanding self-sacrifice, Nadav and Avihu decided to perform an act which would make them liable for death. In this way they would impress upon the entire nation how careful they must be in guarding the honor of the Mishkan, which served as a dwelling for the *Shechinah* of Hashem.

Nadav and Avihu translated their inspiration into action. They entered the Mishkan and offered a strange fire, and consequently their *neshamot* were consumed. When Bnei Yisrael saw this, they were filled with fear and trepidation. The death of Aharon's sons caused them to exercise added caution when approaching the Mishkan in order to guard its honor properly.

This was similar to the previous act of Tzelafchad gathering wood on Shabbat (*Shabbat* 96b). He did this in order to warn Bnei Yisrael to be careful with the laws of Shabbat even during their sojourn in the desert, prior to entering Eretz Yisrael. He wanted to demonstrate that if they would become lax in their observance of its laws, they would be liable for death. Since Hashem recognized his noble intentions in sacrificing himself to teach Bnei Yisrael a lesson, Hashem granted him a heritage in Eretz Yisrael by giving his daughters an inheritance in the Land. In addition, his daughters merited bringing to light a new law of the Torah (*Sanhedrin* 8a).

Aharon's sons also exhibited tremendous self-sacrifice for Bnei Yisrael's sake. Therefore, Hashem declared (*Vayikra* 10:6), "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." Likewise, Hashem instructed the parashah discussing issues pertaining to the Mishkan to be named after this episode. This highlights the elevated status of Nadav and Avihu and the honor due them, for in their merit Bnei Yisrael accorded greater reverence to the Mishkan, and later to the Beit Hamikdash.

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b) say that the departure of tzaddikim from this world is as devastating as the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and

serves as atonement. Because Nadav and Avihu sacrificed their lives for the honor of the Mishkan so that Bnei Yisrael would not become careless regarding its service, they were compared to the Mishkan itself. Just as the Mishkan brought atonement to the nation, so too did the death of Nadav and Avihu. This is why parashat *Acharei Mot* is read on Yom Kippur. Just as the destruction of the Temple atoned for Am Yisrael, the death of Aharon's sons also atoned for the nation (*Moed Katan* 28a).

According to what we mentioned earlier, that Aharon's sons died because of the cumulative guilt that they had accrued, it seems that Hashem never takes a person's *neshamah* immediately, but instead waits until he has accumulated a large amount of sins and thus deserves to die in punishment (*Sotah* 9a). In truth, we cannot fathom the sin of Aharon's sons. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 10:3) says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This indicates that they were tzaddikim and close to Hashem. However, we learn a lesson from their deaths that a person should do teshuvah for every small misdeed, in order that they should not accumulate and ultimately make him deserving of severe punishment.

It is important to know that Hashem never punishes immediately. He first sends signals in order to arouse the person to teshuvah. For example, a person's suit may rip. Afterwards, his car engine may die in the midst of a trip. Then, he may begin to feel ill. However, if all these signals do not succeed in awakening him to return to the proper path, Hashem brings upon him a devastating calamity, in the hope that it will shake him out of his apathy, and he will return to Hashem (*Kiddushin* 20a).

Similarly, one who speaks *lashon hara* is not afflicted with *tzara'at* on his body immediately. First, the walls of his house and his furniture become affected. Afterwards, it spreads to his clothing. If he still does not do teshuvah, Hashem causes the affliction to appear on his flesh (*Rambam, Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10).

The greatest obstacle in Avodat Hashem is the force of habit. Many times we ignore the many gifts surrounding us because we are

accustomed to them. It seems natural that things should be this way. However, only when we observe a disabled person hobbling on crutches, or a blind man led by his walking stick, are we awakened to thank Hashem for enabling us to walk on our own and for giving us healthy vision to enjoy.

Bnei Yisrael benefitted from many miracles in the Desert. The ready-to-eat manna came down from Heaven to sustain them. Despite this, they protested against the manna and demanded meat to satisfy their desires, even though the manna could also taste like meat (*Yoma* 75a). It is difficult to understand how this came about, because it defies all logic.

It seems that because Bnei Yisrael became accustomed to living on miracles and receiving sustenance from Heaven on a daily basis, their senses were dulled to the wonders of the manna, and they did not feel obligated to thank Hashem. This led them to protest against the manna, demanding meat.

Aharon's sons feared that Bnei Yisrael would become accustomed to the *Shechinah's* presence in the Mishkan and even object to it, just as they had objected to the spiritual food that came down from Heaven. Therefore, they performed an act for which they would become liable for death. They hoped that this would serve to impress upon Bnei Yisrael how cautious they must be to guard the sanctity of the Mishkan and accord honor to the *Shechinah* residing within it. In this way, they would be spared exacting justice.

Hashem agreed with their act. Therefore, this parashah is named for their deaths. This is especially befitting, since the parashah discusses the sanctity of the Mishkan, which they honored greatly. Through them the honor of Hashem was magnified, as it says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

In Summary

- Why is the parashah discussing the subject of honoring the Mishkan named after the episode regarding the death of Aharon's sons, which is

extensively detailed in parashat *Shemini*? Aharon's sons feared that Bnei Yisrael would become accustomed to the presence of the *Shechinah* and would therefore become careless in regard to the Mishkan's service. Their fears were well-founded, since Bnei Yisrael had displayed a lack of appreciation regarding the many miracles Hashem performed for them. Since they got used to their extraordinary situation, they also became lax in displaying respect to their leaders. Therefore, Nadav and Avihu purposely did an act that would make themselves liable for death. This was in order to impress upon Bnei Yisrael the importance of guarding the honor of the *Shechinah* and the *kedushah* of the Mishkan. As a reward, they merited that this parashah, which discusses honoring the Mishkan, memorializes their death.

- Similarly, Tzelafchad sacrificed his life in order to teach Bnei Yisrael to meticulously fulfill mitzvot while still in the Desert, and not only after entering Eretz Yisrael.
- There is an opinion that Aharon's sons were liable for death because of their cumulative liability. On the other hand, whoever says that Aharon's sons sinned is mistaken. We can learn from this that Hashem does not punish a person immediately. Hashem first sends him signals to awaken him to teshuvah. Only if he persists in his wrongdoing does Hashem punish him.

The Sons of Aharon

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

Why does this pasuk refer to Nadav and Avihu as "the sons of Aharon" rather than by their names?

In Morocco it was customary to declare upon the death of a tzaddik: "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)." This expression derives from the juxtaposition of parashat *Kedoshim* to parashat *Acharei Mot*. Even after the death of a simple person, who did not excel in Torah, one may apply this saying to him. This is because we can never know if he was aroused to teshuvah in his final moments, making a complete turnabout. I knew several people far from Torah and mitzvot, who shed many tears and begged for forgiveness on their death bed. Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) teach that there are those who acquire their World to Come in one hour. They are truly holy after their deaths.

In fact, this saying originated from the Torah, discussing the deaths of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu. Hashem said about them (*Vayikra* 10:3): "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This is because Aharon's sons did not sin in order to fulfill their passion, or for self-gratification. They wanted to impress upon Bnei Yisrael the importance of guarding the *kedushah* of the Mishkan. This is similar to Tzelafchad, who was put to death for desecrating Shabbat. His sole intention was to warn Bnei Yisrael about the severity of desecrating Shabbat (*Tosafot*, *Bava Batra* 119b). This is why it is surprising that the Torah did not mention the names of Nadav and Avihu, who were extraordinarily selfless, but instead refers to them as the "sons of Aharon."

We can resolve this question through the following account (*Shabbat* 89a). After Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Har Sinai with the Torah, the Satan came to Hashem and asked Him, "Where is the Torah?" Hashem answered him, "On Earth." The Satan went down to Earth and searched all over for the Torah. He tried so hard to uncover the Torah's whereabouts that he even looked for it in Gehinnom, deep in the abyss, and in the ocean. Since the Satan failed to find the Torah, he returned to Hashem and asked Him, "Where is the Torah? I already searched for it in every place on Earth and did not find it." When Hashem saw that the Satan was exerting so much effort to find the Torah, but was not successful, He revealed to him that the Torah was in the possession of the son of Amram.

The Satan descended to Moshe and asked him the whereabouts of the Torah. Moshe answered that the Torah was not in his possession. The Satan went back to Hashem and complained, "Why did You tell me that the Torah is by Moshe? Moshe insists that it is not in his possession!" Hashem approached Moshe and asked him, "Are you fabricating answers? After all, I delivered the Torah into your hands." Moshe replied to Hashem, "Is the Torah not considered 'A coveted treasure that was set aside by You 974 generations prior to the Creation of the World?' If so, how can I profess that the Torah belongs to me? In truth, anyone who wants to come and learn the Torah can do so. The Torah is not in my exclusive possession." Hashem said to Moshe, "You, who have humbled yourself to such an extent, will merit that the Torah will be called by your name, as it says (*Malachi* 3:22), "Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant."

I saw several questions raised regarding this Gemara. Why did the Satan inquire about the location of the Torah? What connection does the Satan have with the Torah? Also, the Satan knew that the Torah was given to Am Yisrael: the entire world came to a standstill when Hashem revealed His *Shechinah* on the mountain and granted the Torah to Am Yisrael. Moreover, why did Hashem cooperate with the Satan rather than simply dismissing him?

We can shed light upon this issue in the following way. When Moshe brought the Torah down to the world in order to give it to Am Yisrael, everyone felt its absence in Heaven. As long as the Torah was in Heaven, it created an aura of exceptional *kedushah*. This is because it possesses a brilliant light, which lights up the entire Upper Spheres. However, after Moshe descended with the Torah, its loss was felt acutely. Even the Angel of Death could not ignore its absence. He knows that his very existence is dependent on the study of the Torah, since the *kelippah* is sustained by *kedushah*. Therefore, the Satan invested much effort in searching for the location of the Torah.

Likewise, since Hashem knows that the existence of the *kelippah* is dependent upon *kedushah*, He aided the Satan in his search for the Torah. Hashem also wanted Am Yisrael to learn a lesson from the Satan. If even the Satan made such tremendous efforts to locate the Torah, in order to ensure his continued existence, how much more so should Am Yisrael make efforts to attain Torah, since it is their very essence. Our entire life is dependent on the Torah, which is called "the tree of life to those who grasp it." Certainly we must dedicate ourselves to it and be prepared to sacrifice our lives for the implementation of the Torah's holy words. Moreover, when a person sanctifies himself through Torah, he perfects the world by revealing the absolute Kingship of Hashem.

In fact, everything that takes place in the World to Come is concealed from our vision, as it says (*Tehillim* 31:20), "How abundant is Your goodness that You have stored away for those who fear You." In order to taste the bliss of the World to Come, one must attach himself to the words of the Torah and perform good deeds. I can testify from my own experience that when I succeed in getting to the root of a deep concept in Torah, or if I chance upon an opportunity to perform charity, happiness and elation fill my heart. It is impossible to compare the deep satisfaction experienced by this to any other pleasure. This is an example of the ecstasy of the World to Come.

In a similar vein, Rabbi Chaim Zaitchik, zt"l, writes in his sefer discussing chapters of *mussar* (*Pri Ha'aretz* I, 31) the following. He asks

why Shabbat is different than all other mitzvot of the Torah. All the other mitzvot were transmitted to Moshe from Hashem, and Moshe passed on the information to Aharon, who taught it to his sons, passing it on through the system of leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, and leaders of fifty, until the command reached all of Am Yisrael. Conversely, the mitzvah of Shabbat was transmitted to the entire nation by Moshe himself (*Yalkut Shimoni* 408). What is the uniqueness of the mitzvah of Shabbat that it merited being transmitted to Bnei Yisrael by Moshe directly, without any agents?

Rabbi Zaitchik explains that Shabbat possesses the flavor of the World to Come. In order to transmit this to Bnei Yisrael, it was necessary for Moshe himself to directly command them about Shabbat. This is because Moshe alone ascended to Heaven and experienced the flavor of the World to Come. Since Moshe had enjoyed basking in the *Shechinah* and had been in proximity of the Heavenly Throne, only he was capable of conveying to Bnei Yisrael the superior pleasure of one who keeps Shabbat, which possesses the flavor of the World to Come.

Whoever keeps Shabbat is considered as if he fulfilled the whole Torah. This is because the mitzvah of Shabbat corresponds to all the mitzvot given in the Torah (*Shemot Rabbah* 25:12). It follows that Moshe transmitted to Bnei Yisrael all the 613 mitzvot when commanding them about Shabbat. The Torah itself contains the flavor of the World to Come.

One Shabbat, I delivered a lecture in the Beit Hakeneset about the uniqueness of Shabbat. Among those that attended, a man arose and began to argue heatedly with me about what I had described, since he failed to grasp the distinctiveness and holiness of Shabbat. As much as I tried to explain to him the importance of keeping Shabbat, my words did not penetrate his heart. It was as if I was speaking to a deaf man. Sometime later, I found out that this person was a non-Jew, since only his father was Jewish, and his mother was a gentile. I realized that this was the reason that he could not comprehend the beauty and significance of Shabbat.

Similarly, the Satan recognized that the delightful flavor of the Torah is actually a taste of the World to Come. He agonized over its absence. Therefore, he descended from Above and began to search for the Torah's location. The Satan also knew that his entire existence depends upon the fulfillment of the Torah. Since one who learns Torah and fulfills its mitzvot has the ability to taste the flavor of the Upper Worlds, he does not have to ascend to Heaven in order to experience the sensation of loftiness and attachment to the *Shechinah*. Chazal tell the story (*Chagigah* 14b) about Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, who wished to ascend Above. After their desire was granted, one of them died, and the other lost his mind. This is because the World to Come is a place intended for *neshamot*, and man cannot exist there since he is a physical being. Therefore, whoever aspires to experience the sweet flavor of the World to Come should cleave to the holy Torah in this world. The Torah is a taste of the World to Come.

Regarding the question raised previously about Nadav and Avihu being referred to as "the sons of Aharon," it can be clarified as follows. Nadav and Avihu became supremely holy beings after sacrificing their lives for Am Yisrael. They rose to such elevated heights that their names no longer did justice to their loftiness. Since a name identifies a person's essence, their conventional names could no longer define their exalted spiritual essence. Therefore, their names were omitted. After their deaths, tzaddikim are compared to lofty angels that serve Hashem in sanctity and assemble under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Nadav and Avihu also resembled exalted angels after their deaths, as Hashem testified about them (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

Similarly, the Upper Worlds are hidden and are not fathomable to human beings. This is because of their superior sanctity and spiritual nature. These Heavenly qualities cannot be grasped by physical beings. It is only through learning Torah that one can experience a taste of the World to Come. Since Aharon's sons became sanctified after their death, becoming exceeding spiritual, their names became obscured. Their exalted spiritual essence could not be defined by their conventional

names anymore. Therefore, the Torah refers to them as "the sons of Aharon."

We find that Hashem called Moshe "the son of Amram" when speaking to the Satan (*Shabbat* 89a). Why did Hashem not call him by his name? There are those that suggest that because Moshe conducted himself with outstanding humility, Hashem also alluded to him without mentioning his name directly. This corresponds to Chazal's statement (*Makkot* 10b) "In the path that a person chooses to go, he is led." However, I think that the reason for omitting his name is as follows. Moshe Rabbeinu became elevated to the level of an angel after remaining in their company Above, without eating or drinking for forty days and forty nights. Therefore, Moshe's name could no longer identify him adequately. His level of sanctity was beyond any human standard. Therefore, Hashem referred to Moshe as "the son of Amram." This also explains why Nadav and Avihu were referred to in the Torah as "the sons of Aharon." They became so elevated after sacrificing their lives on Bnei Yisrael's behalf that their conventional names could no longer properly define their essence.

In Summary

- Why are Nadav and Avihu referred to in the Torah as "the sons of Aharon?" They are obviously highly regarded in their own right, as it says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."
- This can be explained according to the Gemara relating how the Satan went in search of the location of the Torah. It is surprising that the Satan felt compelled to search for the Torah. Also, why did Hashem cooperate with him? The Satan knows that his entire existence is dependent upon the Torah. This is because the *kelippah* is sustained by *kedushah*. Therefore, when the Satan sensed the Torah's absence in Heaven, he went to search for its location. When Hashem perceived the Satan's eagerness to find the Torah, He cooperated with his search. Moreover, Hashem wanted to teach Am Yisrael a lesson from the Satan from his relentless search for the Torah. How much more should Am Yisrael, whose whole

existence is dependent on fulfilling the Torah as their mission, dedicate themselves to seeking Torah.

- The sensation experienced in the Upper Worlds is unfathomable. It is hidden from those below, as it says, "How abundant is Your goodness that You have stored away for those who fear You." Whoever wishes to experience a taste of the World to Come should attach himself to the Torah, which possesses the flavor of the World to Come. This is why Moshe, himself, commanded Bnei Yisrael about Shabbat, despite all other mitzvot being transmitted through the agents appointed over the thousands, the hundreds, etc. Since Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come, only one who went up to Heaven and actually tasted the Heavenly flavor would be able to transmit it appropriately. Shabbat is equivalent to the entire Torah. By keeping Shabbat, as well as by learning Torah, one can experience a taste of the World to Come.
- Nadav and Avihu became exceedingly elevated after their deaths. Therefore, their conventional names could no longer define their exalted spiritual essence. Thus, their names remained hidden. This is similar to the Upper Worlds, which are hidden and unfathomable by human beings, except for those who learn Torah.
- Similarly, Hashem called Moshe "the son of Amram," because he became extremely sanctified after ascending to Heaven, resembling an angel. Therefore, his conventional name could not properly reflect his exalted essence.

Coming Close to Hashem

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

This pasuk raises several points. First, why is this parashah read during the Shacharit service on Yom Kippur? Why does the Torah begin this parashah by mentioning the deaths of Aharon's sons, and even name the parashah in their memory, when the details of their death are not recorded in this parashah at all, but earlier, in parashat *Shemini*. Why is the description of their death, recorded in parashat *Shemini*, separated from the mitzvot written in this parashah, relating to the laws of the Kohanim, by the two parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora*?

We can resolve all these questions in the following way. Regarding Nadav and Avihu, it says (*Vayikra* 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me," which indicates that they were close to Hashem and were tzaddikim. In addition to being exceptional tzaddikim, they were worthy of becoming the leaders of Am Yisrael after Moshe and Aharon's death. Upon Nadav and Avihu's death, Hashem instructed (*Vayikra* 10:6) that "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." Clearly, had they been guilty of sinning, Hashem would not have commanded all of Am Yisrael to mourn them. Since Hashem told Bnei Yisrael to bewail the conflagration, it reflected their righteousness and exalted spiritual level.

Similarly, it is written about Aharon's sons (ibid. 16:1), "When they approached before Hashem." Chazal (*Ohr Hachaim, Vayikra* 16:1) comment that since no sin was mentioned regarding the sons of Aharon, it teaches us that they did not sin. In fact, the opposite is true. They achieved an unusual closeness to Hashem by uprooting their *Yetzer Hara*. They fulfilled the pasuk (*Tehillim* 109:22), "And my heart has died within

me." Through their Avodat Hashem they succeeded in entirely eliminating the *Yetzer Hara*, which dwelled within their hearts.

In order to better understand this, we must explore what is written about Nadav and Avihu in parashat *Mishpatim* (*Shemot* 24:11): "They gazed at G-d, yet they ate and drank." This is puzzling. Can we suggest that Nadav and Avihu were indifferent to the *Shechinah*, eating and drinking while in the presence of Hashem? Clearly, this was not the case. They were not eating and drinking simply to fulfill their desires, since the *Shechinah* does not reveal itself to people who are undeserving. Their act of eating was elevated and sanctified, since their entire purpose in eating was to become attached to Hashem to a higher degree. This is implied in the words of the pasuk, "They gazed at G-d, yet they ate and drank." While they ate, their sole intent was to draw as close to possible to Hashem. It was as if they sacrificed to Hashem the food that they ate through their lofty intentions. This is why the pasuk states, "When they approached before Hashem." Every action that they took was calculated to bring them closer to Hashem. They singularly aspired to serve Hashem through great self-sacrifice in order to connect to Him and cleave to His ways.

David Hamelech testifies about himself (*Tehillim* 119:97) "O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation." Although he was occupied with fighting battles and with national affairs, his greatest delight was discussing the concepts of Torah. Furthermore, he declared (*Tehillim* 109:22), "And my heart has died within me." Because David Hamelech succeeded in eliminating his *Yetzer Hara* (*Bava Batra* 17a), he created a suitable setting for Torah and *kedushah* to dwell within him. This is the approach of tzaddikim, who labor all their lives to conquer their *Yetzer Hara*, thus freeing their minds in order to come close to Hashem.

This idea helps us resolve why parashat *Acharei Mot* is read on Yom Kippur. This teaches that the deaths of tzaddikim serve as atonement (*Moed Katan* 28a). Consequently we beseech Hashem to forgive us for all our sins in their merit. By reading the parashah about Nadav and Avihu, we hope that this will be considered as if we too have come very close to Hashem, as we stand before Him white as snow, without sin. We hope that

in our efforts in overcoming and destroying the Satan, we will achieve what David Hamelech described, "And my heart has died within me." It is most appropriate for Yom Kippur, as it says (*Vayikra* 16:30), "For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed."

Sometimes a person feels that he did everything possible in order to do complete teshuvah for his misdeeds, but in reality this is not the case. If he would conduct a careful self-examination, he would discover that his teshuvah is nothing more than lip service. Even though he may be convinced that he did teshuvah, he may still be far from doing complete teshuvah. The true way to do teshuvah is to emulate the example of Aharon's sons, as it states (ibid. 16:1), "When they approached before Hashem, and they died." This signifies that they subdued the *Yetzer Hara* within them, resulting in complete attachment to Hashem. They became so drawn to Hashem that they desired to die for His sake in complete self-sacrifice. Ultimately, they succeeded in fulfilling their objective, in accordance to their exalted level. However, one is not required to die in order to sanctify the Name of Heaven, except for certain instances when one is required to give up his life rather than sin (*Sanhedrin* 74a). Rather, while one is living he should strive to sanctify the Name of Hashem through his actions.

Hashem informed Moshe about the mitzvot regarding the Kohanim, written in parashat *Acharei Mot*, only after the parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora*, which discuss *tzara'at*. This is because it is important to first clarify the severity of *lashon hara*, which is punished with *tzara'at*. Since Hashem is exacting with tzaddikim to a hairsbreadth, Nadav and Avihu were liable for death by slightly breaching the laws of guarding one's tongue. They showed a certain element of disrespect when they said about Moshe and Aharon, "When will these two elders die so that we can lead the nation instead (*Tanchuma*, *Acharei Mot* 6)? Therefore, the Torah separates between parashat *Shemini* and parashat *Acharei Mot*, which discuss the death of Aharon's sons, with the subject of *lashon hara*.

This teaches us how important it is to avoid the sin of *lashon hara*. This is especially true of one who seeks to come close to Hashem. It is important to realize that *lashon hara* distances one greatly from the *Shechinah*. However, we should not assume that Aharon's sons literally transgressed with the sin of *lashon hara*. It is only because of the lofty level which they had achieved that Hashem judged their words exactingly. It was not befitting for such righteous tzaddikim, who had succeeded in eliminating their *Yetzer Hara*, to speak disrespectfully. Aharon's sons should have been more careful with their words, since "there is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Hashem" (*Mishlei* 21:30). If Hashem specifically chose Moshe and Aharon to lead Am Yisrael, then how could Nadav and Avihu argue against it? Since Hashem is exacting with His pious ones to a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b), the Attribute of Justice prevailed.

Aharon's sons were condemned to death due to their lofty level, which teaches us how exalted they truly were. The Torah testifies that they died as righteous tzaddikim, since the Mishkan in which they perished did not become defiled as a result of their death. In addition, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to mourn them. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu concurred with Nadav and Avihu, because he sensed that they were even closer to Hashem than he and Aharon, his brother. Hashem also agreed with Moshe, but told him, "This is My original plan, that you should lead the nation, and that Aharon should serve as Kohen Gadol. Since this is My plan, no one has permission to dispute it."

The parashah is called *Acharei Mot* to memorialize Nadav and Avihu, since generally after tzaddikim die, they are forgotten. The sons of Aharon were so precious to Hashem that He did not want their deaths to be forgotten. Therefore, the Torah designated an entire parashah in their memory so that whoever would read it would remember their greatness in achieving an outstanding connection to Hashem. In this parashah it states (*Vayikra* 16:1), "וידבר ה' אל משה – Hashem spoke to Moshe." The word דיבור (speech) denotes harshness. Hashem used this word when turning to Moshe and not the word ויאמר, which is not as emphatic, in

order to arouse the people to seek to fill the void created by the deaths of Aharon's sons, who were exceptionally close to Hashem. Their deaths served as a lesson for Am Yisrael, teaching them to what extent the people should strive to connect to Hashem. Nadav and Avihu's desire to be attached to Hashem was so great that they even desired to die in sanctification of His Name. Ultimately, they achieved their goal.

Regarding this subject, I feel compelled to recall the memory of the tzaddik, Rabbi Nissim Rebibo, ztk"l, even though it has been many months since his passing. We still feel the enormous void created by his death. Although we mourned his death upon his passing, it is only months later that we are truly capable of internalizing the tremendous loss. How can we be comforted? His outstanding greatness stemmed from his simplicity. Whoever saw him thought he was an ordinary student, since he did not wear the attire of an eminent Rabbi, nor did he conduct himself in a proud manner. He always sat among the people and avoided sitting up front in the *mizrach*, where the important leaders sit. We are obligated to shed many tears over this precious tzaddik. Regarding him one can say, "After a person dies (אחרי מות), he is considered holy (קדושים)," since he merited drawing exceedingly close to Hashem. In the prime of his spiritual growth, he was suddenly taken from us with a kiss from Hashem.

This parashah teaches us that whoever wishes to merit connection with Hashem, as in "G-d's nearness is my good," must first remove the *Yetzer Hara* from within him and leave room in his heart only for the study of Torah. We mention the parashah discussing Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur, in the hope that Hashem will purify and sanctify us in their merit. Since the death of tzaddikim atone for sins, we beseech Hashem that the merit of these tzaddikim should protect us, making us worthy of being written and sealed in the book of good, long life.

In Summary

- Why is this parashah read on Yom Kippur? Why does this parashah begin by mentioning the death of Aharon's sons, and is even named in their memory, when their death took place prior to this parashah, and is

described in parashat *Shemini*? Why do the two parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora* separate between the description of the death of Aharon's sons, in parashat *Shemini*, and the laws of the Kohanim, discussed here in *Acharei Mot*?

- Whoever says that Aharon's sons sinned is mistaken. This is proved by the fact that Am Yisrael were commanded to bewail the conflagration that Hashem had ignited. In addition, it says, "when they approached before Hashem." This indicates that their sole desire was to draw closer to Hashem. It is also written regarding Aharon's sons that "they gazed at G-d, yet they ate and drank." This implies that even their mundane act of eating and drinking was performed in utmost sanctity.

- David Hamelech, who testified about himself that the Torah was his main interest, eliminated his *Yetzer Hara* and filled his entire being with Torah and Avodat Hashem. Similarly, Aharon's sons conquered their *Yetzer Hara* and dedicated themselves entirely to becoming attached to Hashem. This is the reason that we mention their death on Yom Kippur. Since the death of tzaddikim atone for the sins of the generation, we pray to Hashem that in the merit of Nadav and Avihu we will be worthy of being judged favorably on Yom Kippur.

- The Torah separates the parshiyot *Shemini* and *Acharei Mot* with the two parshiyot of *Tazria* and *Metzora*. This signifies that the cause of Nadav and Avihu's deaths was the sin of *lashon hara*, since many laws concerning *lashon hara* are discussed in these parshiyot. Aharon's sons were found guilty for declaring "When will these two elders die so that we can lead the nation instead?" Although they had beneficial intentions, they were blamed for not exercising extra caution in their speech, as befitting their exalted level of piety.

- This parashah is called *Acharei Mot* to memorialize Nadav and Avihu, in order that they should be remembered for all generations to come. Moreover, their names are mentioned on Yom Kippur. Aharon's sons succeeded in eliminating their *Yetzer Hara* entirely. They became highly

elevated, seeking to die in sanctification of Hashem's Name. Their wish was granted from Heaven.

Overachieving

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

Parashat *Acharei Mot*, which begins by mentioning the deaths of Aharon's sons, is read on Yom Kippur. Also, the Avodah of the Kohen Gadol, which is read on Yom Kippur, is written in this parashah. Consequently, Chazal (*Moed Katan* 28a) teach that just as Yom Kippur atones for sin, likewise the deaths of tzaddikim atone for the nation. Why is this so?

There are many people who are famous because of their talents or profession, such as musicians, actors, and ballet dancers. The public admires them greatly, and even idolizes them. However, after these stars die, people only mourn them for a limited period. Sometime later, they are completely forgotten, as if they had never existed at all. Conversely, tzaddikim are still considered living even after their deaths. To the extent that they served as a pillar of strength for the people during their lives, they are extolled, and their memory is honored after their deaths. This is true regarding Aharon's sons. During their lives, they were outstanding tzaddikim, and after their deaths they were greatly sanctified and elevated. Because of this they are mentioned on Yom Kippur, and they serve to atone for the sins of Am Yisrael.

It is important to realize that a person does not die as a result of performing a mitzvah, as it says (*Vayikra* 18:5), "And live by them." Since

Aharon's sons died while offering a sacrifice for Hashem, it indicates that their act was not sanctioned in the Torah. Because Hashem is exacting with tzaddikim to a hairsbreadth (*Yevamot* 121b), they were brought to judgment before the Heavenly Court.

Clearly, we cannot fathom the sin of Aharon's sons. However, Chazal (*Ohr Hachaim*, *Vayikra* 16a) reveal that Nadav and Avihu strove to reach a very lofty level when they were not yet ready for it. This can be compared to a person who has to lift heavy weights which are beyond his ability. He cannot lift them single-handedly, but instead, must use a crane. Likewise, *l'havdil*, Aharon's sons were not able to withstand the tremendous *kedushah* that they sought. Therefore, they perished.

Aharon's sons entered the Mishkan deliberately to offer the *ketoret* as a sacrifice for Hashem because they considered themselves to be on the same level as Moshe and Aharon, worthy of leading the nation after their deaths (*Tanchuma*, *Acharei Mot* 6). Just as Moshe spoke to Hashem face to face, they thought that they too were capable of connecting to Hashem in this way. Moreover, they felt it was required of them to behave in this way, since they possessed the potential to conduct themselves in a lofty manner. Therefore, they sought to enter the holy Sanctuary and offer the *ketoret* as a sacrifice for Hashem.

Moreover, Aharon's sons sought to become the leaders of the nation instead of Moshe and Aharon, declaring, "When will these two elders die so that we can lead the nation instead" (ibid.)? We should not assume that they sought personal honor. However, they sensed that they had the exceptional spiritual capacity necessary to lead the nation. Therefore, they felt obligated to utilize their capabilities in the service of Hashem to lead the people. Thus, Nadav and Avihu's intentions were entirely for the sake of Heaven. Nevertheless, they failed to distinguish that the right time for them to realize their potential had not yet arrived. They first had to invest more in personal growth before they would be ready to lead the nation and utilize their exceptional capacities bestowed upon them from Heaven.

After they died, Hashem told Bnei Yisrael (*Vayikra* 10:6), "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited." This indicates that there was no anger directed toward them from Heaven, and although they died, they were considered absolutely righteous. As proof, their deaths are mentioned on Yom Kippur, and we beseech Hashem that their deaths should serve as a merit for Bnei Yisrael to receive a favorable judgment.

In parashat *Shemini*, it says (ibid. 10:3), "And Aharon fell silent." This implies that when Moshe Rabbeinu informed Aharon about the death of his sons, Aharon accepted the decree from Heaven with equanimity, without any doubts or arguments. How was Aharon capable of receiving the shock of his sons' death with such serenity, to the extent that he was able to remain absolutely silent, when normally one would instinctively protest? From where did Aharon acquire the extraordinary strength and fortitude to accept the severe decree with quiet calm?

Rabbi Yochanan acted in a similar way. He buried all ten of his children during his lifetime. However, every time another one of his children died, Rabbi Yochanan accepted the decree in a superhuman manner (*Berachot* 5b). Another example of supreme acceptance of the Divine will is the following. Chazal (*Midrash*, *Mishlei* 31) state that one Shabbat, when Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness returned from the Beit Hakeneset, he noticed that his sons were missing. He asked his wife where they were. She told him that the boys had gone to their teacher. In truth, his sons had died. However, since Rabbi Meir's wife did not want her husband to grieve on Shabbat, she postponed revealing what had happened until after Shabbat.

The words of Rabbi Meir's wife when revealing the painful tiding shed light upon how Aharon Hakohen and other great people are able to contain their sorrow and accept the Heavenly decree with equanimity. Rabbi Meir's wife asked him, "If someone were to deposit a security in your possession, would you be obligated to return it to him upon his request?" Rabbi Meir answered in the affirmative. Thereafter, she continued to ask, "Do our *neshamot*, and the *neshamot* of our children belong to us, or are they entrusted in our possession as security? Rabbi

Meir answered, "They are a security." His wife then told him that since the *neshamot* of their sons were entrusted to them as a security by Hashem, the time had come to return the security to its owner. Consequently, there was no reason to protest.

This was also the viewpoint of Aharon Hakohen. All his life he lived with the understanding that the *neshamot* of his children were entrusted to him only as a security. Therefore, when he was informed about their death, he was capable of remaining silent and containing his grief without complaining. It was clear to him that all his possessions were bestowed upon him by Hashem, including his two sons. Therefore, when his sons died and were taken to the Heavenly yeshiva, he was able to accept the tidings calmly.

Generally, a father transmits to his children his own viewpoint of the world. By studying the conduct of their fathers, children learn to follow in their path. Aharon Hakohen lived all his life with the clear realization that everything belongs to Hashem, including one's body and *neshamah*. Consequently, his sons absorbed this outlook from him and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for Hashem, since everything belongs to Him. However, Hashem found them guilty, because the Torah requires a person to guard his life and engage in the study of Torah. Only in a situation where a person is given one of two choices, either to transgress one of the three cardinal sins, or sacrifice his life, does the Torah demand that he sacrifice his life in sanctification of Hashem's Name (*Sanhedrin* 74a). Since Aharon's sons interpreted their father's viewpoint in an extreme manner, they erred. They did not realize that Hashem does not desire a person to seek to die for His sake.

On the contrary, Hashem wants a person to elevate himself through Torah and *yirah* gradually, step by step. Each stage is meant to prepare one for the next level. However, Aharon's sons sought to acquire the highest level of *kedushah* and *yirah* at once, instead of progressing gradually, bit by bit.

As an example, the Americans proceeded to conquer Bagdad immediately upon entering Iraq, when they should have first conquered the smaller cities around the capital in order to fortify their presence. Only after their conquest was secure, should they have continued on to the main quarters. Because the Americans did not follow standard strategy, they only achieved feigned victory. Until today Iraq is unstable, and each day much blood is shed in battle between the two nations, as well as in civil war.

Similarly, one time when I was in America speaking at a parlor meeting, I asked for a cup of water because my throat was dry. To my surprise, within a few minutes there were five cups of water in front of me. However, since there was not enough space for all of them, the cups tilted and the water spilled on me. At the moment, all present began to laugh. But, this taught me an important lesson that sometimes one who adds actually detracts. When one invests excessive efforts, exceeding the required amount, not only is it not beneficial, but it may even cause harm.

This rule is valid not only regarding material matters, but also concerning spiritual matters. If a person wants to acquire lasting achievements, he must acquire them with patience, so that he should not lose everything, as it says, "If you grab too much, you gain nothing at all." Many times we see large influential companies go bankrupt all of a sudden and fold up like a pack of cards. Hashem wants to teach us that this applies not only to material matters, but also to spiritual matters. A *ba'al teshuvah* succeeds by advancing in Avodat Hashem, doing a gradual teshuvah, step by step, not attempting to grasp the entire Torah at once. Only after he feels secure with the first stage, does he progress to the next one.

We mention the deaths of Nadav and Avihu on Yom Kippur (*Vayikra Rabbah* 20:12). The death of a tzaddik serves as atonement for the sins of the generation. Why is this so? When a person mourns the tzaddik, he reflects upon his greatness and recalls his virtuous behavior and extraordinary devotion. Consequently, he is aroused to do teshuvah and draw close to Hashem. As a result, his sins are eventually forgiven. Thus,

mourning for a tzaddik is the means to bring a person to teshuvah, which results in achieving atonement. The death of a tzaddik serves as a springboard for people to draw close to Hashem through teshuvah, as it says, "Merit is achieved through those who are meritorious."

The Gemara says (*Ketubot* 103b) that when Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi died, a Heavenly Voice declared that whoever participated in the funeral would merit the World to Come. In fact, all those who participated did merit a portion in the World to Come. The Gemara adds (ibid.) that one of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi's students was far away at the time of the funeral, and when he heard the Heavenly Voice's declaration, he went up to the roof and jumped to his death. This was because of his overwhelming anguish at not being able to join the funeral procession and thereby meriting a portion in the World to Come. Upon his death, a Heavenly Voice declared that he too would receive a portion in the World to Come.

Why did the Heavenly Voice declare that all those who participated in the funeral of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi would merit inheriting a portion in the World to Come? The death of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi shocked the people greatly, arousing them to teshuvah and bringing them close to Hashem. This is why they ultimately merited a portion in the World to Come. On the other hand, those who did not attend the funeral and continued with their lives demonstrated that they were detached from all spiritual inspiration. Therefore, they clearly were not worthy of a portion in the World to Come.

We mention the death of Aharon's sons specifically on the day that we request life from Hashem. Why is this so? This is in order to awaken people to learn an important lesson. Each person will inevitably leave this world and join his ancestors, who have perished. One should take advantage of his days and fill them with good deeds, so that when his days expire, he will merit ascending to the Next World as an innocent man and not be found guilty. We know that tzaddikim in their death are considered living. If we desire that we too should be considered living after our death, we have to work toward this goal while we are alive. We should invest in studying Torah and performing many mitzvot, as Nadav

and Avihu did, whose memory lives on despite their death thousands of years ago.

In Summary

- We mention the death of Aharon's sons on Yom Kippur in order to arouse the Attribute of Mercy upon us. We hope to be found innocent and thereby merit a favorable judgment. Furthermore, tzaddikim after death are considered living. To the same degree that they became sanctified during their life, they are sanctified in their death, and their memory is perpetuated.
- Aharon's sons were condemned to death because they sought to achieve a lofty level before they were adequately prepared for it. Clearly, they had pure intentions and acted for the sake of Heaven. However, they should have advanced gradually, step by step, and not sought to proceed to the highest levels in one giant leap.
- It says, "And Aharon fell silent." How was he capable of accepting the decree calmly without protesting? Aharon realized that his sons were entrusted to him only as a security. Therefore, when they were taken from him, he did not complain. In the same way, Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness justified the decree when their sons perished, accepting it with love.
- Aharon's sons absorbed the lesson of their father that everything ultimately belongs to Hashem. Therefore, they were inspired to sacrifice their lives for Hashem's sake. Hashem blamed them for doing so, since it says in the Torah, "And live by them." This implies that a person should live with inspiration through keeping the mitzvot of the Torah. It is only in specific situations that a person is obligated to relinquish his life in sanctification of Hashem.
- The death of a tzaddik atones for the sins of the generation. This is because people are shocked and awakened to do teshuvah. As a result, they merit atonement for their sins. Thus, the tzaddik's death is the means

for bringing people to do teshuvah, and consequently, have their sins forgiven.

- Why do we mention the death of Aharon's sons specifically on Yom Kippur, when we request life from Hashem? Hashem wants us to recognize that our lives in this world are limited, and only the World to Come is eternal. Therefore, one should accomplish in this world in order to merit the World of Reward.

Hashem Reproves Those Whom He Loves

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, they deserved to die. If not for Moshe's efforts in annulling the decree, Hashem would have vented His wrath upon them. Although the Generation of the Wilderness was not wiped out because of their sin, the *Shechinah* departed from them. Consequently, Bnei Yisrael sensed that they no longer found favor with Hashem. They were thus greatly astonished when, despite removing His *Shechinah*, Hashem continued to perform many extraordinary miracles for them. The manna continued to descend from Heaven, the Well of Miriam continued to escort them, quenching their thirst, the Pillar of Cloud straightened the terrain, the Pillar of Fire lit up their path, and even their clothes and shoes did not wear out from their journey. Consequently, Am Yisrael were confused. They were not sure whether Hashem was angry with them, or loved them. If He was angry at them, surely he would have discontinued performing miracles on their behalf.

Am Yisrael feared that these miracles indicated that Hashem was granting them the reward that they deserved in this world rather than the World to Come, by performing miracles for them. However, when they saw a fire descending from Heaven and the glory of Hashem being revealed to them, they began to realize that Hashem once again favored them, as before. The revelation of the *Shechinah* was a clear sign that Hashem truly loved them and was not just seeking to reward them in this world for their good deeds, in order to deny them bliss in the World to Come.

This realization was reinforced when they witnessed Hashem punishing Nadav and Avihu, since Hashem punishes those who sin in this world in order that their reward should not be diminished in the World to Come. The death of Aharon's sons proved that Hashem did not seek to withhold from them their reward in the World to Come. On the contrary, He was punishing them in this world so that they would achieve atonement and merit eternal life. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 10:3) says, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This implies that they were tzaddikim and close to Hashem. However, since Hashem is exacting with tzaddikim to a hairsbreadth, according to the exalted level of their *kedushah*, they were condemned to death.

One should be wary when he lacks nothing in this world, because perhaps he is receiving his reward here rather than in the World to Come (*Sanhedrin* 101a). On the other hand, when he is beset with troubles and suffering, it is a sign that he is favored by Hashem and is being admonished when necessary (ibid.), as it says (*Mishlei* 3:12), "For Hashem admonishes the ones He loves." Similarly, Yaakov Avinu declared (*Bereishit* 32:10), "I have been diminished by all the kindnesses." Although he had been promised by Hashem that he would receive many blessings, he feared that they would detract from his reward in the World to Come (*Shabbat* 32a).

Consequently, taking away the *neshamot* of these two tzaddikim actually proved that Hashem still loved and favored Bnei Yisrael. Regarding this, David Hamelech said (*Tehillim* 94:12), "Praiseworthy is the

man whom G-d disciplines." This is because through suffering, Hashem proves to man that He desires his benefit and seeks connection with him; He wishes to grant him his reward in the World to Come (*Rashi*, *Berachot* 5a). Hashem inflicts a person in this world with pain and suffering in order that he should merit entering the World to Come, being worthy of the reward reserved for him (*Kiddushin* 39b, see *Rashi*, ibid.).

Sometimes a person sins and does not receive retribution, but continues to succeed, fulfilling the maxim "The ways of the wicked are successful," and "The wicked enjoy goodness." Such a person should fear that perhaps Hashem is paying him the reward for his good deeds now, in this world, and is withholding punishment so that he should not merit receiving reward in the World to Come. Conversely, the tzaddik suffers in this world, in order to cleanse him from every small transgression that he committed. This is in order that he should merit receiving his full reward in the World to Come.

Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael observed their miraculous existence in the Wilderness following the sin of the Golden Calf, they feared that Hashem was rewarding them in this world in order to preserve their punishment for the World to Come. However, when they witnessed the deaths of Aharon's sons, they realized that Hashem was punishing the ones He loves in this world, in order to enable them to receive their reward in the Next World, which is entirely blissful.

In light of this, we can explain the reason that parashat *Acharei Mot* is read on Yom Kippur, and the connection between Yom Kippur and the deaths of Aharon's sons. Although Hashem forgives Am Yisrael for their sins on Yom Kippur, a person should realize that if he is beset with troubles following Yom Kippur, it is only for his benefit. This is because Hashem wishes to cleanse him of even his most minor transgressions, despite the fact that he has already gained atonement for them, in order to enable him to arrive at the Heavenly Court entirely innocent. In this way he will surely merit inheriting a portion in the World to Come.

In Summary

- Bnei Yisrael were confused. Despite sinning with the Golden Calf, Hashem continued to shower miracles upon them. They were worried that they were being rewarded in this world for all their good deeds, in order that they should not merit everlasting reward in the World to Come.
- After Hashem once again rested His *Shechinah* among Bnei Yisrael, they understood that their sin was forgiven. It was an indication of Hashem's love for them. This realization was reinforced with the death of Aharon's sons.

Caution in Avodat Hashem

"And Hashem said to Moshe; Speak to Aharon, your brother – he may not come at all times into the Sanctuary, within the Curtain, in front of the Cover that is upon the Ark, and he will not die; for with a cloud I appear upon the Ark-cover"

(*Vayikra* 16:2)

Hashem commanded Moshe to warn Aharon that he should not enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whenever he desired. He should be aware that he was only permitted to enter there once a year, on Yom Kippur. Even at that time it was not permitted for him to enter for his own purposes, but only in order to pray and beseech Hashem on behalf of Am Yisrael. Hashem reiterated that Aharon must be extremely cautious in this matter, in order that he should not be harmed, as his sons Nadav and Avihu were when they got burnt as a result of not being scrupulous in the honor of the Sanctuary.

It is surprising that Aharon needed to be admonished in this way. It would certainly not occur to Aharon to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without explicit permission from Hashem. After all, Aharon was known for his extraordinary righteousness. Every move that he made was performed only for the sake of Heaven. Why was it necessary to explicitly command him to be cautious? Moreover, this command was issued following his sons' death. At that time he was acutely aware of the severe repercussions in not properly honoring the Sanctuary.

This question is reinforced by the fact that Aharon himself did not seek to fill the position as Kohen Gadol. In fact, he felt that Moshe, his younger brother, was more worthy to serve in this role. Only after Moshe Rabbeinu convinced him, explaining to him the great privilege of serving in the Sanctuary, did Aharon agree to accept the position (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Vayikra* 514). In light of this, it seems that Hashem's command was unnecessary, since Aharon would surely exercise extreme caution when approaching the Mishkan.

Chazal teach us that there are certain matters which are beyond human comprehension and control. For example, there is a prohibition for one to read personal letters that are not addressed to him. Included in this is the obligation to knock on one's door before entering his home. These constraints on a person's behavior indicate how the Torah protects a person's privacy. It also signifies that there are matters in which a person should not involve himself. He is obligated to exercise added caution not to intrude on his fellow's privacy. In light of this, our question is magnified. After all, if even an ordinary person would avoid intruding on his fellow's privacy, certainly Aharon Hakohen would not behave in this way, by entering the Sanctuary at will.

This can be explained by the following statement of Chazal: "The deeds of the forefathers are portents for their children" (*Tanchuma*, *Lech Lecha* 9; *Ramban*, *Lech Lecha* 12:2). This implies that children generally inherit the traits of their parents, since they observe their behavior and imitate them. Upon analyzing my own conduct, I see that there are areas in which I differ from my esteemed father, zy"a, behaving in an opposite manner.

For example, my father was an extremely quiet man, uttering hardly a single word. On the other hand, I love to lecture, drawing people closer to Hashem. Conversely, there are areas in which I very much resemble my father, because I absorbed his conduct and have become accustomed to behaving as he did.

Including the qualities that I acquired from him is my readiness to dispense charity and help the destitute, as my father did when disbursing his money for *tzedakah*. Also, I especially cherish the mitzvah of tefillin, as my father did. Likewise, I feel that I also inherited from him the ability to tolerate humiliation, but not the humiliation of the Torah or its scholars. When I chance upon a person disparaging the holy Torah, or its scholars, I am filled with rage and am unable to contain myself. I recall my father behaving a similar way. Although he was a very quiet person by nature, he was uncompromising concerning the Torah and its scholars. Woe to the one who was caught speaking against them within his earshot!

It seems that Nadav and Avihu resembled their father's characteristics of self-sacrifice and devotion to Hashem, in fulfillment of the maxim "The deeds of the forefathers are portents for their children." Their error stemmed from their overwhelming desire to connect to Hashem with the Heavenly fire. This is because they did not realize that this fire was much too intense for human beings. Consequently, this was not the proper method in achieving elevation and connecting to Hashem. Their death taught Bnei Yisrael that although Hashem wishes His children to draw close to Him, they must be aware that there are areas that are not within their limits. Therefore, they should not attempt to connect to Hashem in an incorrect manner.

Since Nadav and Avihu's intentions were sincere, and they behaved in this way only because they had inherited the trait of aspiring to sacrifice themselves for Hashem's sake from their father, Hashem ordered all of Bnei Yisrael to mourn them. They had not sinned out of haughtiness; only because they had absorbed the yearning for attachment to Hashem from their father.

This is the reason why Hashem commanded Aharon about this matter. Since He knew that Aharon was inclined to seek attachment to Hashem, and additionally, his sons had already transgressed in this behavior, Hashem warned him not to overstep his boundaries, as his sons had done, but to progress in his Avodat Hashem in an acceptable manner. Hashem did not want him to seek to draw close to Him by entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* at his will and ultimately forfeiting his life.

When Moshe Rabbeinu failed to descend from Heaven with the Torah according to the people's calculations, they concluded that he had perished. They immediately approached Aharon and demanded that he create a Golden Calf for them, since they felt incapable of continuing on their own, without a guide. At first Aharon did not want to create the Golden Calf, since he knew that a person must serve his Creator at all times and in every situation, even when he lacks a spiritual leader to guide him. Aharon himself had achieved a high level in Avodat Hashem. He attempted to impress upon Bnei Yisrael that they must continue serving Hashem with faith and self-sacrifice to the best of their abilities. They had all witnessed the revelation of Hashem's *Shechinah*. Even though Moshe was no longer with them to intercede on their behalf, they could continue in their Avodat Hashem on their own.

However, Am Yisrael did not accept Aharon's opinion. They insisted that he fashion the Golden Calf to serve as an agent, which would intercede on their behalf (*Ramban*, *Shemot* 32a). When Aharon saw how unrelenting Bnei Yisrael were, even murdering Chur, who tried to admonish them (*Sanhedrin* 7a), he decided to yield to their demands in order to put an end to the bloodshed. Aharon was so devoted to Hashem that he willingly sacrificed his life by fashioning the Golden Calf, in order that Am Yisrael should not shed blood and thereby desecrate Hashem's Name (*Vayikra Rabbah* 10:3).

Hashem observed Aharon's self-sacrifice and knew that he was prepared to surrender his life for the sake of Am Yisrael. How much more so was he willing to sacrifice himself in order to draw closer to Hashem. Therefore, Moshe's pleas on his behalf were partially accepted, and only

two of Aharon's sons died, instead of all four. This was because Aharon was coerced into fashioning the Golden Calf, in order to save himself and others from being murdered. He only agreed to make it when he realized that the people would not listen to his advice to connect directly with Hashem.

However, we find that Aharon was punished for the sin of the Waters of Merivah. It would seem that this was a less severe sin. Since Aharon did not admonish his brother, Moshe, when he hit the rock instead of speaking to it, he was judged exactingly and was denied entry into Eretz Yisrael. This proves Aharon's innocence in the sin of the Golden Calf, since Hashem did not punish him then.

Aharon's selfless behavior sheds light on the source of Nadav and Avihu's conduct. Since they observed their father's actions, they believed that it was necessary to serve Hashem directly, in every possible way, as it says (*Tehillim* 35:10), "All my limbs will say, Hashem, who is like You?" However, in their passionate desire to connect to Hashem directly, they failed to realize that the means that they were employing were incorrect since the goal was beyond their ability. This warranted harsh judgment. However, Hashem ordered all of Bnei Yisrael to mourn the deaths of Aharon's sons because their intention was entirely pure and for the sake of Heaven.

It is important to know that the obligation to sacrifice one's life for Hashem is only relevant in specific situations (*Sanhedrin* 74a), or in times of *gezeirot hashmad* (ibid.). Conversely, there are situations in which a person is required to transgress in order to preserve his life. We find examples of this during the Holocaust, when it was necessary to consume non-kosher foods in order to remain alive. The Torah states (*Vayikra* 18:5), "And live by them (the mitzvot)." Chazal (*Yoma* 85b) explain that the Torah promotes a person's life. The performance of mitzvot is not intended to cause a person to die prematurely. Therefore, it is mandatory to exercise caution in guarding one's life and avoiding harm, as it states (*Devarim* 4:15), "But you shall greatly beware for your souls." A person can express his devotion to Hashem by overcoming lust and avoiding sin.

When a person overcomes his physical inclinations and sacrifices his personal ambitions in order to promote the study of Torah, Hashem considers this as if he sacrificed himself for His sake.

In Summary

- Hashem commanded Moshe to warn Aharon not to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* randomly, but only as permitted on Yom Kippur. It is surprising that this warning was necessary. We would not suspect that Aharon would enter without permission, especially after his two sons died for seeking to connect to Hashem in an unpermitted way. In addition, Aharon did not wish to accept the position of a Kohen Gadol. He only agreed after Moshe convinced him. Thus, it is clear that he would not have presumptuously entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without permission.
- "The deeds of the forefathers are portents for their children." This implies that children generally inherit the traits of their parents. Nadav and Avihu aspired to connect with the Divine fire because they learned from their father to seek closeness with Hashem. Consequently, their sin did not stem from haughtiness, but only because they absorbed from their father the trait of self-sacrifice for Hashem's sake. However, they failed to realize that they had not yet reached this lofty level; therefore they died.
- For this reason, Hashem commanded Aharon to beware of entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. He knew that Aharon possessed the trait of self-sacrifice. Because of His overwhelming love for Aharon, Hashem did not want him to die by overstepping his limits in his desire to draw close to Hashem, as his sons had. The Torah seeks to protect a person's life, as it says, "And live by them."
- Aharon Hakohen believed that a person should serve Hashem even in the absence of a leader, who shows him the way. Therefore, he did not want to participate in fashioning the Golden Calf. However, Bnei Yisrael did not accept his opinion, and they had already murdered Chur in their zeal. For this reason, Aharon instructed them in fashioning the Golden Calf. Aharon was not punished for the sin of the Golden Calf because Hashem

knew that his actions stemmed from total self-sacrifice for the people's sake. He wanted to prevent bloodshed. Aharon was punished for the sin of the Waters of Merivah. This indicates his innocence in the sin of the Golden Calf. Had he not been entirely innocent, he would have been punished for this sin as well.

- Aharon's sons inherited the trait of self-sacrifice from their father. However, they did not realize that there are aspects in Avodat Hashem that are beyond human comprehension. As a rule, a person should strive to sanctify Hashem's Name when he is alive and not only in death, as it says, "But you shall greatly beware for your souls." Even during one's lifetime, a person can sanctify Hashem's Name by distancing himself from material pursuits.

Considering the Consequences

"And Hashem said to Moshe; Speak to Aharon, your brother – he may not come at all times into the Sanctuary, within the Curtain, in front of the Cover that is upon the Ark, and he will not die; for with a cloud I appear upon the Ark-cover"

(*Vayikra* 16:2)

Following the death of Aharon's sons, Hashem appeared to Moshe and instructed him to warn Aharon not to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* randomly, but only when Hashem sanctions it. Hashem added that if Aharon Hakohen would not listen to Him, and would enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* at will, he would be liable for death, as were his two sons,

Nadav and Avihu, who entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without permission.

This is difficult to understand, since we know that the glory of Hashem fills the world, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 6:3) "The whole world is filled with His glory." This implies that Hashem's Presence is found everywhere, wherever we may go. It is Hashem's Presence in every facet of Creation that ensures its continued existence. It says (*Bereishit Rabbah* 10:6) that even every blade of grass has an angel striking it and exhorting it to grow. Also the ocean does not overstep its boundaries established by Hashem during the six days of Creation, as it says (*Tehillim* 104:9), "You set a boundary they cannot overstep." If Hashem would remove His supervision, the ocean would overflow and flood the world. Hashem also determined the sun's position, as it says (ibid. vs. 19), "The sun knows its destination." If it would become slightly more distant from the earth, the world would instantly freeze. Conversely, if it would draw a little closer, the world would be consumed by fire.

Since Hashem's existence sustains the world, it is clear that He is found in every place. In light of this, we may ask: If Hashem is truly found everywhere, why were Aharon's sons accused for entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without permission? If we were to suggest that a greater degree of *kedushah* exists in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, it would imply that the *kedushah* existing in the world at large is limited.

Although Hashem's kingship fills the entire world, the *Kodesh Hakodashim* is a place where the *Shechinah* is obvious. The *Shechinah* dwells there with greater intensity. Similarly, when a person stands in prayer before Hashem, he must concentrate deeply, since he is standing before the Master of the World. However, when he begins the Shemoneh Esrei, which is prayed while standing still, he has to concentrate even more intensely, fulfilling the words of Chazal (*Berachot* 28b): "Know before Whom you stand." The halachot regarding the Shemoneh Esrei are more severe than for other prayers, since one must adopt a greater degree of awareness of the *Shechinah* while saying it. As an example, in

the Shemoneh Esrei one is forbidden to move, speak, or even greet someone. One must concentrate entirely on his prayer,

Regarding our subject, we should be aware that although Hashem's Kingship encompasses the world, the *Kodesh Hakodashim* is a place where the *Shechinah* is obvious. For this reason, the sons of Aharon were punished for not demonstrating added reverence by entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without requesting permission from Hashem. This can be compared to a human king who lives in a palace with many floors and rooms. His friends may enter his palace and visit its many chambers. However, there is one specific room, in which the king stores his treasures, where even his closest friends may not enter at their will. They must first obtain specific permission from the king in order to enter there. If this is so regarding a human king, how much more so does this apply to Hashem.

Nadav and Avihu were also found guilty for lighting their own fire for the *korban* without permission, in addition to the fire that descended from Heaven. Therefore, they were condemned to death (*Tanchuma, Acharei Mot* 6). We can learn an important lesson from this. The world is conducted according to specific laws to indicate that everything in the world has its rules and laws. One may not simply behave as he pleases. If everyone were to do as they please, the world would turn into confusion, and "each man would eat his fellow alive." In order that the world should not become chaotic, it must be conducted according to set rules and laws. In fact, we see that all of nature operates according to a specific plan. This is called the "wheel of life." Every species and creature has a vital task to accomplish in order for it to exist. When a person interferes with the laws of nature and tampers with the role of a species, the entire world cycle becomes disrupted, and the resulting harm is greater than the benefits he may have intended to achieve.

Since Nadav and Avihu deviated from the rules and sought to draw close to Hashem by lighting their own fire to connect to the Divine fire from Above, without receiving specific permission, they were struck dead. This impresses upon us that Hashem is the Master of the World, and only

He has the authority and the ability to determine the rules and laws of Creation. When a person attempts to disrupt the laws of Creation and to do as he wishes, the outcome is disastrous.

We find in this parashah that Moshe Rabbeinu warned his brother, Aharon, not to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whenever he pleases, but only after receiving specific permission from Hashem. Why was it necessary to specifically warn Aharon regarding this? He was known for his righteousness and outstanding wisdom. Would it occur to Aharon to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without permission, especially after his two sons had perished as a result of this transgression? It seems that this command was superfluous.

We can resolve this difficulty by analyzing a similar issue regarding the purification process of the *metzora*. When the Torah discusses the *metzora*, who was inflicted with *tzara'at* for transgressing in *lashon hara*, the Torah states that after he was healed from his affliction, and the Kohen allowed him to rejoin the people, he was obligated to sacrifice a sin-offering. This *korban* consisted of two unblemished male lambs and one unblemished ewe in its first year, etc. (*Vayikra* 14:10). It is difficult to understand why the Torah commands the *metzora* to bring such a lavish and expensive *korban*. What if the slanderer was a poor man, who could not afford this costly sacrifice? How would he become purified from his *tumah*?

Chazal conclude that although the *korban* was extremely costly, the *metzora* is obligated to offer it in order to be healed. However, a pauper is only obligated to offer one lamb and two birds. Even so, a lamb was more than a poor man could afford. This was specifically intended so that before speaking a person should consider the heavy price he would have to pay if he would utter words of *lashon hara*. The expensive *korban* served as a deterrent, preventing people from speaking *lashon hara*.

Notwithstanding, we see that despite the costly process of purification, many people transgress with this severe sin without considering its consequence. This teaches us how forceful the *Yetzer Hara* is, since a

poor man might still transgress with *lashon hara* despite being aware of the expensive sacrifices that he would have to offer as atonement. This is similar to a diabetic who cannot withstand the temptation of sweets. Although eating sugar places his life in danger, he continues to consume sweets without considering the consequences. This is the way of the *Yetzer Hara*. He cunningly persuades a person to transgress, causing him to disregard the consequences he will suffer after he succumbs, and the costly price he will have to pay, which he cannot afford.

The story is told about Naaman, the army commander of Aram, who was afflicted with *tzara'at* (*Melachim* II, 5). His Jewish maid-servant advised him to go to the prophet, Elisha, and receive a blessing to be cured. Naaman listened to his maid-servant's advice and came to Elisha Hanavi. Elisha told him to immerse in the Jordan River seven times in order to be purified of *tzara'at*. At first, Naaman refused to accept the words of the *Navi*, and he parted angrily from him. However, some time later, his anger subsided, and he agreed to listen to the *Navi*. It states (ibid., vs. 14) that after Naaman immersed in the Jordan River seven times, he was entirely purified of *tzara'at*. Naaman sought to repay Elisha Hanavi for his favor and told him (vs. 15), "Behold, now I know that there is no G-d in the whole world except in Israel! And now, please accept a tribute from your servant." Elisha Hanavi refused to accept payment from him and bade him farewell.

Elisha Hanavi had an attendant called Geichazi. When Geichazi saw that Elisha had refused the gifts from Naaman, he greedily raced after his chariot, seeking to acquire the gifts for himself. He fabricated a tale to the commanding general, saying (ibid. vs. 22), "Just now two young men of the prophets' disciples have arrived to me from Mount Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing." Naaman was eager to repay Elisha the Prophet for his favor, and he assumed that Geichazi was acting in his interests. He immediately gave him all that he requested. When Elisha became aware of Geichazi's deceitful act, he immediately cursed him, saying (ibid. 5:27), "Naaman's *tzara'at* shall

therefore cleave to you and to your children forever!" His curse took effect and Geichazi left Elisha's presence white as snow with *tzara'at*.

How was it possible for Geichazi to behave contrary to the will of the *Navi*, and seek personal gains in such a dishonest manner? Geichazi was not a fool. Certainly he knew that Elisha Hanavi would eventually discover his deception. How did he not fear that he would end up publicly disgraced? This is due to the scheming of the *Yetzer Hara*, who blinds even the eyes of the wise. He manages to distort the conduct of a person, making him do things that he normally would not consider. Because of the powerful force of the *Yetzer Hara*, at times a person falls for his tactics without noticing it. This is why Geichazi blindly followed the plan of the *Yetzer Hara* without considering the consequences of his actions. The *Yetzer Hara* works to distort a person's logic and blind him to the outcome of his deeds. In addition, he portrays the instant gratification of the moment, so that a person should only consider the imminent pleasure without considering the consequences.

In light of this, Hashem told Moshe to warn Aharon not to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* at his will, even though we would not imagine that Aharon would transgress in this way. This warning makes us aware of the powerful force of the *Yetzer Hara*, who employs countless strategies in order to cause tzaddikim to fall in his trap. Chazal (*Sukkah* 52a) explain that the greater a person, the greater is his *Yetzer Hara*. The challenges that tzaddikim face in their spiritual pursuits are unfathomable. Even though it may outwardly seem that the tzaddik does not need to struggle to perfect his character traits, the opposite is true. Precisely because of the loftiness of the tzaddik, more control is required, and he faces more intense battles against his *Yetzer Hara*, who does not take kindly to his elevated status.

Regarding this, it says (*Lecha Dodi*), "Last in deed, but first in thought." This implies that a person should look ahead and consider the consequences of his actions before doing them. Will the deed advance his Avodat Hashem, or will it ultimately cause him eternal misery? Each person, according to his level, experiences a weak period in his spiritual

progress. The Satan cunningly takes advantage of this opportunity in order to cause the person to sin. The *Yetzer Hara* does not explicitly order him to transgress a specific mitzvah, but instead persuasively convinces him that the mitzvah is only a stringent behavior which may be overlooked. In this way he slowly sways the person, until he unwittingly transgresses a mitzvah of the Torah.

If Aharon, who was on an exalted spiritual level, required an explicit command from Hashem to warn him to be cautious about entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without receiving permission from Hashem, how much more so do we need reinforcement in avoiding our *Yetzer Hara*, who constantly attempts to divert us from the proper path.

In Summary

- It says, "The whole world is filled with His glory." This implies that the *Shechinah* of Hashem is found everywhere. Since this is so, why were Aharon's sons held accountable for entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without permission? The *Kodesh Hakodashim* is distinct from the rest of the world because the Shechinah is more concentrated there. Therefore, one must exercise greater caution when entering it.
- Aharon's sons were also found guilty for lighting a fire in the holiest location without permission. This teaches us that the world is conducted according to Divine laws, and whoever attempts to interfere with the laws of nature disrupts its balance and endangers himself and the entire world.
- Why did Hashem instruct Moshe to warn Aharon not to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without specific permission? Surely, Aharon would never consider doing so, especially after his two sons had died due to this transgression. We can resolve this difficulty by analyzing a similar issue, regarding the purification process of the *metzora*. Why was the *metzora* obligated to offer such an expensive *korban*, which included two unblemished male lambs and one unblemished ewe in its first year, etc.? What could a person do if he was not able to afford it?

- The reason why the Torah commanded the *metzora* to bring such a costly sacrifice was in order to teach Am Yisrael to consider their actions carefully, weighing their consequences. We learn of the powerful force of the *Yetzer Hara*, since a pauper might still transgress with *lashon hara*, despite the knowledge that he could not afford the expensive *korban* required for atonement. The story of Geichazi serves as an example of this. Although he knew that Elisha Hanavi would discover his deception and punish him, he did not refrain from sinning.
- This is why Aharon was commanded not to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* without permission. Since the *Yetzer Hara* attacks everyone, including the great and righteous people, who are faced with greater temptations because of their level, Aharon required this explicit warning.

Lasting Impressions

"Like the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled do not do; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you, and do not follow their statutes"

(*Vayikra* 18:3)

The Torah states that Hashem appeared to Moshe and commanded him to instruct Bnei Yisrael not to imitate the behavior of the Egyptians, in whose land they had dwelled. They should also keep away from the behavior of the Canaanites, through whose land they were about to pass.

Why would it occur to Am Yisrael, the Chosen Nation, who had just received the holy Torah, to stoop to the behavior of the other nations? Moreover, why would they want to copy the most debased nations, such

as Egypt and Canaan? Am Yisrael were redeemed in the merit of guarding their Jewish names, style of dress, and language (*Shir Hashirim* 4:25; *Maharal*, *Netzach Yisrael, Perek* 25; *Pesikta Zutrati, Shemot* 6:6). They remained separate, not mingling with the Egyptians (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 23). Why was it necessary to warn Bnei Yisrael not to follow the ways of the nations when they had already exercised tremendous caution in guarding their Jewish identity even while enslaved in the most depraved land? This admonition is similar to warning a rich man not to imitate the behavior of a pauper.

This can be explained by the words of Rashi (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "The eye sees, [and] the heart desires." Normally people are drawn after the temptations that they are exposed to. Although a person does not cognitively want to act upon the enticement set before his eyes, his heart is naturally drawn after his desires. He may suddenly find himself committing serious sins, which normally he would not contemplate doing. Similarly, Bnei Yisrael did not wish to follow the ways of the nations. However, Hashem, Who discerns a person's inner intentions, warned Bnei Yisrael regarding the nations. Even though Bnei Yisrael themselves did not wish to imitate the nations, however, by witnessing their behavior, and becoming familiar with their customs, they might slowly become drawn to them and begin behaving in a similar manner.

When Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, Hashem granted them special protection in order that they should not become completely assimilated among the Egyptians. This is because Hashem knew that if Bnei Yisrael would take only one more step toward the ways of the Egyptians, they would descend to the depths of the fiftieth level of *tumah*. Thereafter, it would be impossible to rise from their corrupt state, and they would not merit leaving Egypt. This is why Hashem protected Bnei Yisrael from the decadent lures of Egypt. Even so, Bnei Yisrael had already descended to the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash, Parashat Yitro*), and if Bnei Yisrael had not abstained from intermarriage, they would never have been able to rise from their low level.

In parashat Balak it says (*Bamidbar* 25:1), "Israel settled in Shittim and the people began to act promiscuously with the daughters of Moav." If someone would have asked Bnei Yisrael if they truly wanted to transgress by behaving immorally, without doubt, they would have reacted with shock and sworn that they only desired to follow the laws of the Torah. However, since "the eye sees" and consequently "the heart desires," there is no assurance that one will be able to avoid immorality. Ultimately, Bnei Yisrael succumbed to sin because they did not adequately avoid the daughters of Moav.

In addition, the scenes that Bnei Yisrael witnessed while enslaved in Egypt, and the conduct that they were exposed to, left an indelible impression on them. Although they did their utmost to disengage from the depravity of the Egyptians, a faint impression remained because of their exposure. This made it necessary for them to take additional steps to guard themselves from succumbing to such behavior.

Once, while I flew with Air France airline, music was being played in the background. Although I did not intentionally listen to the songs, and I tried hard to distract myself, one of the songs penetrated my mind against my will. To my dismay, just as I stood up to pray, the song began to replay in my mind and disturbed my prayer.

This is an example of the lesson that sometimes the actions of a person, as well as his thoughts, surface against his will. In order that one should truly succeed in guarding himself against negative impressions, he must as much as possible avoid being exposed to harmful influences.

Just as the force of negative impressions compels a person to behave badly, likewise the force of positive impressions can influence a person to act constructively. The Gemara relates (*Eiruvin* 13b) that Rabbeinu Hakadosh grew in wisdom and greatness because he used to sit behind Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness in the Beit Hamidrash. When Rabbi Meir would learn Torah, a brilliant light would shine forth and envelope him. Rabbeinu Hakadosh, who sat behind him, would see this light, which influenced him to grow in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. How much greater

he would have become had he sat facing Rabbi Meir, being exposed to the light in its full brilliance.

This is why a person should exercise great caution to choose good company and be exposed only to positive influences that will draw his heart to them. Ultimately, those who seek purity are assisted by Heaven to succeed.

In Summary

- Why did Hashem warn the Chosen Nation not to follow the customs of the Egyptians and the Canaanim? Certainly Bnei Yisrael would attempt to guard themselves from behaving like these depraved nations.
- It is the nature of man to be drawn after that which his eyes behold. Even though he may not wish to sin, he is pulled after his heart's desires, without consciously wanting to do so. Therefore, a person should guard his eyes in order not to be drawn to harmful sights, which may lead him to behave in a forbidden manner.
- While Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, they were exposed to the depravity of the Egyptians. Therefore, a faint impression of their immorality remained with them. This is why they had a greater obligation to guard themselves from imitating their immoral conduct.
- A positive impression can be effective to the same degree. Therefore, a person should place himself in good company and expose himself only to positive influences.

Gems on Parashat Acharei Mot

Marriage Protects from Sin

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

Chazal (*Tanchuma*, *Acharei Mot* 6) say that Nadav and Avihu were punished for lighting a strange fire, since they were not married at the time. Had they been married, lighting the strange fire would not have been considered offensive. This parashah is read on Yom Kippur (*Megillah* 31a) after Shacharit, and the pesukim discussing forbidden relations is read during Minchah. What is the connection between the deaths of Aharon's sons and forbidden relations, which are both read on Yom Kippur?

The Torah reveals that if Aharon's sons would have been married, they would not have sinned by lighting a strange fire. This is because when husband and wife live together peacefully, the *Shechinah* resides among them, indicated by the letter י of the word איש (man) and the letter ה of the word אשה (woman), which forms Hashem's Name י-ה (*Sotah* 17a). However, when the *Shechinah* is absent, and the letters י-ה are missing from the איש (man) and אשה (woman), only the letters אש (fire) remain.

This is why by abstaining from marriage, Nadav and Avihu eventually lit a strange fire.

From this we learn that a woman has the potential to save her husband from sinning. Conversely, when a man is not married, he can become degenerate and eventually transgress all three cardinal sins. This does not imply that Nadav and Avihu actually transgressed with immoral conduct. However, we may assume that had they been married, they would not have sinned by lighting a strange fire.

After the Death

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died"

(*Vayikra* 16:1)

Why is this parashah called *Acharei Mot* (After the Death), rather than *Parashat Nadav and Avihu*, after the people discussed in the parashah? Other parshiyot are named after the people discussed in them, e.g., *Chayei Sarah* and *Pinchas*.

The name of the parashah teaches us that when a person performs a mitzvah with exceptional zeal and devotion, it is considered as if he sacrificed his life for its fulfillment. Consequently, his reward is unfathomable.

Another reason for the name of this parashah is the following. When analyzing the words, we see that the last letters of the words אחרי מות have the numerical value of 410, which is the *gematria* of the word קדוש (holy). In addition, the first letters of the word אחרי מות have the same

gematria as the word בם, adding one for the word itself, which alludes to the commandment "ודברת בם – and you shall speak of them [Torah]." This implies that if a person desires to sanctify himself and become elevated through Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, he should dedicate his life entirely to learning Torah.

Becoming Elevated in the Service of Hashem

"With this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary: with a bull, a young male of cattle, for a sin-offering, and a ram for an olah-offering"

(*Vayikra* 16:3)

The word בזאת (with this) alludes to the Torah (*Avodah Zarah* 2b), since it says (*Devarim* 4:44), "זאת התורה – this is the teaching." In addition, according to Kabbalah the word, בזאת denotes the *Shechinah* (*Rakanti* 58). Likewise, the word זאת refers to Am Yisrael upon whom it says (*Shir Hashirim* 3:6) "מי זאת עולה מן המדבר – Who is this ascending from the wilderness?"

Following parashat *Acharei Mot*, in which these words appear, is parashat *Kedoshim*. This teaches us an important lesson. The letter ב' (which has the *gematria* of two) of בזאת alludes to the two organs, the eyes and the heart, which serve as agents for sin (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 10b). One who truly wishes to sanctify himself must first sanctify these two organs. Chazal (*Rashi*, *Bamidbar* 15:39) tell us that "the eye sees and the heart desires." This implies that in order to progress in Avodat Hashem,

one must sanctify his eyes and his heart so that they should not cause him to stumble and sin.

The Ben Ish Chai teaches (*Shanah Sheniyah*, *Tetzaveh*; ibid., *Chukat*) that not every person who desires to be sanctified succeeds. This is because in order to become sanctified, one must possess strong roots stemming from the traditions of our forefathers. Therefore, a non-Jew who learns Torah and fulfills its mitzvot is punishable by death (*Sanhedrin* 59a).

Kedoshim

Levels in Kedushah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:1-2)

The main subject of parashat *Kedoshim* is *kedushah* and *taharah*, as is implied by its name. In fact, the Torah repeats the idea of *kedushah* three times in this parashah.

In the beginning, it says (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I."

In the middle, it says (ibid. 20:7-8), "You shall sanctify yourselves and you will be holy, for I am Hashem, your G-d. You shall observe My decrees and perform them – I am Hashem, Who sanctifies you."

In the end, it says (ibid. vs. 26), "You shall be holy for Me, for I Hashem am holy; and I have separated you from among the peoples to be Mine."

Upon analyzing these pesukim, we can conclude that there are two categories of *kedushah*. The first is *kedushah* which is manifested by

abstention. This is described by Chazal with the statement (*Yevamot* 20a), "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." This implies that a person should abstain even from things that are permitted to him. The Ramban writes (*Vayikra* 19:2) that even regarding things that are allowed, a person should abstain from them if they serve no necessary purpose. For example, a person should not eat gluttonously, even if the food is kosher. In addition, when a person's wife is permitted to him, he should ideally practice moderation.

The other category of *kedushah* is abstaining from transgressions which are prohibited. Avoiding sin is also a catalyst for *kedushah*. Rashi describes this concept in reference to the words "You shall be holy." Rashi explains, "Be removed from *arayot* and from sin, for wherever you find restriction of sexual immorality [mentioned in the Torah], you find holiness [juxtaposed with it]." This implies that the actual abstinence from immorality generates *kedushah*. Although, abstinence from things which are permitted also creates *kedushah*, this is a higher level, which not everyone attains.

The *kedushah* engendered by abstinence from immorality results in separation and detachment from the nations of the world, who are well-known for their immorality and shamelessness. Because Bnei Yisrael are meticulous in marrying with *kedushah* and purity, they remain attached to Hashem, and they do not become assimilated among the nations. This idea is supported by the statement (*Vayikra* 20:26), "You shall be holy for Me, for I Hashem am holy; and I have separated you from among the peoples to be Mine." This implies that by acting with *kedushah* and fulfilling Hashem's commandments in the Torah, Am Yisrael remain separated from all other nations, belonging solely to Hashem. Upon analyzing the words of the pasuk, we can conclude that *kedushah* is abstinence and separation, which serve to sanctify and elevate Am Yisrael, connecting them to Hashem.

Regarding this pasuk, Rashi teaches (ibid.): "If you are separated from [the other peoples], you are Mine. But if not, you belong to Nebuchadnezzar and his colleagues." However, it is unclear why Rashi

included Nebuchadnezzar and his colleagues in his explanation. Rashi could have written that "if you are separated from the other peoples, then you are Mine. But if not, you are not Mine." This teaches us a lesson. If Am Yisrael do not sanctify themselves by separating themselves from the nations, Hashem delivers them into their hands. The nations become the ones beloved to Hashem, because of Am Yisrael's own preference for them.

In fact, the *Navi* says (*Yirmiyahu* 25:9) that Hashem referred to Nebuchadnezzar as "My servant." Generally, this description denotes favor and closeness to Hashem. Moshe also merited being called "Moshe, My servant" (*Yehoshua* 1:2). Why did Nebuchadnezzar merit being referred to with such favor? This is because Bnei Yisrael favored his nation. However, this very nation murdered them and destroyed the Beit Hamikdash. Furthermore, it merited being favored by Hashem, even having their leader referred to as "My servant."

In every generation, when Bnei Yisrael become slack in protecting their *kedushah*, turning their backs on Hashem and His Torah and following the ways of the nations, Hashem punishes them by giving them what they deserve and distancing them from Him. Instead, He draws the other nations closer to Him and strengthens them. It is precisely those nations that Am Yisrael follow and imitate that ultimately turn against them and persecute them.

Although by distancing oneself from the nations, one can attain *kedushah*, there is an even more elevated level of *kedushah* that one should aspire to reach. One should ideally separate himself from vice solely for Hashem's sake. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 20:26) says, "And I have separated you from among the peoples to be *Mine*." Rashi explains that this means that Bnei Yisrael are separated from the nations and their ways "for My sake."

For example, a person may refrain from eating pig because he does not like its taste, not necessarily because he wishes to guard himself from transgressing Hashem's command. Conversely, one may refrain from

eating pig in order to sanctify himself and fulfill Hashem's will. Had Hashem not prohibited him from eating pig, he would have enjoyed it. Thus one should abstain from sin in order to fulfill Hashem's will, not because it is convenient and suits him.

Thus, the two categories of *kedushah* are split into three levels:

The first level is to keep the mitzvot of the Torah and avoid transgressing its prohibitions. When one fulfills the mitzvot meticulously, without entertaining any doubts regarding their authenticity, as it says (*Vayikra* 20:8), "You shall observe My decrees and perform them," he will merit to become sanctified, fulfilling the second part of the pasuk: "I am Hashem, Who sanctifies you."

The second level is described by the pasuk (ibid. 19:2) "You shall be holy, for holy am I." This refers to achieving sanctity by abstaining from things that are permitted by the Torah, since through refraining from them, one can reach greater levels in Avodat Hashem. An example of this is one who abstains from drinking wine in order to strengthen his commitment in serving Hashem, even though it is not a prohibition of the Torah.

The third level is the loftiest level of *kedushah*. It is referred to in the pasuk (ibid. 20:26) "You shall be holy for Me, for I Hashem am holy; and I have separated you from among the peoples to be Mine." This signifies that one's separation from the nations should be for Hashem's sake alone, due to a sincere desire to sanctify His Name and fulfill His will. Just as one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah (*Avot* 4:2), likewise, one level of *kedushah* leads to another. Initially, the Torah obligates a person to "sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." This refers to common behavior, such as minimizing one's conversation with women, as well as consuming food and drinking wine with moderation. While sanctifying oneself through that which is permitted to him, a person will perfect his Avodat Hashem, as it says (*Vayikra* 20:8), "You shall observe My decrees," implying that he will eventually fulfill the mitzvot meticulously. This final level, which is the loftiest one, is described as

(ibid. 20:26) "You shall be holy for Me." Ultimately, he will attain an aspect of G-dliness, seeking to cleave to Hashem and sanctify His Name through performing the mitzvot with the sole intention of sanctifying His Name.

This is similar to what is said in the Shacharit prayer of Shabbat, "And may Israel, the sanctifiers of Your Name, rest on it." Shabbat is one of the loftiest levels in Avodat Hashem. We may conclude that one who observes Shabbat properly conveys that he wishes to take pleasure in the glory of the *Shechinah*. In fact, Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come. Therefore, one who relishes Shabbat proves that he is not fulfilling mitzvot because he is being forced to do so against his will, but he truly desires to cleave to Hashem and sanctify His Name.

Although parashat *Kedoshim* begins with the subject of *kedushah*, it concludes with an issue of *tumah*, as it says in the last pasuk of the parashah (*Vayikra* 20:27): "Any man or woman in whom there shall be the sorcery of Ov or of Yid'oni." This indicates that regarding Avodat Hashem one can never remain static. Either one progresses, seeking greater levels of sanctification to draw himself closer to Hashem, or he regresses and declines in his commitment in serving Hashem, to the extent that he may even engage in the sorcery of Ov or of Yid'oni. One should take this lesson to heart and constantly aspire for more *kedushah* so that he will ultimately reach the lofty level of "You shall be holy for Me" – for Hashem's sake (see *Safra Kedoshim* 9:11-12).

In Summary

- The main subject of the parashah is *kedushah*. The issue of *kedushah* is mentioned three times in this parashah: in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end.
- There are two categories of *kedushah*. One is abstention from sinning, and the other is sanctifying oneself through that which is permitted, as Chazal say, "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." Rashi explains that when a person refrains from transgressing the prohibitions of the Torah, he merits achieving *kedushah*. Similarly, when Am Yisrael

avoid sinning, they merit disconnecting from the nations and becoming consecrated solely for Hashem.

- The pasuk says, and I have separated you from among the peoples to be Mine." Rashi teaches, "If you are separated from [the other peoples], you are Mine. But if not, you belong to Nebuchadnezzar and his colleagues." Why did Rashi include Nebuchadnezzar and his colleagues in his explanation? It is because when Am Yisrael follow the ways of the nations, ultimately those nations persecute them. In addition, the nations gain Hashem's favor instead of Bnei Yisrael, as the *Navi* prophesied regarding Nebuchadnezzar, referring to him affectionately as "My servant."

- Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael are obligated to distance themselves from vice for Hashem's sake, with the intention of fulfilling Hashem's will. When abstaining from sin, they should intend to do so solely for Hashem's sake and not because it is convenient for them.

- The two categories of *kedushah* are split into three levels: (1) Fulfilling mitzvot and abstaining from sin. The virtue of one who performs mitzvot and avoids sin is unfathomable. (2) Sanctifying oneself through that which is permitted according to the Torah. (3) Adhering to the words of the Torah with the intention of sanctifying Hashem's Name and fulfilling His will, solely for Hashem's sake.

- Parashat *Kedoshim* begins by emphasizing the importance of achieving greater levels in *kedushah* and ends by describing the worst level of *tumah*. This teaches that one can never remain stationary in his Avodat Hashem. Either one achieves sanctification and elevation in *kedushah*, or he regresses and declines spiritually, ultimately engaging in the sorcery of Ov or Yid'oni, *rachmana litzlan*.

Ways to Attain Kedushah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:1-2)

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to gather all of Bnei Yisrael and command them to be holy, just as Hashem is entirely holy and elevated. What did Hashem intend by saying to Moshe, "You shall be holy, for holy am I?" Is it possible to achieve even a minimal measure of Hashem's *kedushah*? Hashem is entirely above nature, since "He has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal." It is almost like telling a poor person to conduct himself like a rich man when he does not possess the means to do so.

This question is magnified since Moshe Rabbeinu issued this command to all of Bnei Yisrael, including infants and young children. They, too, were included in the command, obligating them to sanctify themselves in holiness, just as Hashem is holy. While this command is difficult and unfathomable even for adults, how much more so for young children.

We can clarify by explaining that the command to be holy is not only conceptual, but a person must perform a positive action in order to become sanctified and spiritually elevated. The aspirations of a person should not remain theoretical alone, but he should actively be involved in achieving this lofty goal. For example, there are many people who wish with all their heart to become wealthy and live respectably, however, they do not take any steps toward realizing their dream. They sit at home and dream of being rich. Hashem commanded man to perform a minimal act, toward achieving *kedushah*, which is the effort that man is required to make, in order that he ultimately merit Hashem's Divine assistance from Above.

Therefore, one who wishes to get married should actively involve himself in his search, either personally, or through people who are close to him, and make others aware that he is seeking his mate. However, if a person neglects making an effort toward finding a spouse, he cannot complain if his *shidduch* is delayed. This is described by the Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:3), "Open for me an entrance as narrow as a needle, and I will open for you an entrance as wide as a hall." These words imply that a person is obligated to perform just a small act, which is the effort that man is required to make, in order to merit much success in his endeavors. He should not assume that his efforts contradict his trust in Hashem.

Just as this is obvious regarding physical acquisitions, so too, a person should invest efforts in spiritual endeavors, in order to merit rising to great heights and drawing close to Hashem, Who is the epitome of *kedushah*. This is expressed in our daily prayer: "Holy, holy, holy is Hashem, Master of Legions" (*Yeshayahu* 6:3). When a person conducts himself in a way that reflects "saying [that you will undertake the mission], acting [upon it], and accomplishing [it]," Hashem grants him special blessings in his efforts, since "whoever seeks purity is assisted in his endeavor" (*Yoma* 38b).

In order to implement the command to be holy, we must fulfill the injunction to "go in His ways" (*Devarim* 28:9). Chazal (*Shabbat* 133b) explain that this means that he should imitate Hashem's behavior. When a person clings to Hashem's attributes, and strictly conducts his daily schedule according to Hashem's will, he merits attaining the level of "You shall be holy." However, good intentions are not sufficient; they must be expressed through a specific act in order to realize one's lofty goals.

Moshe Rabbeinu issued this command to the entire congregation, including infants, in order to teach the following lesson to Bnei Yisrael: The training for achieving *kedushah* and purity begins already at a very young age, even when the child is still in his mother's womb. Since a mother has tremendous influence on her fetus, she must be careful to guard her eyes from forbidden sights (*Shevet Mussar* 24) and hear only

words of holiness and purity, which have the potential of leaving a lasting impression of holiness on her unborn child. Accordingly, she will be worthy of giving birth to a righteous and pure son (*Bartenura*, *Avot* 2:8). Similarly, when a couple is meticulous in guarding the laws of family purity, the children are born in purity, and they possess the ability to advance in spiritual greatness.

There is a story told about a Rabbi who approached a famous tzaddik while carrying his baby son, who was only eight days old. The Rabbi placed his infant before the tzaddik and told him that he could already perceive that his son was extraordinarily special and marked for greatness. The tzaddik was taken aback and argued how he could be certain that his son was destined for greatness since he was only eight days old. The Rabbi explained that from the moment the baby was born, he noticed that every time the baby's blanket covering his head slipped down, he immediately began to cry until the blanket was drawn over his head, covering it. In addition, the baby would wake up immediately if someone would close the door to his room, since he could not see the mezuzah on the doorpost. The tzaddik wanted to test if the father's assumptions were correct. He covered the mezuzah in his room, and immediately the baby woke up crying. This proved to the tzaddik that the father's words were true. Upon witnessing this, the tzaddik gazed at the baby's face and told the father that his countenance reflected that he was holy and pure from birth.

This story teaches us how much parents can affect the future of their children. By being careful to meticulously keep the laws of family purity, they merit children being born in holiness, who will consequently live according to the laws of the Torah all their lives. Similarly, Moshe Rabbeinu showed signs of greatness upon his birth. Because he was destined to become the savior of Am Yisrael and speak with the *Shechinah*, he refused to nurse from the Egyptian women, despite his young age (*Sotah* 12b). It seems that his pure origin, due to the holiness and purity of his parents, protected him from involuntarily nursing from

an Egyptian. The very mouth that was destined to speak with the *Shechinah* could not come in contact with a non-Jewish woman.

The Gemara (*Yevamot* 20a) teaches, "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." This implies that a man should sanctify himself by denying himself physical pleasures that fall into the category of self-gratification. On the other hand, we know that Hashem created His world in order to cause mankind pleasure. This is supported by the fact that man was given five senses in order to enjoy Hashem's world. The tremendous variety apparent in nature attests to the fact that Hashem wants us to enjoy the world that He has made (*Yerushalmi*, *Kiddushin*, end of *Perek* 4). How can we resolve this contradiction? Should man seek to sanctify himself even through that which is permitted to him, abstaining from physical pleasure, or should he take pleasure in Hashem's world?

When a person controls himself and does not eat excessively in self-gratification, but with the intention of gaining strength in order to serve Hashem, he transforms the physical act of eating and sanctifies it. In this way, he elevates eating to a spiritual achievement, doing it for Hashem's sake. In addition, the Torah commands a person to make a blessing on his food before putting it in his mouth, in order to sanctify the physical act, drawing him closer to Hashem.

Furthermore, the Torah commands man to get married. However, the Torah creates a safeguard for man, restraining him with specific restrictions in order to harness his passion. This is why a man cannot be intimate with his wife at all times, but only when she is ritually pure. The moment that a man does not keep the laws of family purity, and allows himself to touch his wife when she is a *niddah*, he transgresses the command "You shall be holy, for holy am I" (*Vayikra* 19:2). Thus, the enjoinder to "sanctify yourself even through that which is permitted to you" serves as a guide for a person, teaching him how to control his *Yetzer* and passions in order that he should be able to achieve *kedushah* and *taharah*. There are various levels of restraint. The greater the difficulty in containing oneself, the greater the level of *kedushah* one achieves.

There are occasions when a person must abstain from fulfilling his passion because the Torah commands him to do so. For example, he is not permitted to eat meat and milk together or to behave immorally, etc. Furthermore, there are additional safeguards which are not considered prohibitions of the Torah. However it is commendable for a person to impose them upon himself, each person according to his level. This can be illustrated with the following example. A person possesses five candies in his pocket. When he eats only one candy and makes a blessing over it, keeping the other four in his pocket, despite his desire to enjoy them as well, he overcomes his personal lust and proves that it is not his *Yetzer* who is controlling his body, but that he wishes to reflect the G-dliness within him and protect his *kedushah*. Consequently, he achieves two objectives: First, that he makes a blessing on the food; second, that he overcomes eating everything that is within reach.

A certain mashgiach was sent to Siberia during World War II. Hunger reigned there, and each person was entitled to one loaf of bread, which was meant to sustain him for the entire week. In addition, some oil was occasionally distributed in the camps. In order to obtain the ration of bread, one was obligated to stand in line for two days, and the same applied for the oil. The Mashgiach related that he and a group of people with him did not know what to do with the oil, so they did not wait on line for two days in order to obtain it. However, some people stood for two full days in line to acquire the oil, despite having no use for it, because they would trade it in for bread. The Mashgiach testified that of all the people who stood on line for the oil in order to trade, despite not requiring it for their sustenance, not one developed into a *ben Torah*. However, several members of the group that restrained themselves and did not waste two full days in order to acquire the oil eventually became great Roshei Yeshivot.

A person is allowed to conduct business, and we find that there were many famous Rabbis who merited both greatness in Torah and wealth. However, it is important to examine a person's priorities in gaining wealth. Is it for his personal gain, in order to amass further profits, or

does he use his money to give *tzedakah* and help others? If one is only interested in personal profit, his efforts in business will reduce his level of *kedushah*. Whereas, when a person invests in business with the purpose of using his money to fulfill mitzvot, then it is legitimate, and such a person merits sanctifying his earnings by elevating them from a purely physical entity to a lofty, spiritual one.

Once, while waiting for my flight to Eretz Yisrael, a friend of mine handed me two delicious fruits as a parting gift. One fruit I distributed to my family on Shabbat Kodesh, and the other fruit I saved for a different occasion, despite its tempting sweetness. I did not want my consumption to be considered purely gluttonous, in order to fulfill my passion. In the end, I felt that I had already received my measure of pleasure from the first fruit, and I presented the second fruit to someone else. After accomplishing this deed, I felt that I had acquired a higher degree of holiness and had drawn closer to Hashem by overcoming the temptation for food and sanctifying myself through that which was permitted to me.

In Summary

- Bnei Yisrael were commanded "You shall be holy, for holy am I." How can this be demanded of the entire congregation when it is impossible to resemble Hashem, Who "has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal"? Furthermore, Moshe issued this command even to the small children. How is it possible to require them to achieve such a lofty goal?
- One must cleave to the ways of Hashem and emulate His behavior. However, it should not remain a conceptual aspiration, but he should take action toward realizing this goal. Ultimately, "Whoever seeks purity is assisted in his endeavor."
- Moshe Rabbeinu issued this command also to the young children in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that the training for *kedushah* and *taharah* begins when the child is still in his mother's womb. How much more so is it incumbent upon the parents to guide their children to *kedushah* after they are born. Consequently, when they will mature, they will continue behaving in this way.

♦ We are exhorted to "sanctify yourself even through that which is permitted to you." How does this concur with the fact that Hashem created a magnificent world in order for mankind to enjoy? Hashem wants man to take pleasure in the world, and therefore granted him five senses. However, one is obligated to utilize all worldly pleasures in the service of Hashem, and not for self-gratification. Thus, it is commendable for a person to restrain himself from indulging in physical pleasures in order to train himself to control his passions.

Sanctify Yourself through That Which Is Permitted to You

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:1-2)

Parashat *Kedoshim* was transmitted in an assembly (*Safra*, *Kedoshim* 1) before all of Bnei Yisrael, and not in groups as the other commands were. The entire congregation used to gather around the king once a year on Sukkot in the Beit Hamikdash, and he would read this portion of the Torah aloud. Chazal teach (*Tanchuma, Kedoshim* 2; *Vayikra Rabbah* 24:9) that the opening command of this parashah obligates Am Yisrael to be holy because Hashem is holy. However, one should not assume that he could ever attain the same level of *kedushah* as Hashem. A person should be aware that Hashem's *kedushah* is greater than his own. This concept requires in depth explanation.

Furthermore, we may wonder how such an unfathomable assignment was issued to the entire congregation, including the young children. It

would seem that these ideas are way above their comprehension. Why were the children required to listen to this command being issued? In addition, what is the reason for the juxtaposition of parashat *Kedoshim* to *Acharei Mot*? Also, what is the connection between the various commands of this parashah, such as (*Vayikra* 19:3) honoring one's parents, keeping Shabbat, and (ibid. 19:4) desisting from idol worship with the opening pasuk (ibid. vs. 2) "You shall be holy, for holy am I?"

Hashem obligates every Jew to become holy, as it says, "You shall be holy." This injunction informs Bnei Yisrael that they each have the potential to become a holy person. However, despite their holiness, they will remain alive, unlike the angels, who upon declaring "Holy, holy, holy" (*Yeshayahu* 6:3) immediately die from the intense holiness of their words and are burned in the river of Dinur in sanctification of Hashem's Name (*Chagigah* 14a).

Hashem asked Moshe to transmit this parashah in an assembly, in front of the entire congregation, including the children, to impress upon them that they are essentially holy and are therefore required to guard their *kedushah*. Although they cannot grasp the depths of this concept, the impressive assembly will remain etched in their hearts and will escort them throughout their lives until they will mature and understand the meaning of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I." It has been proven on many different occasions that young children who were present at various gatherings but could not appreciate their significance because of their young age, nevertheless were impacted by them. The impressions of their experience continued to escort them throughout their lives. Eventually, when they grew older and became capable of appreciating the meaning of the event, they were able to grasp its importance and derive the full benefit of their experience.

The Torah uses the words "You shall be holy" in the form of a command. This implies that the command was in effect even though the young children could not comprehend or absorb its essence. Ultimately, when they would grow older, becoming more intelligent, they would be required to fulfill this command appropriately.

Once, someone asked me why I wake my little boys up early to say the Selichot prayers prior to Rosh Hashanah, since they do not understand much of what is being said. I answered him that although they do not grasp its meaning now, however I am certain that their participation in these Selichot prayers will affect them significantly when they grow older.

For this reason, the young children were required to be present at the assembly. It would train them at a young age to become holy and sanctify themselves through that which is permitted. Normally young children are attracted to sweets, and will do almost anything to get one. Therefore, Hashem wanted these young children to begin training from an early age toward sanctification and holiness by refraining from indulging in physical pursuits and the vanities of this world, such as the sweets that they crave. This training would help them abstain from worldly pleasures in the future, helping them attain *kedushah*.

We see the significance of the assembly from the fact that even the young children who were not yet obligated in the fulfillment of mitzvot, were required to join. Hashem wanted them to hear His command, given over by Moshe, to impress upon them the importance of sanctifying themselves through that which is permitted. How much more so were the older, more mature members of the nation, required to internalize Hashem's command to abstain from that which is forbidden to them, such as immorality and lewdness.

The parashah preceding parashat *Kedoshim* is parashat *Acharei Mot*. What is the connection between these parshiyot? The primary acquisition of *kedushah* is achieved after one figuratively "kills" (*Acharei Mot*) all his passions for self-gratification, exhibiting no preference for the enticements of this world. The issue of *kedushah* is so important that the Torah (*Yevamot* 20a) says "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." This implies that one should refrain even from things that are permitted according to the Torah, such as drinking wine, etc. If a person wishes to sanctify himself and become elevated in *kedushah*, he should refrain from such pleasures in order to become more attached to

his spiritual element. (See *Ramban*, *Vayikra* 19:2; *Iggeret HaGra* on the words "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you.")

The essence of *kedushah* is to derive pleasure only from connection with Hashem. When one seeks to take pleasure also in the vanities of this world, he diminishes his *kedushah*. We can explain the concept of *kedushah* in the following way. Hashem "has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal." He is entirely beyond our conception. Certainly, Hashem does not enjoy physical pleasures, which He created specifically for the needs and survival of mankind. Hashem wants people to resemble Him in their behavior and character traits, as it says, "Just as He is compassionate, so too should you be compassionate, etc." (*Shabbat* 133b). This illustrates how one should implement the command for man to cleave to Hashem. Hashem is the essence of *kedushah*, and all the vanities of this world are irrelevant to Him. Consequently, a person is obligated to resemble Hashem in His *kedushah*. In order to achieve greater levels in *kedushah*, he should abstain from physical pursuits, which contradict *kedushah*, and be content with minimal needs. This is illustrated by Chazal's testimony about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa (*Ta'anit* 24b), "The entire world was sustained in his merit, yet he sufficed with a measure of carob."

Chazal (*Ramban*, *Vayikra* 19:2) say that *kedushah* is defined as absolute abstinence from worldly pleasures. How is it possible to command man, who is a physical creature, to abstain from all physical pursuits, when he is dependent upon them for his survival? How can we compare Hashem, Who is entirely above the physical realm, and therefore not dependent upon material acquisitions, to man, made of flesh and blood, whose creation from the physical earth necessitates material acquisitions?

This is implied in the words of the Torah (*Yevamot* 20a), "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." Since a person cannot become entirely removed from all aspects of the physical world due to his physical makeup, he can only sanctify himself by refraining from that which is permitted to him but not necessary for his minimal sustenance. Hashem also warned His people that they should not assume that their

kedushah could reach the level of His own, since Hashem's *kedushah* is vastly greater (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:9). Hashem does not want His people to become conceited and haughty. Despite one's efforts in acquiring *kedushah* by abstaining from the pleasures of this world, he must remember that there is no comparison between his *kedushah* and the *kedushah* of Hashem, Who is entirely holy, without any need for physical objects.

Although, at first glance, this injunction may seem puzzling, it is actually intended to prevent a person from becoming conceited. Since a person remains alive despite being immersed in *kedushah*, unlike the angels who get burnt from the intensity of their *kedushah*, it was necessary to warn Am Yisrael to remain humble and recognize their true state. After all, they are still attached to the vanities of this world by eating, drinking, and getting married. The distance between their *kedushah* and Hashem's *kedushah* is vast.

The word קדושים shares the same *gematria* as the words קום ש-די (arise Sha-dai). According to the Ben Ish Chai (*Shanah Sheniyah*, *Ki Tavo*), we can explain the following. A baby boy before his *brit* is considered a שד (demon) since all the destructive spirits can harm him. However, after the removal of his foreskin, which is the layer of *tumah*, the letter 'י is thereby formed and becomes a part of him. Consequently, the Name שד-י is branded in his body. Therefore, it is clear why a person who is circumcised is considered as having an "אות ברית קודש" (sign of the *brit*) (*Shabbat* 137b). A person becomes קדוש (holy) after the foreskin is removed, since the Name שד-י is now intrinsically a part of him. One is obligated to respect this holy Name, which is now attached to him, and not desecrate the *oht brit kodesh* by behaving in a lewd or illicit manner.

Thus, the command (*Vayikra* 19:2) "You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d" implies that since Hashem resides within us through His Name שד-י, which is formed by the *oht brit kodesh*, each person is required to constantly sanctify himself to a greater degree. Even while enjoying relations with one's wife, he should sanctify himself through that which is permitted to him and set limits on himself not to indulge

excessively. Consequently, Hashem will consider it as if he had abstained entirely from all self-pleasures and vanities of this world.

What is the connection to the subsequent commands to revere one's parents, observe Shabbat, and not turn to idol worship? A person who sanctifies himself through that which is permitted to him becomes a true "man." For example, David Hamelech instructed his son Shlomo before his death (*Melachim* I, 2:2) "Be strong and become a man." Becoming a "man" signifies controlling one's desires and passions. Therefore, the Torah chose this word regarding the command (*Vayikra* 19:3) "Every **man** shall revere his mother and his father." It indicates that although a person may be fully grown and mature as a man, he must nevertheless revere his father and his mother. Even though he may feel like their equal, he may not disparage them, but should sanctify himself by behaving as a true "man" with self-control, meticulously fulfilling the command of revering one's parents.

A person raised with the fear of Heaven, has a strong *Yetzer Hara*, in proportion to his spiritual level, that leads him to sin even in minor matters. Since he is accustomed to his parents, the *Yetzer Hara* may cause him to accidentally offend their honor. Therefore, the Torah warns about honoring one's parents immediately after the command to become holy, which elevates a person to a high level.

The pasuk continues (ibid.), "And you shall observe My Shabbatot." It is likely that one who relinquishes his own honor in reverence of his parents will ultimately honor Hashem and observe His Shabbat. One can learn the importance of guarding Shabbat by considering how great his obligation is to do so. If the Torah commands a person to revere his parents, who gave him the potential for life in this world, how much more so should he honor Hashem, who granted life to his parents. He should certainly observe His Shabbatot. Conversely, we may assume that if one is not careful in honoring his parents, whom he can visually perceive as a reality, he could not possibly succeed in observing Shabbat and honoring Hashem, Whom he cannot visually perceive.

When a person does not revere his parents and desecrates the Shabbat, he soon turns to idol worship. This is what the Torah warns in the next pasuk (ibid. 19:4): "Do not turn to the idols, and molten gods you shall not make for yourselves." These commands indicate a chain reaction, beginning with the foundation of *kedushah*, which leads to all other mitzvot. The same is true conversely, since if one disregards his *kedushah*, he will eventually disregard the honor of his parents, desecrate the Shabbat, and ultimately turn to idol worship.

The Torah obligates a person to conduct himself with holiness, even while associating with his wife. When intimate relations are conducted according to the laws of family purity, the parents merit holy sons, who meticulously observe all the mitzvot (*Da'at Kedushah* 1), including honoring their parents correctly. However, when *kedushah* and family purity laws are disregarded, the children born subsequently may reject the Torah and scorn their parents, even cursing them (*Nedarim* 20b). There is no greater pain than rebellious children.

It is wise for a person to conduct his home in a holy manner, and thereby merit much satisfaction from his sons, who will honor him during his life, and also after his death by reciting the Kaddish prayer for his soul's elevation. This is alluded to by the juxtaposition of parashat *Kedoshim* to *Acharei Mot*. If a person is worthy, then after he dies (*Acharei Mot*), his sons will follow in the ways of Hashem because of the pure education that they absorbed from their home. Consequently, they will diligently recite the Kaddish (*Kedoshim*) prayer after their parent's death, elevating their souls Above.

In Summary

- What is the meaning of "You shall be holy, for holy am I"? Why was it necessary for the young children to be present when this command was issued? What is the reason for the juxtaposition of these parshiyot? Furthermore, what is the connection between the command to be holy with the mitzvot of observing Shabbat, revering one's parents, and not turning to idol worship?

- Hashem commanded his people to guard their *kedushah* since they are not like the angels, who get burnt when declaring "*Kadosh*, *kadosh*." They will remain alive despite their holiness. Since a person is obligated to cleave to Hashem by emulating His ways, and Hashem is holy, Am Yisrael was commanded to elevate and sanctify themselves as well.
- The children were present when this command was issued in order to educate them at a young age to aspire to guard their *kedushah*. The impression of the occasion would remain etched in their hearts, accompanying them to maturity.
- Parashat *Acharei Mot* is contiguous with parashat *Kedoshim* in order to teach us that a person can achieve *kedushah* by figuratively "killing" his desires and passions for pleasure, as it says, "Sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you."
- How can a man, who is a physical being, disconnect himself from material matters? Furthermore, how can one compare a man to Hashem, Who is entirely spiritual and holy? This is accomplished when a person partakes of physical matters only for his sustenance and needs and avoids all unnecessary self-indulgence.
- Hashem warned His people not to become conceited and haughty. Although man can attain great levels of kedushah, he can never attain the kedushah of Hashem. Although they are not like the angels, who get burnt from their *kedushah*, they are still limited and should therefore remain humble.
- The word קדושים shares the same *gematria* as the words קום שד-י (arise Sha-dai). The Ben Ish Chai says that an infant before his *brit* is considered like a demon because the dangerous spirits could harm him. However, after his *brit*, the letter 'י joins him, causing the Name שד-י to dwell within him. Because of this *kedushah*, the organ of the *brit* is referred to as "*oht brit kodesh*." Therefore, whoever abstains from immorality, allows the Name שד-י to reside within him, alluded to by the words קום שד-י (arise Sha-dai).

♦ A person who becomes elevated and sanctified, becomes a "man," as it says, "Be strong and become a man." Despite a person's physical growth and maturity, he must revere and honor his parents, as it says, "Every man shall revere his mother and his father." As a result of honoring one's parents, a person will observe Shabbat. This is because revering one's parents trains a person to fulfill the will of those who are older than him. Consequently, how much more so will he fulfill the will of Hashem. When a person ignores these two commandments, he will ultimately turn to idol worship, *rachmana litzlan*!

Hashem Scrutinizes One's Intentions

"Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:2)

In Morocco it was customary to consider every person holy after his death. This originated from the fact that parashat *Kedoshim* follows parashat *Acharei Mot*, and people would proverbially state, "אחרי מות קדושים – After death one is considered holy." The gaon, Rabbi Chalimi, zt"l, from Algiers, wrote in his sefer *Zechut Avot* that one may not scorn any person after his death, even if he was a rasha. This is because one must consider that perhaps the person regretted his sins prior to his death and did complete teshuvah. This corresponds to the teaching of Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) "There are those who attain their portion in the World to Come in a moment."

The tzaddik, Rabbi Yaakov ben Shabbat, zt"l, a disciple of my holy grandfather, the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hagadol, zy"a, explains the statement of Chazal (*Berachot* 19a) that if one sees a *talmid chacham* who sinned by night, he should not suspect him in the day, for he certainly did

teshuvah. It may be that the *talmid chacham* sinned only in order that he could fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah, as it says (*Devarim* 30:2), "And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d." Therefore, one should not suspect him, since his sin was not for the purpose of indulging in passion, but on the contrary, from Heaven he was brought to do a small aveirah so that he should be able to fulfill the mitzvah of doing teshuvah.

Chazal expound on the issue of pure intentions with the following example (*Ketubot* 63a; see *Tosafot* ibid.; *Shoshanat Ha'amakim*, *Shir Hashirim* 1:4). Chazal relate that Ben Azzai married Rabbi Akiva's daughter, but divorced her shortly after with the consent of the contemporary *Chachamim*. Why did the *Chachamim* support his decision to get divorced? After all, one of the first mitzvot of the Torah is to be fruitful and multiply (*Bereishit* 1:28). It would seem that, on the contrary, Ben Azzai should have remained married precisely because of his erudition in Torah, since learning leads to action. Consequently, he should have fulfilled the Torah's command to have children.

The question is heightened by what happened to Chizkiyahu, who also refused to marry, and was punished with a fatal illness (*Yeshayahu* 38:1). When Yeshayahu Hanavi appeared to Chizkiyahu Hamelech, who was suffering, instead of wishing him a speedy recovery, he informed him, "You shall die, and you shall not live." Chazal (*Berachot* 10a) say that the double language implies that Chizkiyahu was destined to die the following day, leaving this world, and in addition, he would also be banished from the World to Come. This is because he had never married, and thereby disregarded the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply.

Chizkiyahu intentionally refrained from marrying, since he foresaw in *ruach hakodesh* that Menashe the Wicked would be his son. He did not wish to be the cause for such an evil person to be born, who would sin and induce all of Am Yisrael to sin. Therefore, he chose to remain single (*Berachot* 10a). We may wonder why the *Chachamim* allowed Ben Azzai to divorce, whereas Chizkiyahu, who refrained from marrying for altruistic reasons, was decreed to lose his portion in the World to Come.

The difference between the two cases is the following. Chizkiyahu was a king, who had many obligations to fulfill. Although he engaged in the study of Torah and its dissemination, to the extent that Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 94b) testify about his generation that there was not a single child who was not fluent in the complex laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, he was also occupied with governmental matters. Therefore, he could not dedicate himself entirely to Torah as Ben Azzai did. The *Chachamim* allowed Ben Azzai to divorce his wife, since they realized that his study of Torah was all-encompassing. Regarding Ben Azzai, one can argue (*Sukkah* 26a), "When one is in the midst of [performing] a mitzvah – he is absolved from performing another mitzvah at that time." Ben Azzai's total immersion in Torah protected him. Conversely, since Chizkiyahu Hamelech was the king, he was also involved in legislative affairs. Therefore, he was obligated to get married so that he would fulfill the mitzvah of having children and be guarded from sin by his wife.

We can learn a lesson from the punishment of Chizkiyahu. He was considered a tremendous tzaddik in his generation, however he was condemned for not getting married and having children, despite his good intentions of preventing the birth of wicked descendants. How much more so is a person blameworthy if he gets married and has children but does not raise them in the ways of the Torah.

Chazal (*Avot* 2:1) say, "Know what is above you – a watchful Eye, and an attentive Ear, and all your deeds are recorded in a Book." Although at first one may judge his fellow a certain way because of his behavior and lifestyle, he should be aware that ultimately only Hashem, Who is capable of scrutinizing one's intentions, can accurately judge a person's spiritual level (*Yirmeyahu* 17:9-10). This is why we must consider each person holy. We cannot possibly gather all the necessary factors in order to judge another person's spiritual level. Only Hashem can recognize the qualities of each person and judge him accordingly.

I once invited a generous benefactor to our office, in Lyon, France. I hoped he would donate a substantial sum to support our illustrious institutions, for "if there is no flour, there is no Torah…" (*Avot* 3:17). The

office was in the building of our institution, which was secured by a series of hidden cameras, connected to the monitor in a closed circuit. This way I was able to observe everything that was happening on the campus grounds at every moment, in order to be protected from hostile attacks. While glancing at the screen, I noticed the sponsor approaching the gate with a cigarette in his hand. He paused in order to finish smoking his cigarette. Then he carefully wiped all traces of evidence from his mouth and face, without suspecting that he was being watched. He smoothed his suit to portray a neat appearance and hurried to enter the office. Upon seeing me, he extended his hand to shake mine as is customary. Following this incident I thought to myself that I received a live lesson of Chazal's teaching (*Avot* 2:1): "Know what is above you – a watchful Eye, and an attentive Ear, and all your deeds are recorded in a Book."

In Summary

- Parashat *Kedoshim* is contiguous with parashat *Acharei Mot*, giving rise to the maxim "אחרי מות - קדושים – "After death one is considered holy." After a person dies, he is remembered as being holy, since "there are those who attain their portion in the World to Come in an hour."
- The gaon, Rabbi Yaakov ben Shabbat, said that one may not suspect a tzaddik of sinning, because even if he transgressed, he did so only for the purpose of subsequently fulfilling the mitzvah of teshuvah. Only Hashem, Who can scrutinize one's intentions, can judge the person.
- The *Chachamim* allowed Ben Azzai to divorce his wife and be exempt from the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply, whereas Chizkiyahu Hamelech was severely punished for not getting married in the first place. This is because Ben Azzai was totally immersed in the study of Torah, exempting him from being involved in other mitzvot, as it says, "When one is in the midst of performing a mitzvah – he is absolved of performing another mitzvah at that time." However, Chizkiyahu Hamelech, despite his

greatness in Torah, was involved in the legislative affairs of his kingdom as well. Therefore, he was obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of having children and be guarded from sin by his wife.

Yisrael, in Whom I Take Glory

"Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:2)

Hashem said to Yisrael, "Before I created my world, the administering angels glorified My Name through you and sanctified My Name through you," and they would say (*Tehillim* 106:48), "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael, from this world to the World to Come." When Adam was created, the angels said to Hashem, "Is this the one, through whom we glorify You?" Hashem said to them "No. He is a thief, etc." Likewise, when Noach was born, they thought that they should glorify Hashem through him, but Hashem said otherwise. Hashem answered them in the same way when Avraham was born, and also when Yitzchak was born. Only when Yaakov Avinu was born, and the angels asked Hashem if he was the one through whom they should glorify Him, Hashem answered them, 'Yes,' as it says (*Yeshayahu* 49:3), "Yisrael, in whom I take glory." This is because Hashem would take pride in Yaakov and become glorified through him. He is the one to whom the angels refer when they glorify Hashem through Am Yisrael" (*Tanchuma*, *Kedoshim* 2).

This explains why Hashem told Am Yisrael (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d." Hashem said, "Until I created my world, the administering angels would sanctify my Name through you. Therefore, now that you have already become a nation and received the Torah, you must be holy."

Hashem informed Am Yisrael that being holy was their mission. Hashem is glorified through man, who reflects His greatness. One can accomplish this by behaving in a G-dly manner, which sanctifies Hashem, Who created him. Yaakov Avinu was exemplary in achieving this goal. Therefore, the angels glorify Hashem through Am Yisrael, referring to Yaakov's exemplary behavior. How was it possible to praise Hashem and glorify Him through man even before he was created? Also, why was Yaakov Avinu singled out to reflect Hashem's glory?

The Midrash says (*Bereishit Rabbah* 8:4) that before Hashem created man, He consulted with the angels, as it says (*Bereishit* 1:26), "Let us make man." The words "let us" is in the plural form. The Midrash explains (ibid. 8:5) that Hashem consulted with one group of angels, and they advised Him that it was not worthwhile to create man. Hashem summoned a second group of angels and asked them if it was worthwhile to create man. While they were debating this point, Hashem created Adam and did not wait for their response. In fact, when man was created, the angels thought that he was G-d, and they wanted to say *shirah* before him (*Midrash Zuta*, *Kohelet* 6). However, when they saw him fall asleep, they realized that he was not G-d.

This raises several questions. If the angels did not want Hashem to create man at all, then how is it possible that they glorified Hashem through him even before he was created? What was the logic of the first group, who did not want Hashem to create man at all? What was the difference between the first group, who opposed the creation of man, and the second group, who deliberated, and in the end, mistook man for G-d?

This can be clarified by the statement of the Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 90a), "All Israel has a share in the World to come, as it is said: 'And Your people are all righteous.'" This implies that each member of Am Yisrael has the potential to acquire a portion in the World to Come by learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvot. However, without Torah, a person cannot attain a portion in the World to Come, since one who does not study Torah cannot achieve *yirat Shamayim* and serve Hashem.

This sheds light on Hashem's response to the angels after Yaakov Avinu was born, saying that he was the one through whom they should glorify Him. It was specifically Yaakov who was called (*Bereishit* 25:27) "a wholesome man, abiding in tents." He studied Torah and remained in the yeshiva of Shem v'Eiver for fourteen consecutive years (*Megillah* 17a). All his life he engaged in the study of Torah (*Yoma* 28b). Yaakov Avinu was the personification of Torah.

The angels knew that in the future, man would study Torah. Through man's study of Torah, the Name of Hashem would be exalted and glorified. Since the Torah already existed before the creation of man, the angels glorified Hashem through man even before he was created, and before the Creation of the world.

The first group of angels did not want Hashem to create man, because they assumed that since man was a physical being, with bodily needs, and was not entirely spiritual, he might desecrate Hashem through his material pursuits. Therefore, it would be preferable for man not to be created in the first place, as opposed to being created and causing Hashem's Name to be desecrated. However, the other angels knew that the purpose of Am Yisrael is to keep the Torah, which would be given to them in the future at Har Sinai. Consequently, they concluded that it was worthwhile for Hashem to create man, because through man's fulfillment of mitzvot, Hashem would ultimately be sanctified, creating a *kiddush Hashem*.

Hashem told Am Yisrael (*Vayikra* 19b), "'You shall be holy, for holy am I,' since even before you were created, the angels would glorify Me through you, saying, 'Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Israel.' Therefore, your entire existence in this world is only in order to sanctify My Name." Ultimately, this is what the command to be holy suggests. Am Yisrael's essence is to generate *kiddush Hashem* through learning Torah and keeping mitzvot.

In Summary

- "You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d." Chazal explain that even before man was created, the angels would glorify Hashem's Name through him, as it says, "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Israel, from this world to the World to Come." How could the angels glorify Hashem even before the world was created? Furthermore, the Midrash says that prior to man's creation, the angels did not want him to be created. Then why did they glorify Hashem through man?
- This is because they knew that ultimately Hashem would give the Torah to man, and through the study of Torah, the Name of Hashem would be glorified. The reason that they would glorify Hashem through the name of man even before the Creation of the world was because the Torah existed before Creation.
- The first group of angels did not want Hashem to create man, because they assumed that if he was a physical being, Hashem's Name could not be sanctified through him. However, the other angels, who knew that the Torah would ultimately be given to Am Yisrael, wanted Hashem to create man, since it is only through the study of Torah and its fulfillment that Hashem's Name can become sanctified in the world.
- Hashem commanded Am Yisrael, "You shall be holy, for holy am I," since, even before they were created, the angels praised Hashem and glorified Him through Yisrael. Because this is Am Yisrael's mission, they are obligated to remain holy.

The Path Leading to Kedushah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d. Every man shall revere his mother and his father and you shall observe My Sabbaths – I am Hashem, your G-d. Do not turn to the idols, and molten gods you shall not make for yourselves – I am Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:1-4)

Parashat *Kedoshim* begins with Hashem's command to Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael that they must be holy, for Hashem is holy. In the continuation of the pesukim, the Torah issues the command to revere one's parents, which ultimately leads to respecting them properly. In the same pasuk, Am Yisrael is commanded to observe Shabbat. Following this, Moshe Rabbeinu warns them not to turn to idol worship. What is the connection between all these commandments?

We must first explain the meaning of the command "You shall be holy, for holy am I." The Torah describes (*Shemot* 15:2) that when Bnei Yisrael stood at the shores of Yam Suf, on the seventh day after the Exodus from Egypt and saw the waters split, they immediately declared, "This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him." Not only the people who stood at the shore affirmed this declaration, but Chazal (*Sotah* 30b) say that also every unborn child in the womb of its mother made this proclamation. This is surprising. We can understand why the people standing at the shore proclaimed this declaration in recognition of Hashem's reality. They had already recognized the extraordinary powers of Hashem in Egypt, when He struck the Egyptians with the ten plagues. However, why would the unborn children say it? Surely, in order to make such a proclamation, one

needs to experience Hashem's greatness. The unborn children had not experienced the revelation of Hashem in the ten plagues.

When Yaakov Avinu and Yosef were reunited after twenty-two years of separation, they recognized each other, exclaiming, "You are my father!" "You are my son!" This is because there had been a strong bond between them before Yosef was sold as a slave. This bond was reinforced by Yaakov's overwhelming love and preference for Yosef over his other sons. This is why the image of Yaakov remained etched on Yosef's heart, making it possible for them to recognize each other despite the span of many years in which they had not met. Apart from the natural love of a father to his son, there was a special connection Yaakov and Yosef shared because they had studied halachah together. In fact, before they parted they were engaged in the subject of *eglah arufah* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3).

Therefore, we may assume that if the unborn children declared, "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him," it indicated that they had prior knowledge of Hashem. Otherwise, they could not have made such a declaration. Chazal (*Niddah* 30b) explain that when an unborn child is in his mother's womb, there is a candle burning over his head and an angel teaching him Torah. What is the candle that is burning over his head? This is the *neshamah*, which is his G-dly portion (*Pardes Rimonim* 32a) and connects man to Hashem (see *Shabbat* 30b). The unborn child in his mother's womb recognized Hashem's existence better than people after they are born, whose *neshamot* have become stained by sin. Since the *neshamah* of the unborn child is pure and free from any sin, its connection to Hashem is stronger and more direct, with no obstructions.

This is why the unborn children declared "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him." They recognized Hashem's exalted greatness, since they possessed pure *neshamot*, which were hewn from the Upper Spheres and had never experienced sin. Their attachment to Hashem was much stronger than grown people, whose *neshamot* were already stained by the blemish of sin, marring their clear perception of Hashem.

This explains why, at the moment that an infant is born, it begins to cry. His *neshamah* is sorry to leave the holy atmosphere within his mother's womb, where he learns Torah enveloped by the *Shechinah*, without the enticements of this world. Since this world is a world of vanities and physical pursuits, the holy *neshamah* is unhappy to be born and descend in level. It cries because of its vulnerability to sin knowing that it becomes blemished by it (*Zohar* II, 96b).

This is why Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I." Hashem told them that they should always aspire to elevate and sanctify the *neshamah* to the level that it enjoyed in his mother's womb. Since a person is fashioned by Hashem and possesses a *neshamah* hewn from the Upper Spheres, he must always aspire to become elevated. He is enjoined to resemble Hashem in His *kedushah*, since Hashem blew into him His own breath. Chazal describe this with the words (*Ramban*, *Bereishit* 2:7) "What did He blow in? From Himself He blew in." This indicates that Hashem infused man with His own breath by instilling him with a holy *neshamah*. This can be compared to a person blowing a balloon with the air exhaled from his lungs. Ultimately, the air in the balloon stems from the one who blew it up (*Nefesh Hachaim* 1:15).

Despite not having been present at the Splitting of the Sea, the unborn children declared, "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him." This was a lesson for Am Yisrael, teaching them that the *neshamot* of the unborn children could observe what was happening outside of their mother because of their lofty *kedushah*. Why were they on such an exalted level of *kedushah*? Only because they had never experienced sin, enabling them to remain closely bound to Hashem.

How could Am Yisrael become worthy of elevating their *neshamot* to the exalted level of the unborn child? By abstaining from immorality, as Rashi says (*Rashi*, *Vayikra* 19:2), "For wherever you find restriction of sexual immorality mentioned in the Torah, you find holiness juxtaposed with it." This indicates that when Bnei Yisrael refrain from immorality and draw closer to Torah, they become sanctified, fulfilling Hashem's command to them.

Following the command to become holy, Moshe Rabbeinu commanded Am Yisrael (*Vayikra* 19:3), "Every man shall revere his mother and his father." The connection between these two commands lies in the fact that there are three partners in the creation of man: Hashem, the father, and the mother (*Kiddushin* 30b). For this fact alone, a person should thank his parents and respect them. This is because they fashioned him with the help of Hashem and were the initial cause for his attachment to Him. The connection originated when he was in his mother's womb and clearly perceived the *kedushah* of Hashem, without any barriers between them.

Notwithstanding, it is important to note that that the obligation of honoring one's parents is only on the condition that they encourage their children to go in the ways of Hashem, or at least, do not prevent them from doing so. However, when parents serve to divert their children from serving Hashem and prevent them from studying Torah and fulfilling mitzvot, the children are forbidden to adhere to their parents' bidding (*Yevamot* 5b; *Shulchan Orach*, *Yoreh De'ah* 246a). They must remove themselves from their parents' iniquitous influence in order that their *kedushah* and connection to Hashem should not be negatively impacted by them.

After the command to honor one's parents, the Torah commands us (*Vayikra* 19:3), "You shall observe My Sabbaths." The connection between Shabbat and the command of "You shall be holy" is that Shabbat is referred to as "Shabbat Kodesh" (The Holy Shabbat). Regarding Shabbat it says that Hashem blessed it and sanctified it "because on it He ceased from all His work which G-d created to do" (*Bereishit* 2:3). On Shabbat, Hashem grants us a *neshamah yeteirah* (*Beitzah* 16a), since Shabbat possesses overwhelming *kedushah*. It is impossible for the existing *neshamah* to contain this enormous *kedushah* alone. The additional *neshamah* enables him to absorb all the *kedushah* inherent in Shabbat, as it says (*Kohelet*), "Two are better than one."

It is important to note that the *neshamah yeteirah* dwells in the World to Come during the rest of the week. Since Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come (see *Berachot* 57b; *Batei Midrashot*, *Chelek* 2), the *neshamah*

yeteirah can descend to the world and reside within a person on Shabbat, which is "a taste of the World to Come." Because the *neshamah yeteirah* possesses such enormous *kedushah*, a person's *emunah* is strengthened on Shabbat. Shabbat is an opportunity for man to reinforce his connection with Hashem by elevating the mundane. Moreover, the *neshamah yeteirah* leaves a significant impression upon a person, and upon the whole world, which lasts throughout the week. The *neshamah yeteirah* helps him utilize the unique qualities of Shabbat and pass them on to the weekdays, enabling him to elevate and sanctify himself.

The *neshamah* of a person can be compared to an electrical wire. When it connects to another wire, it creates a flow of electricity. Similarly, the *neshamah* attaches a person to Hashem and creates a connection between them. However, the *neshamah yeteirah* is not merely like an electrical wire, but resembles a power station, where electricity is generated. Just as the intensity of the force generated by a power station is greater than the current contained in one wire, so too, the *neshamah yeteirah* is laden with extraordinary *kedushah*, which has the potential to elevate and sanctify a person.

The continuation of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:4) states, "Do not turn to the idols." In our times, we do not possess a *Yetzer Hara* for idol worship. However, people idolize their money instead. They are so enslaved to their money that it controls their entire life. When a person does not guard the *kedushah* of Shabbat and conducts his business on Shabbat, in order to earn a few more dollars, it demonstrates that he idolizes his money; he cannot refrain from working even for one day.

The end of the pasuk states (ibid.), "ואלוהי מסכה לא תעשו לכם – And molten gods you shall not make for yourselves." Loosely translated, מסכה denotes a television/computer screen. This implies that today this form of idol worship is performed by viewing immoral scenes on television and through the Internet. The visual illusions are portrayed in an enticing manner as a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara* to distract a person from serving Hashem. The most effective way of increasing *kedushah* is by refraining from immorality (*Rashi*, *Vayikra* 19:2). Only by abstaining from all forms

of abominations can one fulfill Hashem's command, "You shall be holy, for holy am I."

In Summary

- What is the connection between the contiguous commands to be holy, to revere one's parents, observe Shabbat, and refrain from idol worship?
- When Bnei Yisrael stood at the shores of the Yam Suf, they declared, "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him." Even the unborn children in their mother's womb, issued this cry. The people standing at the shore could proclaim this declaration in recognition of Hashem's reality, since they had previously experienced many miracles. However, how did the unborn children, who had not witnessed Hashem's supremacy, recognize Him and join in the declaration?
- The *neshamah* of a person is hewn from the Upper Spheres. Before a *neshamah* descends to this world, it perceives Hashem more clearly, because it is not blemished by sin, which creates a barrier between it and Hashem. Therefore, even the unborn children called out, "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him." This teaches us to aspire to elevate our *kedushah* to the level of the unborn children, who never sinned and therefore recognize Hashem with absolute clarity.
- The way to perceive Hashem's absolute existence is by abstaining from immorality and cleaving to *kedushah*, through Torah and mitzvot.
- The Torah placed the commandment to honor one's parents following the commandment to be holy for two reasons: (1) The obligation of showing gratitude to one's parents, who take part in the formation of a person, which ultimately enables him to form a connection between himself and Hashem. (2) By honoring one's parents, he will eventually honor Hashem and cleave to Him in *kedushah*, as he did initially, while in his mother's womb.
- The connection between Shabbat and the command to be holy is that Shabbat is called "Shabbat Kodesh." This is because of the holy *neshamah yeteirah*, stemming from the Upper Spheres, which Hashem

bestows upon his people on Shabbat. The *neshamah yeteirah* is necessary in order to contain the overwhelming *kedushah* of Shabbat, which is too great for only one *neshamah* to endure. Thus, the *neshamah yeteirah* enables a person to intensify his connection with Hashem and elevate himself spiritually.

- The command "Do not turn to the idols" alludes to one's money, which is the idol of our times. When a person conducts his business on Shabbat because of his lust for money, it is a form of idol worship.
- It says, "ואלוהי מסכה לא תעשו לכם – And molten gods you shall not make for yourselves," מסכה is loosely translated as "a computer/television screen." This refers to devices portraying visual illusions that corrupt people. When a person refrains from immorality and distances himself from lewdness, he fulfills the Torah's command "You shall be holy."

The Connection between Honoring One's Parents and Keeping Shabbat

"Every man shall revere his mother and his father and you shall observe My Sabbaths – I am Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:3)

In parashat *Kedoshim*, the Torah commands a person to revere his mother and his father. The Torah precedes the obligation to revere one's mother to revering his father, since a person fears his father more than his mother. Therefore, the Torah enjoins him to exercise added caution in revering his mother (*Kiddushin* 31a). On the other hand, it says (*Shemot* 20:12), "Honor your father and your mother." Here, the verse places his mother after his father. This is because a person naturally honors his

mother more than his father, since his mother is the one who provides for his needs and wins him over with pleasant words. Therefore, regarding honor, the Torah mentions the father first, in order to reinforce the importance of also honoring one's father (ibid. 30:2).

After the Torah commands a person to revere his mother and his father, it commands him to observe Shabbat, as it says "And you shall observe My Sabbaths." Why are these two commands adjacent to each other? What is the connection between them?

Rashi explains (*Vayikra* 19:3), that this teaches that the command to observe Shabbat supersedes the command to revere one's father. Although the Torah obligates a person to honor his parents, it is only on condition that they do not restrain him from going in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot. When parents interfere with their child's observance of Shabbat, or any other mitzvah, his obligation to revere his parents ceases. One must disobey his parents in order to avoid transgressing the will of Hashem.

We may also add the following explanation. The Torah commands a person to honor his parents because the Name י-ה dwells between them, comprised of the letter י in the word איש (man), and the letter ה in the word אשה (woman) (*Sotah* 17a). Just as we are obligated to honor Hashem, likewise, we are commanded to honor our parents, who have the *Shechinah* dwelling among them. However, the moment one of the parents demands that their child transgress a command of Hashem, the Name י-ה departs. Consequently, it is forbidden for the child to adhere to his request.

Another reason for the juxtaposition of these two commands is the following. We know that this world and the World to Come were created with the Name י-ה (*Menachot* 29b), as it says (*Yeshayahu* 26:4) "כי בי-ה צור עולמים – For in G-d, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds." The World to Come was created with the letter י, and this world, which is entirely material, was created with the letter ה (*Menachot* 29b). A person, who is a physical being and thus created with the letter ה, is enjoined to guard

Shabbat, which resembles the World to Come, created with the letter י'. Thus, he connects the two worlds together, joining the Name of Hashem.

Similarly, this is the reason that the Torah commands us (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy." Since we live in a material world, we may easily become corrupted and impede the unity of the Name י-ה. By revering and honoring one's parents, among whom the Name י-ה resides, a person will eventually be motivated to recall his obligation in connecting the two worlds, which were created with the Name י-ה. How can one connect the two worlds? By protecting his *kedushah* and purity, as it says, "You shall be holy." Similarly, by keeping Shabbat, which is the hallmark of Creation, a person becomes a partner with Hashem in Creation (*Shabbat* 119b).

Shabbat is referred to as "Shabbat Kodesh" (*Shemot* 16:23), since it is the epitome of *kedushah*. In fact, all the other days of the week are affected by its exceptional *kedushah* (*Zohar* II, 63b). On Shabbat, a person receives a *neshamah yeteirah* (*Beitzah* 16a) from the Upper Spheres, adding more *kedushah* to his existing *kedushah*. This is because the *neshamah yeteirah* stems from the World to Come, which is the world of the *neshamot* (*Tanchuma*, *Tazria* 1). The *neshamah* represents the letter י', because it stems from the World to Come, which was created with the letter י' (*Menachot* 29b). When a person partakes in the physical pleasures of eating meat and drinking wine on Shabbat, providing enjoyment for his body, and also nourishes his soul with Heavenly *divrei Torah*, he reinforces the connection between the body and soul, which were created with the letters ה' and י'.

A person must honor his parents, who enabled him to enter this world, making it possible for him to observe Shabbat and add more *kedushah* to his existing *kedushah*. The mitzvah of honoring one's parents is unfathomably great, since by honoring his parents, who are visible to him, he connects more intensely to the Name י-ה, which dwells among them. Consequently, he is reminded of Hashem's existence, which is hidden from him (*Kiddushin* 31a). One should honor Hashem and cleave to Him throughout all the days of the week, especially on Shabbat Kodesh, which is a day that is entirely holy (*Tamid* 33b). The more a person adds to his

kedushah on Shabbat by cleaving to Hashem, the more elevated will his Avodat Hashem be during the rest of the week.

This lends insight into the account of Chizkiyahu Hamelech's refusal to get married, and his subsequent threat of punishment of losing both this world and the World to Come. Since Chizkiyahu refrained from marrying, he was also unable to have children, who are commanded to honor their parents, ultimately consolidating the Name י-ה. Consequently, not only did Chizkiyahu cause a loss for himself, but he also caused a loss for the children whom he was meant to bring into being. He denied them the opportunity to honor their parents and thereby bond with Hashem, unifying the Name י-ה.

Refraining from marriage causes a rift in the Name י-ה. Honoring one's parents arouses a person to cleave to Hashem and fulfill His will in observing Shabbat. In this way, he connects the World to Come, which was created with the letter י with this world, which was created with the letter ה, unifying Hashem's Name י-ה. Because Chizkiyahu did not allow for the unification of Hashem's Name י-ה, by refraining from marriage, he was threatened measure for measure with the punishment of losing both worlds, which were created with the Name י-ה.

It is interesting to note that the first letters of the words אמו ואביו (his mother and father) have the *gematria* of seven, which alludes to the seventh day of Shabbat Kodesh. This is another allusion to the connection between the mitzvah of honoring one's parents and observing Shabbat. The more a person extends himself in honoring his parents, who have the Name י-ה dwelling among them, to that degree will he experience the revelation of Hashem's existence on Shabbat Kodesh. It is a time of connection between the two worlds, since on Shabbat the *neshamah yeteirah* descends to this world from the Upper Spheres.

The Torah commands a person to observe Shabbat and warns him not to listen to his parents if they tell him to desecrate the Shabbat, since this would create a flaw in the Name י-ה, with which the two worlds were created.

In Summary

- The Torah precedes the obligation to revere one's mother to revering his father, since a person naturally fears his father more than his mother. Similarly, the Torah precedes the obligation to honor one's father to honoring his mother, because he more readily honors his mother.
- The Torah places the command to keep Shabbat adjacent to the command to honor one's parents in order to teach a person that although he is enjoined to honor his parents, he may not desecrate Shabbat or transgress any other mitzvah, if they tell him to do so. He should disregard their request in order to avoid transgressing Hashem's will.
- One is obligated to revere his parents since the Name י-ה resides among them. Just as one honors Hashem, so too, should he respect his parents. Correspondingly, when a person, who is a physical being, created with the letter ה', observes Shabbat, resembling the World to Come, created with the letter י', he unifies the Name י-ה. This explains the juxtaposition of these mitzvot.
- A person should honor his parents, who brought him into this world and enabled him to observe Shabbat, which adds *kedushah* to the existing *kedushah* of his *neshamah*. By honoring his parents, who are visible to him, he will eventually honor Hashem. Moreover, When a person partakes in physical pleasures on Shabbat, and in addition nourishes his soul with *divrei* Torah, he reinforces the connection between the body and soul, which were created with the letters ה' and י'. Consequently, Hashem's Name י-ה is unified.
- By refraining from marriage, Chizkiyahu was threatened with the punishment of being denied the privilege of the two worlds, which were created with the Name י-ה. Chizkiyahu's punishment was measure for measure, since he denied his unborn children the opportunity to honor their parents and thereby unify the Name י-ה.

Admonishing with Wisdom

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and you shall not bear a sin because of him"

(*Vayikra* 19:17)

The Torah places the command to reprove one's fellow for sinning following the command to refrain from harboring hate for him in his heart. The connection between them can be explained in the following way. When a person does not hate his fellow in his heart, but sincerely loves him, he will not reprove his fellow with anger or from revenge. He will truly seek to assist his friend in doing complete teshuvah. If the reproof is given with anger and envy, it loses its effectiveness. When a person is angry, he does not relate pleasantly to others. Instead of explaining the error gently to his fellow, he will rage against him, which will achieve the opposite effect. Chazal describe this with the maxim (*Berachot* 6b; *Sefer Hayashar* of *Rabbeinu Tam* 13:173), "Words which are issued from the heart, ultimately penetrate the heart."

Chazal relate the following incident (*Yalkut Bereishit* 247:16). A couple was married for ten years, but did not have children. They came to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to request a divorce. The husband turned to his wife and offered that she could take to her father's house any item that she desired to keep. Rabbi Shimon advised that just as they had celebrated with a feast on the day of their wedding, they should also celebrate with a feast before separating from each other. The woman prepared a lavish feast and got her husband drunk. She quickly ordered her handmaidens to carry her husband's bed, with him in it, to her father's house. When her husband awoke and turned sober, he asked about his whereabouts. His wife explained to him that she had brought him to her father's house, because he had said that anything she desired to keep should be taken there; there was nothing more precious to her than he. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Shimon prayed for the couple, and they merited having a son.

If Rabbi Shimon was capable of blessing the couple to merit a child, why did he not bless them immediately, when they first came to him? Why did he tell them to first prepare a feast before they divorced, and only after the events that subsequently unfolded did he bless them with a son?

In order to clarify the issue, we must preface with the words of Chazal, who say, "Whoever forgoes his natural inclinations, Hashem will forgo [punishment] and forgive his iniquities" (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a). This is because "in the same way that a person judges his fellow, he is judged from Heaven" (*Sotah* 8b). Thus, we may assume that the couple who came before Rabbi Shimon to request a divorce because they had no children, were truly not worthy of having a child at that time.

When they first appeared before Rabbi Shimon asking for a divorce, he could have justifiably agreed to their request, since a couple who is married for ten years but do not have children are legally permitted to divorce (*Yevamot* 64a). However, Rabbi Shimon did not hurry to facilitate their divorce. Instead, he first instructed them to prepare a lavish feast, just as they had prepared on the occasion of their marriage. Why did Rabbi Shimon order them to do something that is not mandated according to law? This is because he noticed how the couple wished to part peacefully from each other. He saw the love and respect between them. It was only because of their childlessness that they wanted to separate. This awareness was underscored by the husband telling his wife that he allowed her to keep anything she wished by taking it to her father's house. They made every effort to part in peace.

When Rabbi Shimon noticed this, he had no doubt that their union was solid and should not be destroyed. Every divorce causes the Mizbeach to shed tears (*Gittin* 90b). If it is possible to save a marriage which is satisfactory, one should do everything in his power to prevent a couple from divorcing. However, the couple that approached Rabbi Shimon faced the overwhelming obstacle of not being blessed with children. Most likely this was due to some past misdeed that had not been corrected. Since there was an accusation against them in Heaven, Rabbi Shimon could not bless them to merit children when they first approached him. Therefore,

he instructed them to prepare a lavish feast in their house before their divorce. He hoped that the added dedication they would demonstrate to each other would arouse the Attribute of Mercy upon them and ultimately make them worthy of having children.

When the couple returned to Rabbi Shimon the second time, he heard the woman's testimony that she had preferred her husband over all her other belongings. She chose to take her husband to her father's house over all her gold and silver ornaments. Rabbi Shimon perceived the extent of her devotion. He understood that since she had foregone her natural inclination, preferring a life of childlessness with her husband to all her earthly possessions, Hashem would likewise overlook her transgressions and grant her a child.

Rabbi Shimon's conduct in this case is an example of indirect reproof. Rabbi Shimon knew that if he would admonish them directly about their past misdeeds, which were preventing them from having a child, they would not be able to contend with the accusations leveled against them in Heaven. However, by sending them home to prepare a feast before their separation, he gave them an opportunity to reflect upon their past and proceed to improve themselves. In this way, it was possible for the Attribute of Mercy to prevail. Because Rabbi Shimon did not facilitate a divorce immediately, nor bless them with children right away, it caused the couple to reconsider their state and invest greater efforts in being worthy of having a child.

The wisdom of Rabbi Shimon's indirect reproof accomplished its goal and served to arouse the woman to overcome her natural inclination for material pursuits and instead choose to continue her marriage. After witnessing her extraordinary dedication, it was decided in Heaven to grant her a son, who would illuminate their lives.

In parashat *Tetzaveh* it states (*Shemot* 28:3), "And you shall speak to each of the wise-hearted people whom I have invested with a spirit of wisdom." This indicates that Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to choose people who were wise-hearted and appoint them in charge of

manufacturing the special garments of the Kohanim. Why did the Torah specifically use the phrase "wise-hearted"? Wisdom stems from the mind and not from the heart. The heart is the source of emotions and feelings.

Ba'alei Mussar explain that just as there is wisdom of the mind, there is wisdom of the heart. Who possesses wisdom of the heart? Those who control their evil impulses and negative emotions. It is actually the heart that initiates the command to the brain telling it how it should think. When anger or passion fills one's heart, negative orders are transmitted to the brain to think accordingly. When a person wishes to control the actions issued by his brain, he must first overcome the evil inclination that was initiated in his heart, and channel his negative emotions in a positive way. Therefore, Hashem specifically instructed Moshe to choose people who possessed "wise hearts." These were people who had acquired virtuous character traits, thereby possessing the ability to control their train of thought by directing their hearts in a positive way.

The couple that appeared before Rabbi Shimon had acquired the important attribute of a "wise heart." This was manifested by their willingness to part from each other peacefully, and not in anger or humiliation. Moreover, the woman overcame her natural inclination for material pursuits, and instead she chose to keep her husband by taking him to her father's house. This was ultimately the deciding factor in her favor, making her worthy of having a child.

Similarly, the Torah (*Shemot* 27:20) commands the Kohen Gadol to light the Menorah with "clear olive oil, crushed for illumination." What is the definition of "crushed"? Chazal explain that it implies the first drop that was extracted from the olive (*Menachot* 86a). Consequently, the Kohen had to crush many olives to extract enough oil for lighting the Menorah, since only the first drop was used.

The reason for using only the first drop is because the first drop signifies self-sacrifice. It can be compared to a person who has to arise early in the morning to pray with a minyan. The real challenge takes place in the initial moment of decision to get up and overcome his laziness.

After a person overcomes his temptation for more sleep, and instead arises to do Hashem's bidding, he is no longer plagued by overwhelming fatigue. The hardship and challenge lies mainly in the decisive moment, when both his *Yetzer Hara* and *Yetzer Tov* are battling to sway his behavior.

The critical moment when one overcomes temptation requires enormous *mesirut nefesh*. After the decision has been made, the difficulty eases, until it is barely felt. This is why Hashem instructed the Kohanim to light the Menorah in the Mikdash with the first drop of oil extracted from the olive. It symbolizes the *mesirut nefesh* necessary for man in order to serve Hashem.

In addition, the first drop of oil that is squeezed from the olive is the most pure, without any trace of sediments mixed in it. This indicates the pure intentions one should employ when performing mitzvot. A person should not harbor impure motives when serving Hashem, such as gaining honor in the eyes of people, or self-aggrandizement.

Thus, it is only a fracture of a moment that differentiates between overcoming one's anger and passion or succumbing to the evil inclination. It is a most fateful moment, since it determines which direction a person will follow, and its eventual consequences. In order to make a wise choice during a fateful moment of decision, one must demonstrate much self sacrifice. This will enable him to overcome the *Yetzer Hara* inherent in man. When a person forgoes his ego and overcomes his evil inclination, it is symbolic of the clear olive oil crushed for illumination, signifying total self-sacrifice.

In Summary

- The Torah places the command to reprove one's fellow for sinning following the command to refrain from harboring hate for him in his heart to teach us that one can only admonish his fellow properly when his heart is free of baseless hatred.

- Chazal relate the story of a couple who wanted to get divorced because they did not have children after being married for ten years. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai told them to first prepare a feast as they had done on their wedding day, and only thereafter to get divorced. The husband told his wife that she could take anything she desired to keep to her father's house. During the feast, the woman got her husband drunk and had him taken to her father's house. When Rabbi Shimon heard this, he blessed them with a child. Why did Rabbi Shimon not bless them immediately with children? Why did he instruct them to first prepare a lavish feast? Furthermore, if he did not want to bless them, why did he not facilitate the divorce immediately, as permitted according to halachah?

- Chazal teach us that "in the same way that a person judges his fellow, he is judged by Heaven." Since the couple was not blessed with children, it indicated that they had performed a misdeed that had not been rectified. Rabbi Shimon knew that in order for his blessing to be realized, the couple had to improve themselves. Therefore, he sent them home to prepare a festive meal so that they would intensify their amity and love for each other. In this merit, his blessing would be validated. Rabbi Shimon perceived their inherent love for each other when he heard the husband telling his wife that he allowed her to take anything she wished for herself.

- When Rabbi Shimon heard that the woman chose her husband over all her worldly possessions, he blessed them with children. This is because the woman had overcome her natural inclination for material pursuits and instead had increased the harmony between herself and her husband. This ultimately made her worthy of having a son.

- This story is exemplary of indirect reproof. If Rabbi Shimon would have admonished them directly to do teshuvah, they may not have listened to him. However, after he sent them home, they were aroused to consider improving themselves.

- The Torah states, "And you shall speak to each of the wise-hearted people." Wisdom stems from the mind and not from the heart. What does

a "wise heart" signify? It indicates the ability to control one's negative emotions. A person's emotions ultimately determine his thoughts and decisions. Rabbi Shimon perceived that the couple possessed "wisdom of the heart," since they wished to part peacefully. This is what enabled them to ultimately achieve rectification for their past misdeeds and merit a child.

- The Menorah was lit using only the first drop of oil extracted from the olive, since it signifies the *mesirut nefesh* necessary in serving Hashem. Furthermore, the first drop of oil is the most pure, without any sediment. Similarly, a person should fulfill Hashem's will with pure intentions, not allowing other considerations to interfere.
- It is a fraction of a moment that differentiates between succumbing to a lustful act or overcoming it. This moment is symbolized by the first drop of oil extracted from the olive. The only way to acquire this "first drop" is through achieving "wisdom of the heart," as was characteristic of the couple in the story.

Gems on Parashat Kedoshim

The Connection between Acharei Mot and Kedoshim

"You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:2)

What is the connection between parashat *Acharei Mot* and parashat *Kedoshim*, which follows it? According to the literal explanation, the laws of incest outlined at the end of parashat *Acharei Mot* describe the *kedushah* that we are commanded about in parashat *Kedoshim*. Similarly, Rashi explains (ibid.) "Wherever you find restriction of sexual immorality mentioned in the Torah, you find holiness juxtaposed with it."

The connection of these parshiyot may also imply the following. Parashat *Acharei Mot* describes the dreadful incident regarding Nadav and Avihu, who died after they "approached before Hashem" (*Vayikra* 16:1) while offering the *ketoret* in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. Regarding them it states: (ibid. 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me." This may deter people from striving for holiness and sanctification, since they may fear dying like Nadav and Avihu, who aspired to draw close to Hashem. Therefore, following parashat *Acharei Mot*, there is parashat *Kedoshim*, describing Hashem's command to be holy and

sanctified. It indicates that there is nothing to fear in striving for holiness, since this is Hashem's will. Fulfilling Hashem's will does not lead to death. Nadav and Avihu died because they acted independently. Their *korban* had not been instructed by Hashem. Conversely, Avraham Avinu was commanded to offer his son as a sacrifice. He immediately set out to fulfill Hashem's command, since he knew he had nothing to fear by performing Hashem's will.

There is an amazing story told about my holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zt"l. A man approached him for help, since he did not have money to marry off his children. Rabbi Chaim told him to go to a certain spot in the market place and he would find a sum of money there. He instructed him to take as much as he needed and bring the rest to Rabbi Chaim. The man set out with perfect faith to do as he was instructed. Indeed, he found the money, took whatever he needed and brought the rest of it to Rabbi Chaim. Rabbi Chaim told him that since he had proven his absolute faith, fulfilling his Rabbi's instructions without question, he would be able to keep the rest of the money, as well. This illustrates that whoever faithfully fulfills his Rabbi's orders will not lose out. How much more so is this true of one who fulfills Hashem's commands.

In truth, people used to have unquestioning faith; something that is sorely lacking in our days.

Kedushah versus Tumah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:1-2)

"Any man or woman in whom there shall be the sorcery of Ov or of Yid'oni, they shall be put to death; they shall pelt them with stones, their blood is upon them"

(*ibid.* 20:27)

Parashat *Kedoshim* begins with the command to acquire holiness. Just as Hashem is holy, likewise, His people are required to resemble Him and sanctify themselves. The parashah ends with an issue regarding the depths of *tumah*. Am Yisrael were commanded to avoid the custom of the nations of engaging in the sorcery of Ov and Yid'oni, raising the dead out of their graves (*Sanhedrin* 65b) and listening to their predictions for the future. Since parashat *Kedoshim* discusses supreme *kedushah*, why did the Torah conclude the parashah with an issue of utmost *tumah*? It would seem more appropriate to end the parashah with matters of *kedushah*, expressing the essence of this parashah.

This teaches that when a person turns his back on Hashem and His Torah, departing from *kedushah*, he will eventually deteriorate and become entirely consumed by *tumah*. He may even succumb to the most abominable behavior of sorcery. Therefore, we are obligated to constantly guard our *kedushah*. By demonstrating to Hashem that we wish to resemble His *kedushah*, we will merit to attain greater levels of *kedushah*.

Conversely, when a person does not express his desire to cleave to Hashem with *kedushah*, the Satan is given the ability to prevail over him, without him even realizing what is happening. Consequently, he may deteriorate drastically, descending to the depths of *tumah* by engaging in the sorcery of Ov and Yid'oni.

Thus, the conclusion of parashat *Kedoshim*, which describes elevated levels of *kedushah*, with this description of one of the worst forms of *tumah*, indicates that Hashem created one corresponding to the other. There is supreme *kedushah* on one hand, and dreadful *tumah* controlled by the Satan on the other hand. When a person does not strive for *kedushah*, he becomes vulnerable to the forces of *tumah*. The Satan gains control over him, causing him to become defiled even with the worst *tumah* of engaging in the sorcery of Ov and Yid'oni. Every person should take heed and constantly strive to cleave to *kedushah*, in order not to become victim to the powers of *tumah*.

The Obligation to Honor Hashem

"Every man shall revere his mother and his father and you shall observe My Shabbatot – I am Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 19:3)

Chazal determine that there are three partners in a person's formation: his father, his mother, and Hashem. The ratio between the contribution of one's parents and that of Hashem is tremendous. Parents contribute less than one percent and Hashem completes more than ninety-nine percent. As proof, when Hashem removes one's *neshamah*, which is His contribution, then the person's flesh and bones, which his parents

contributed, are reduced to dust. Nevertheless, Hashem obligates every person to honor his father and mother. From this we can learn how much more so we are obligated to honor Hashem, Who is the essence of our existence. Therefore, the pasuk concludes with the words, "I am Hashem." This implies that "everyone is obligated in honoring Me" (*Yevamot* 6a).

The way to honor Hashem is by observing the Shabbat, as it says (*Vayikra* 19:3), "You shall observe My Shabbatot – I am Hashem." It is inevitable that by observing Shabbat, a person will be inspired to learn Torah and become imbued with the love of Torah. This is because on Shabbat one is relieved from other obligations and is free to learn uninterrupted. Once a person gets a taste of Torah, he experiences its sweetness, as it says (*Tehillim* 34:9), "Contemplate and see that Hashem is good."

According to Kabbalah (*Pri Eitz Chaim*, *Chag Hamatzot* 7) the Torah is referred to as "The Fundamental Father." This is what is implied by the pasuk (*Shemot* 20:12) "Honor your father and your mother," which refers to the Torah. This will ultimately lead to honoring Hashem.

The Obligation to Rebuke

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and you shall not bear a sin because of him"

(*Vayikra* 19:17)

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his sefer *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (*Sha'ar* 3:59) that the obligation to admonish one's fellow stems from the command "You shall not bear a sin because of him." This indicates that if a person witnesses his fellow sinning and does not reprove him, he is blamed just

as if he had committed the transgression himself. Even though it may seem that the sinner would not accept the admonishment at that time, it is possible that later on he would do teshuvah for his transgression because of the reproof that he had been given. Therefore, one is obligated to admonish his fellow. Notwithstanding, although one must reprove a person who sins, one must do so with sensitivity, explaining the error gently and in a pleasant tone. In this way his words will penetrate the heart of his fellow and they will not fall on deaf ears. Rabbeinu Yonah adds that if a person admonishes his friend in order to aggravate him, or at a time when he is certain that his reproof will not be accepted, or if he humiliates or shouts at him in anger, the sin of his fellow will be accrued to him.

This implies that one must make sure to admonish his fellow tactfully and at the right time. He must consider if it would be better to wait a bit until the person calms down in order for him to accept the reproof readily, since "one may not pacify a person when he is upset" (*Berachot* 7a). Nonetheless, it is forbidden to ignore the improper behavior of another person because we are all responsible for one another (*Shavuot* 39a). In fact, if one member of Am Yisrael sins, the entire nation suffers the consequences (ibid.).

Sometimes, we are convinced that our reproof will not be beneficial at all. We are uncertain whether there is any point in giving rebuke. However, this may be the ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to prevent a person from fulfilling this important mitzvah. In such a case, we should examine the matter carefully to see if perhaps there would be a more suitable time or setting to deliver the reproof. If we confirm that the person's anger has abated and it is possible to admonish him, we must do so, despite our hesitations that our words will fall on deaf ears. It is an obligation that we should not ignore, since we never know when our words will achieve their purpose and ultimately influence a person for the better.

I can testify to this from my own experience. Once a person came to shake my hand and asked me if I remembered him. I told him that it was

difficult for me to remember all the people that I had met. He told me that twelve years earlier he had heard me lecture, delivering words of reproach and *mussar*. A short while ago, those words had resurfaced in his mind, and he decided to make significant changes in his life, ultimately doing complete teshuvah. This person benefitted from words that I had spoken twelve years earlier. We can never predict a person's future. This is why we are all obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of "You shall reprove your fellow," at a suitable time and in a constructive manner.

Emor

Torah Is the Foundation of the World

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

The Torah repeats the word "say" in this pasuk, "**say** to the Kohanim… and you shall **say** to them." This seems unnecessary since the Torah generally minimizes its words. Why does it repeat the word "say"? Chazal's explanations can be found in Rashi's commentary (ibid.).

The Written Torah is a codification of all the commandments, whereas the Oral Torah describes in detail the practical application of the mitzvot (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Zuta* 2). For example, we are commanded to observe Shabbat in the Written Torah with the words (*Devarim* 5:12): "Guard the Sabbath day to sanctify it." However, there is no explanation given of how to observe Shabbat. The Oral Torah explains the thirty-nine categories of forbidden work in detail. Since the Written Torah is codified and concise, why here is the word "say" repeated? The implication of the command already seems clear.

Although the Torah minimizes its words regarding mitzvot, we find that the Torah deviates from this rule when recounting the stories about our

forefathers. Every minute detail is recorded regarding their actions and behavior (*Bereishit Rabbah* 60:8). Chazal say that the Torah serves as a guide for living. The behavior of the forefathers sets an example for their descendants (see *Tanchuma*, *Lech Lecha* 9; *Ramban*, *Lech Lecha* 12:2). These stories serve to arouse within us *yirat Shamayim*, leading us to anticipate (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* 25), "When will my behavior resemble the behavior of my forefathers?" Thus, the Torah describes the actions of our ancestors at length, teaching us important lessons and causing us to contemplate their behavior, so that we, too, should follow in their ways.

With this is mind, we can understand the repetition of the word "say," according to the explanation of Rashi. He says that "say" is repeated in order to "enjoin the adults with regard to the minors." This implies that one command was given for the older members of the nation, and the second command was issued regarding the young children, since already from an early age they must be trained to listen to Hashem's command. It is important to recognize that it is not possible for a person to command his children to be meticulous in mitzvah observance if he himself does not stringently adhere to halachah, doing as he pleases. When a child is small, his father can force him to perform mitzvot. However, when he matures and becomes independent, it is only the personal example and pure education that he absorbed from home which will remain with him, guiding him in all his ways.

Being an exemplary role model is the key to successful education. If parents aspire that their children should strictly observe mitzvot, they must also do so. When children observe their parents living a Torah life and serving Hashem with joy, they seek to follow them and go in their ways.

Thus, the use of "say" followed by "and you shall say" denotes two different commands. Each command was intended for a different category of people. The first was directed to the older members of the congregation, and the second to the younger ones. Just as we study and try to emulate the behavior of our forefathers, which is described in great

detail in the Torah, so too, our children observe our behavior and follow our every step in order to learn from us the proper way to live. When parents are careful to live up to their words, they merit Divine assistance in raising their children to go in the correct path. Ultimately they derive much satisfaction from them.

Why does the Torah issue two separate commands to these two groups of people? It says in Pirkei Avot (1:2) "The world depends on three things – on Torah study, on the service [of G-d], and on kind deeds." "Service" refers to prayer, as it says (*Ta'anit* 2a), "Which is the service of the heart? It is prayer." Since the Beit Hamikdash has been destroyed and the service of *korbanot* has ceased, prayer substitutes for *korbanot*, as it says (*Hoshea* 14:3), "Let our lips substitute for bulls" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21). In the past, the service of the *korbanot* would bind Am Yisrael to Hashem and atone for their sins. In our days, since we do not have the Beit Hamikdash where we could sacrifice *korbanot*, prayer is the means by which we can connect to Hashem.

The second foundation upon which the world depends is kind deeds. Just as Hashem sustains man and provides him with all his needs, so too, should a person concern himself with the needs of other people, in material matters as well as spiritual ones. Hashem showers us with endless kindness. We have no way of repaying His benevolence, since whatever we may do for Him is negligible in comparison to the charity and compassion that He constantly bestows upon us. The way we can express our profound gratitude is to perform acts of charity and kindness with His people. In addition, since "all of Yisrael are responsible for one another," a person may not ignore his fellow. He must seek ways in which he can benefit him and lighten his load.

The third foundation is the Torah, through which Hashem created the world, as it says (*Zohar* II, 161a) "Hashem looked in the Torah and created the world." This indicates that Hashem followed the blueprint of the Torah in order to fashion the world. Chazal say (*Midrash Tehillim* 93; *Rashi*, *Bereishit* 1:2) that even before Hashem created the world, His Throne was hovering over the waters and Hashem was "delighting in the

Torah" (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan* 31). What purpose did learning Torah serve for Hashem? After all the Torah is replete with positive and negative commands that relate to the mundane activities of man. For example, the prohibition of eating pig, or wearing clothing with wool and linen combined, apply to man and not to Hashem, since "He has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal."

Furthermore, Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 3b) say that Hashem occupied Himself with the study of Torah. Why would Hashem engage in the Torah when large portions involve in-depth description of our forefather's behavior, which was written in order to guide future generations to follow in their ways? In addition, why did Hashem study the Torah recounting the deeds of our forefathers, when they had not yet been performed?

As already mentioned, the Zohar says that Hashem "looked in the Torah and created the world." As an illustration, the Zohar compares this to an architect planning the step-by-step construction of a building. Similarly Hashem used the Torah as a blueprint for creating the world. We may wonder how this was possible, since the Torah is comprised of various mitzvot. Can we suggest that the mitzvot serve as a blueprint for Creation?

We can also ask another question regarding this. According to Chazal (*Ritva*, *Kiddushin* 49b), in the future, Hashem will remove the *tumah* of the pig and permit its consumption. The entire existence of the world will change. Many things that are written in the Torah will take on a different form. For example, the *chagim* described in the Torah will not be celebrated after the arrival of Mashiach, except for Chanukah and Purim. Furthermore, the command to love one's fellow as himself will not apply, since truth and peace will prevail, and people will naturally coexist in absolute harmony. What purpose would the mitzvah of "You shall love your fellow as yourself" serve after the *Yetzer Hara* will be eliminated? At that time no one will envy his fellow, nor disparage him. We need to clarify what the status of the mitzvot will be following the arrival of Mashiach, since conditions will change. Likewise, the sacrificing of *korbanot* will cease (*Tanchuma*, *Emor* 14).

The matter can be resolved in the following way. The Zohar says (III, 292b) that before this world was created, as we know it, Hashem created many worlds and destroyed them after detecting that they were not worthy of existence. Only after creating a world according to the guidelines of the Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1a), "G-d saw that it was good" and Hashem allowed it to exist. This implies that Hashem saw that only through the Torah could the world continue to exist; without it the world would be destroyed. Since the foundation of the world is Torah, Hashem designed the world so that the mitzvot of the Torah can be upheld.

There is another aspect of the Torah which makes it essential for the world's existence. We know that Hashem is eternal and beyond human comprehension, while man is a passing, physical being. In order for man to connect with Hashem and be able to exist, Hashem granted him a *neshamah* from Above, which has the potential to elevate him spiritually. Likewise, the Torah, which is eternal and spiritual, also serves to connect man to his Creator, thereby making him worthy of existence.

Consequently, the Torah, the *neshamah*, and man form a partnership in order to give man the ability to exist on earth. Since the *neshamah* and the Torah are eternal creations and not transient, Hashem fashioned them even before the Creation of the world (*Pesachim* 54a; *Bereishit Rabbah* 8:7) in order to bear witness to their significance. The *neshamah* is in essence *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* originating from the Holy Throne, which is its dwelling. Similarly, the Torah is composed of the letters of Hashem's Names, whereby every combination forms a different Name.

When Hashem fashioned the world, He used a different combination of the letters of His Names in order to fashion each creation according to its needs. This is what is implied by the Zohar (II, 161a) "Hashem looked in the Torah and created the world." Likewise, Hashem took the letters א-ד-ם from His Names and combined them in order to create man.

Chazal say that the six hundred thousand *neshamot* of Am Yisrael correspond to the six hundred thousand letters in the Torah. The Names of Hashem hinted to in the words of the Torah, through which Hashem

created the world, is what connects Am Yisrael to the letters of the Torah. Thus, there is also a connection between the 613 mitzvot written in the Torah to a person's limbs, which also total 613. Each mitzvah in the Torah corresponds to another limb in the body of man (*Sha'arei Kedushah* 1:1).

How did Hashem engage in the words of Torah if a substantial portion of the Torah deals with stories about our forefathers, who were not yet born? Hashem foresaw what would take place in the future. He already knew that there would eventually be three founding forefathers: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who would establish the Jewish nation and perform outstanding deeds. Hashem took delight in the behavior of the forefathers even before they existed, because he anticipated the future events. We can compare this to a wealthy person who plans to build himself a spectacular mansion. Even before the mansion is actually constructed, he already imagines with delight the exceptional, top-quality features that will enhance each room. Although the mansion is not yet in existence, the wealthy person enjoys the anticipation of its eventual construction. He experiences much pleasure imagining its eventual inauguration.

Hashem foresaw what would occur in the future with His people, until the end of generations. Although the world was not yet in existence, the anticipation of future events caused Hashem to delight in the words of the Torah, conveying the story of His people, who would ultimately sanctify His Name in the world.

Every creation on earth, including the pig, which is the symbol of *tumah*, was created by combining letters of Hashem's Names. In the future, Hashem will remove the *tumah* of the pig by making its source apparent, rendering it pure. In fact, when we will merit the arrival of Mashiach, the Torah itself will not change, since it is comprised of the Names of Hashem. It will always remain derivatives of Hashem's Names.

Since the Torah is comprised of Hashem's Names, if a single letter is omitted, it is rendered invalid and must be buried according to halachah

as *genizah*. This is because it is as if a letter from the Name of Hashem was omitted.

We can also explain the repetition of the words "say" from a different angle. In order to comprehend deep concepts, one must first master the basic issues. Once the fundamentals are clear, we can proceed to deeper and more lofty matters. The repetition of the word "say" alludes to the stages one must follow when studying Torah, learning step-by-step.

In a different vein, when a person sets out to buy a product, he first verifies which company manufacturing the item is most reliable. After choosing the company with the best reputation, he proceeds to purchase the item. Consequently, the specific item is not selected in its own merit, but in the merit of its brand name, indicating the esteemed company that manufactured it. The company is the one who determines its value and quality. Similarly, Hashem created the world, and the "brand name," referring to Hashem's Names which are the source of each creation, determine the quality and purpose of every creation. Without its source, the world would lose its existence.

Ultimately, each creation cannot suffice with its initial creation for its continued existence, but we must strengthen its foundations each day anew through the study of Torah. This is what Chazal convey by saying (*Avot* 1:2): "The world depends on three things – on Torah study, on the service [of G-d], and on kind deeds." Because of the supreme importance of the Torah, which contains many concealed levels, it is important to caution the elders as well as the young children regarding its laws. When children are young, and they are still open to hearing and accepting guidance, they must be trained to go in the ways of the Torah. In this way, when they mature, they will conduct themselves accordingly, and will continue to pass the torch of the Torah to the coming generations.

In Summary

- The Torah repeats the word "say" in this pasuk even though it generally minimizes its words. Rashi explains that it is not redundant, since the

Torah specifically commands both the elders and the young children separately. This implies that the elders are responsible for educating the younger children by serving as role models. Just as the Torah describes our forefather's deeds at length in order to teach us proper behavior, so too, must we serve as role models for our children. In this way, they will aspire to emulate our way of life.

- The world depends on three things, one of which is the Torah. Chazal say that before the world was created, Hashem would delight in the Torah. How is this possible? After all, many portions of the Torah deal with various prohibitions relating to physical matters. What purpose do they serve for Hashem? Also, how did Hashem study Torah before the world's existence, since many parshiyot discuss stories of our forefathers, who did not yet exist at the time?

- We can explain this according to the Zohar that states that Hashem "looked into the Torah and created the world." This implies that the Torah served as a blueprint, and Hashem created the world according to it. How did the mitzvot of the Torah serve as a blueprint for Creation? Moreover, we know that many prohibitions will become permissible in the future, which implies that the Torah will take on a different form. We need to clarify what the status of these mitzvot will be in the End of Days.

- Hashem created the world through the Torah, which are derivatives of His Names. Each creation was fashioned through a different combination of letters derived from a different Name of Hashem. There are exactly the same numbers of *neshamot* of Am Yisrael as letters in the Torah. Each letter corresponds to a different *neshamah*. In the creation of man, the Torah, the *neshamah*, and man formed a partnership in order for man to be able to exist in the world. Even before the first man and the forefathers were created, Hashem delighted in the Torah and took pleasure in the stories of the forefathers. This was possible because Hashem foresaw what would occur in the future and anticipated its realization. The future developments of the outstanding deeds of the forefathers brought Hashem great joy.

- In the future, when prohibitions of the Torah will become permissible, the Torah will revert to its origin as it was before the world was created, since it was originally derived from the Names of Hashem.
- The repetition of the words "say" and "and you shall say" implies that in order to comprehend deep concepts, one must first master the basic issues. Furthermore, the "brand name" of the world refers to Hashem's Names, which are the source of each creation. Therefore, it is Hashem's Names that determine the quality and purpose of every creation. Without its source, the world could not exist. However, it is insufficient to rely on the initial act of Creation that took place during the six days of Creation. We must fortify each creation anew each day by studying Torah and through teaching Torah to the young children.

Progressing in Avodat Hashem and Its Rewards

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

The Torah repeats the word "say," by adding "and you shall say to them." The implication of this injunction is clear without this repetition. Why does the Torah use double language? This is to teach the Kohanim and all of Bnei Yisrael an important lesson of how cautious we should be in avoiding all types of *tumah*, and especially defilement caused by the *Yetzer Hara*.

We can learn from this that it is insufficient to review the lessons of the Torah only once, but we must continuously repeat its words until they become an essential part of us. Each additional review further protects a person from the *tumah* of the *Yetzer Hara*, as it says, "To a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people." The repetition of the words "say" and "you shall say" teaches us that a person must strive to constantly progress and not remain static. This is what is implied by the words of Rashi, (ibid.), "To enjoin adults with regard to minors." By constantly reviewing his studies, a person will enhance his portion in the World to Come.

In the introduction to Pirkei Avot (*Sanhedrin* 90a) it says, "All Israel has a share in the World to Come, as it is said: 'And your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever.'" Upon closer scrutiny, the last letters of the words כל ישראל יש להם (all Israel has) form the word שללם (their booty). This indicates that the repeated review of Torah and one's subsequent progress in Avodat Hashem is the booty that one takes with him to the World to Come, like the booty that a soldier acquires after a battle. In order to observe mitzvot with dedication and joy one must battle with his *Yetzer Hara*, who tries in every way to distract a person from spiritual gains. However, when a person succeeds in overcoming his *Yetzer Hara*, he acquires the beautiful mitzvot as his booty, which ultimately make him worthy of a portion in the World to Come.

Similarly, the Torah is referred to as "booty" because of the great efforts a person invests in battling to master its lessons. This is because the *Yetzer Hara* focuses his efforts primarily on tackling Torah scholars, since he knows that the Torah causes the world to exist, and it is the source of Bnei Yisrael's unique status. Therefore, one who succeeds in conquering the *Yetzer Hara* acquires the "booty" of the Torah and mitzvot, which defend him and assure his welfare and blessings in the World to Come.

All of Yisrael potentially have a portion in the World to Come. This is because they add their own safeguards and stringencies to enhance their mitzvah observance, and thereby bring pleasure to Hashem. Hashem calls

together all of the Heavenly Hosts to observe the admirable deeds of His people. When the angels witness the worthiness of Klal Yisrael, they proclaim before Hashem, "And who is like Your people, like Israel, a unique nation on earth." Since their defense is awakened in the Upper Worlds, they ultimately inherit the "booty" (שלל) of the World to Come instead of falling captive (שלל) to the *Yetzer Hara*.

We are taught (*Yevamot* 20a) to "sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." It is precisely the additional safeguards that a person imposes upon himself in order to serve Hashem that ultimately grant him the Divine assistance against falling captive to the *Yetzer Hara*. By avoiding the *Yetzer Hara*, a person gains additional "spoils" of the Torah, which make him worthy of a portion in the World to Come.

Before an infant is born, he is made to swear that he will remain a tzaddik and not become a rasha (*Niddah* 30b). This is because his Jewish essence makes him worthy of inheriting a portion in the World to Come. However, in order to realize his privilege, he must follow in the proper path, becoming a tzaddik, and not be enticed by the *Yetzer Hara*. Since a person is forced to take an oath that he will become a tzaddik, he receives Heavenly assistance to progress in his Avodat Hashem and advance in his Torah studies. Thus, when a *neshamah* descends to this world, it is considered a tzaddik. Consequently, Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 90a) determined that each Jew possesses a portion in the World to Come. This implies that in the merit of being born and swearing to become a tzaddik, he is given the privilege of inheriting a portion in the World to Come. It would be a pity for a person to squander this opportunity.

The duty of a person in this world is to toil in Torah and mitzvot. Otherwise, he has no purpose in living. On the other hand, in the World to Come, where the *neshamah* originated from under the Heavenly Throne (*Midrash Hane'elam*, *Bereishit* 113a), there is no concept of toiling in Torah. This is because "it is not in the Heavens" (*Devarim* 30:12). If a person does not invest his efforts in studying Torah, what purpose does his life have? He disregards the main reason for being in this world, which is to amass great "spoils" in Torah in order to inherit a portion in the

World to Come. Consequently, he will be able to bask in the brilliance of the *Shechinah* and discuss the depths of the Torah with Hashem.

We may add that just as Hashem is referred to as "Tzaddik" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:9) because all His ways are benevolent and just, so too, each *neshamah* is considered a tzaddik, since it is hewn from the Upper Worlds and is a G-dly portion from Above (*Pardes Rimonim* 32a). This is why it is worthy of inheriting a portion in the World to Come. Upon descending to this world, filled with the enticement for passions and physical pursuit, Hashem grants the *neshamah* the Divine assistance necessary to overcome all its challenges and become elevated in Avodat Hashem in order to merit the "שי עולמות" (310 worlds as gifts) that Hashem reserves for tzaddikim (*Uktzin* 3:12). When Hashem perceives a person's desire to go in His ways, He assists him in conquering the *Yetzer Hara* and attaining the "spoils" of Torah.

The main purpose of the Exodus of Am Yisrael from Egypt was in order to receive the Torah. So too, the goal of every *neshamah* that descends to the world below is to accept upon itself the Torah, learning and expounding on it. When Am Yisrael were offered the Torah, they responded by accepting it blindly, without first examining its content, and proclaimed, "We will do and we will listen." They preceded the pledge to perform the mitzvot before even hearing what they entailed. Similarly, a person is made to swear to be a tzaddik even before he is born and will face the challenges of life. This too is considered as if he precedes the pledge "to do" before he actually hears what is involved.

The *neshamah* descends to the world against its will (*Avot* 4:22), since it experiences no greater joy other than basking in the brilliance of the *Shechinah* Above. Why is it willing to depart from the safe haven where it dwells and descend to a world full of challenges and dangers that seek to destroy it? Hashem sends the *neshamah* on its mission against its will in order to increase its portion in the World to Come. It does this through learning Torah and establishing safeguards for mitzvah observance while in this world. In this way it will return to the World to Come decorated

with vast "spoils," making it worthy of an honorable place next to the Heavenly Throne.

When the *neshamah* of a person returns to its Source, it gains an immeasurable portion in Heaven if it behaved wisely by observing Torah and mitzvot while in this world. Upon the *neshamah's* return to its Source, if it is adorned with considerable accomplishments in Torah, it ultimately basks in the glory of the *Shechinah*, according to the level that it achieved while in this world.

Thus, when a person is faced with suffering and pain in this world, he should realize that it is all for his benefit. If he succeeds in withstanding the challenges bravely and cleaves to Hashem, he will ultimately inherit a choice portion in the World to Come. Even in moments when it seems to him that he is no longer able to bear the suffering and pain, he should be aware that Hashem is with him in every situation. After all, prior to his birth, when he was still in Heaven, he was made to swear that he would remain a tzaddik. If Hashem chose to bring upon him these challenges, it indicates that he possesses the means to successfully overcome the difficulties. This is because Hashem does not place a person in a situation that he cannot withstand.

Chazal (*Kiddushin* 82a) say that whoever increases his study of Torah and performance of mitzvot will be granted more strength from Heaven to enable him to learn more Torah. This indicates that learning Torah is the essence of one's Avodat Hashem in this world. He must always progress and advance in his accomplishments in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. In this way he will fulfill the statement (*Pesachim* 50a), "Fortunate is he who returns here [to the World to Come] with his Torah in his hand."

The Rambam rules (*Talmud Torah* 1:7) that it is forbidden to accept a salary for learning Torah. I was asked how this concurs with the partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun. This is an agreement establishing that Yissachar will study Torah while Zevulun will support him financially, and they both share the reward for Yissachar's learning

(*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:16). I explained that Yissachar's involvement in Torah is considered his occupation and specialty. This implies that all his life he diligently engages in the study of Torah, not as a perfunctory duty, seeking to be rid of it as soon as possible, but as his life goal.

Since Yissachar is engaged in Torah as his sole occupation and life's goal, he needs someone to support him financially. If he does not have someone to care for his physical needs, his study of Torah will be disturbed, as it says (*Avot* 3:17), "If there is no flour, there is no Torah." Thus, the ruling of the Rambam prohibiting one from charging money for learning Torah does not apply to those who consider Torah their sole occupation and are constantly involved in its study. It applies only to those people who seek to make a profit from the study of Torah "as a spade with which to dig" (*Avot* 4:5). Such people may not receive a salary for studying Torah, since it is not considered study for the sake of Heaven.

It is only when a person studies Torah with dedication, seeking to increase his time spent learning in kollel or yeshiva, that he is allowed to receive compensation, because his dedication proves that Torah is truly his occupation, and his sole aspiration in life.

It is the extra time that a person devotes to studying Torah, aside from his set schedule of a kollel or yeshiva, which determines if Torah is truly his occupation and sole aspiration in life. Only dedicated scholars may accept payment for their studies.

This is similar to the elevated status of the Kohen Gadol. An ordinary Kohen is allowed to become *tamei* regarding the burial of his seven closest relatives: his wife, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister (*Vayikra* 21:3), even if she is already engaged (*Yevamot* 60a). On the other hand, the Kohen Gadol is prohibited from becoming *tamei* even for his closest relatives (*Vayikra* 21:11) unless it is for a *met mitzvah*. For example, Aharon Hakohen was prohibited from participating in the burial of his two sons because of the prohibition to become *tamei* even for one's closest relatives.

Thus, we see that the Kohen Gadol has an additional *kedushah* compared to the other Kohanim. The Torah is so stringent about his *kedushah* that it prohibits him from becoming *tamei* even for those closest to him. This implies that one must always strive to achieve a higher level of *kedushah*, resembling a Kohen Gadol, who is more elevated than others. This can be accomplished by strengthening one's Torah studies and performance of mitzvot. In this way he will merit expanding and improving his portion in the World to Come.

An additional explanation for the repetition of the word "say" in the pasuk, based on Rashi's interpretation (*Vayikra* 21:1) "To enjoin adults with regard to minors" teaches the following lesson. It alludes to the obligation that greater people (adults) should increase their study of Torah more than ordinary people (minors). One should not be satisfied with superficial mitzvah observance. One who does not strive for greater levels in his Avodat Hashem will be held accountable for idly wasting his time. This is because it is for this reason alone that his *neshamah* descended to the world. His *neshamah* could have remained in the World of Truth, where it dwelled originally. Its entire purpose in descending to the world below was in order to grow in Torah and *yirat Shamayim* so that it could merit a greater portion in the World to Come.

In Summary

- The repetition of the words "say" and "you shall say" teach us that the Kohanim and the entire nation should guard themselves greatly from *tumah*, especially from the defilement of the *Yetzer Hara*. Furthermore, it is not enough for a person to learn a subject only once, but he should review it repeatedly. In this way, he will be protected from the *tumah* of the *Yetzer Hara*. The words of Rashi, "To enjoin adults with regard to minors" imply that one must aspire to become a great Torah scholar and not learn in a superficial manner.
- It says "All Israel has a share in the World to Come" (**כל ישראל יש להם**), whereby the last letters of each word spell **שללם** (booty). This implies that whoever adds safeguards in his Avodat Hashem inherits "spoils" of

mitzvot, enhancing his portion in the World to Come. A person should be careful to collect "spoils" (שלל) of mitzvot and not *chalilah* fall captive (שלל) in the hands of the *Yetzer Hara*.

- Prior to a person's descent to the world below he is made to swear that he will be a tzaddik. Since he began his life with a vow to remain righteous, he is worthy of a portion in the World to Come. He would be wise to go in the ways of the righteous in order to ultimately inherit a portion in the World to Come.

- Making a person take an oath prior to his birth to be a tzaddik is compared to Am Yisrael's declaration of "We shall do and we shall listen," preceding the vow to do before even hearing what it is all about. The *neshamah* descends to the world below against its will. However, if it utilizes its opportunity wisely, learning Torah and observing mitzvot, and even adding safeguards to its Avodat Hashem, it will be rewarded accordingly.

- The suffering and challenges that come upon a person are catalysts for improvement, helping one ultimately increase their rewards in the World to Come. Therefore, a person should strive to grow and become elevated specifically through his challenges. He should not become discouraged by the intensity of his difficulties, because if he was given painful challenges, it indicates that he has the ability to overcome them.

- The Rambam rules that it is forbidden for a person to receive a salary for learning Torah. How does this concur with the acceptable partnership of Yissachar and Zevulun? A person whose sole occupation is learning Torah, increasing his Torah studies constantly, falls into the category of those whose Torah is their sole occupation. He is allowed to receive a salary for learning Torah because if he would not receive compensation, he would not be able to continue. On the contrary, one whose Torah studies are not his sole occupation may not receive a salary for learning because one is not allowed to utilize the Torah "as a spade to dig with" (for one's own purposes).

♦ The Kohen Gadol has an additional *kedushah*, and is therefore prohibited from becoming *tamei* even for the sake of burying his closest relatives. It should be every person's aspiration to resemble the Kohen Gadol by increasing his study of Torah and adding safeguards to improve his observance of mitzvot.

Enjoining the Elders in Regard to the Minors

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

Many commentaries (*Kli Yakar*, *Ohr Hachaim*) question why the Torah repeats the words "say" and "you shall say," when the implications of this command already seem clear. Why did the Torah deviate from its custom of minimizing its words and repeat itself?

Rashi explains (ibid.) that there is no repetition in the pasuk because the purpose of the double language is "to enjoin the elders in regard to the minors." One command was directed at the elders and the other was for the younger members of the nation.

Besides for addressing the different age groups, both the "elders" and the "minors," Rashi's words may also be referring to great mitzvot as opposed to ordinary ones. Moshe Rabbeinu warned Bnei Yisrael that they should be meticulous in both the mitzvot that have paramount importance and the ordinary ones, which people tend to neglect.

This is the connection between parashat *Kedoshim* and the subsequent parashah, *Emor*. In parashat *Kedoshim*, Hashem tells Bnei Yisrael (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I." This is a difficult order to fulfill and requires clarification. Is it truly possible to resemble Hashem in His *kedushah*? After all, Hashem "has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal." Hashem is entirely spiritual. How is it possible to demand of Am Yisrael to compare to Hashem in His *kedushah* when they have a body as well as a soul? On the contrary, the closer a person draws to Hashem, the more he realizes how distant he is from Him and how much further he needs to advance in order to ultimately cleave to Him.

The answer to this question is found in the explanation for the double language in the pasuk. As we explained, this can also imply that just as one is careful to perform the important mitzvot, so too, he should be meticulous in fulfilling the ordinary mitzvot, which people generally neglect. When one strictly observes the ordinary mitzvot, it will ultimately lead him to adhere to the more important mitzvot. Each person should strive to draw closer to Hashem all his life. One cannot reach Hashem's level of *kedushah* because of His awesome glory, nevertheless, he should serve Hashem and advance step-by-step on the path leading to his goal.

How can one follow the path leading to the Gates of Heaven and become sanctified? This can be accomplished by implementing the lesson alluded to in the repetition of the words "say" and "you shall say." One should be meticulous in performing mitzvot that seem ordinary, which are actually the foundation for mitzvah observance. Consequently, this will serve as a springboard, ultimately bringing one to adhere to the more critical and sublime mitzvot. When a person trains himself to be cautious in minor matters, he will ultimately be careful in more major issues. However, when one is not scrupulous in fulfilling the simple mitzvot, he will quickly go from bad to worse, and end up transgressing grave sins.

This indicates the connection between parashat *Kedoshim* and parashat *Emor*. By being meticulous in both minor matters and more critical mitzvot, as is alluded to by the double language of "say" and "you shall say," one will ultimately achieve *kedushah* in his Avodat Hashem, and

follow in Hashem's conduct, as it says, "Just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful" (*Shabbat* 133b).

From the moment a person is born, his allotted time in this world begins to diminish. He must complete his mission for which he was created in the span of time given to him to live. His task is to reveal Hashem's existence in the world, learn Torah, fulfill mitzvot, and cleave to Hashem's attributes. However, it is impossible for a person to achieve the level of Hashem's *kedushah*, since His *kedushah* has no limits, whereas man, who is a mortal, physical being, is swayed by temptation and passion. Under human conditions, it is not possible to attain the pristine, lofty level of Hashem.

How then can we fulfill the command "You shall be holy, for holy am I?" It can only be fulfilled by cleaving to Hashem's Torah and mitzvot, which serve as a ladder, raising one to the heights of *kedushah* and *taharah*. Even though a person cannot possibly become entirely sanctified and reach Hashem's lofty level, he is ultimately judged by his success in overcoming adversity in order to serve Hashem. His success is determined by his advancement and progress in reaching for higher levels in *kedushah*. This can be illustrated with the example of a race to reach a finishing goal high up on the summit of a huge mountain, which no human being could possibly reach. The participants of the race are judged by their ability to reach the highest point possible. Even though they are not capable of reaching the summit, their success is determined by their progress in getting closer to the peak. The higher they ascend, the greater are their chances of winning the race.

Similarly, during our lifetime we cannot achieve the goal of attaining the level of Hashem's *kedushah*. Nonetheless, we are obligated to progress in Avodat Hashem as much as possible, thereby narrowing the gap between our *kedushah* and that of Hashem. While a person is alive, he can never close the gap completely, because Hashem determined (*Shemot* 33:20) "For no human can see Me and live." This implies that because of Hashem's overwhelming *kedushah*, it is impossible for a person to gaze directly at His *kedushah* and remain alive. This is because Hashem's

kedushah is infinite. Because of man's limitations as a mortal being, he is unable to behold such intensity. This can be compared to the human eye, which cannot directly behold the sun because of its glaring brightness.

Regarding this, Iyov states (*Iyov* 19:26), "I see G-d from my flesh." Iyov was conveying the message that in order to recognize Hashem's existence, one does not need to see Him face to face. It is sufficient to simply observe man's wondrous body, created with infinite wisdom. Through this alone one can acquire *emunah*. Similarly, Yeshayahu Hanavi says (40:26), "Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these [things]!" This indicates that it is sufficient for one to simply gaze upward in order to perceive the vast greatness and *kedushah* of Hashem, Who created His world with infinite wisdom.

This point can be further illustrated in the following way. A soldier seeking to cross a border will first survey the territory ahead with high-powered binoculars. He clearly understands that his life is at stake if he does not first scout the territory. Although he has not physically crossed the border, by gazing through the binoculars, he already observes the conditions awaiting him on the other side. *L'havdil*, a human being cannot cross the boundaries designated for him, because Hashem determined "For no human can see Me and live." Nevertheless, Hashem granted us means to assist us in observing that which is beyond human vision. This is made possible by arming oneself with Torah, which draws a person closer to the goal for which he was created and elevates him. His attachment to Hashem is ultimately strengthened by following the conduct of Hashem, as it says, "Just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful."

The Satan plants mines in the battlefield in order to prevent the soldier fighting Hashem's battles from achieving his goal. However, when one is armed with the Torah, he can reveal the dangers in time. Through self-improvement and Divine assistance, a person can succeed in removing the obstacles from his path in order to be able to continue advancing further in the ways of Hashem.

The importance of being scrupulous with ordinary mitzvot can be further explained by taking an example from a bottle of expensive wine. When a small amount of wine is missing from the bottle, it causes the bottle to be incomplete. Only if the small amount is replenished, will the bottle be perfected. It is enough for just a small amount of wine to be lacking for the bottle to lose its value. Sometimes it is precisely the small details that create perfection. When they are lacking, the product will be incomplete. This is the implication of the double language (*Vayikra* 21:1) "say" and "you shall say," enjoining the elders regarding the minors. Just as we are generally meticulous in performing the important mitzvot, likewise we should be scrupulous in every minute detail of each mitzvah. It is the small details of the mitzvah which determine its perfection and completion. By being cautious about the seemingly trivial details, we will advance significantly in emulating the *kedushah* of Hashem.

Educating children to be meticulous in performing the minute elements of mitzvot begins already from an early age, when their hearts are open to accepting their parents' words. The younger the children, they more they acknowledge their parents' authority. However, if parents pass up this opportune period of youth, when children absorb their lessons like dry ground thirsting for water after a drought, they may forfeit their ability to instill their values in them, as it says (*Kohelet* 1:15), "A twisted thing cannot be made straight."

The juxtaposition of parashat *Emor* to *Kedoshim* teaches us that by repeating and reviewing Torah constantly, paying careful attention to every minute detail, one will ultimately perform important mitzvot perfectly. A parent should train his children to be scrupulous in performing ordinary mitzvot in the same way as the important ones while they are still young and willing to listen to the voice of Hashem's Torah.

In Summary

- The Torah repeats the words "say" and "you shall say" in the pasuk. Rashi explains that this is in order to "enjoin the elders regarding the minors." Moshe Rabbeinu instructed the people to be scrupulous in observing the

ordinary mitzvot just like the important mitzvot. This may be what Rashi was alluding to in his words "To enjoin the elders (lit. big ones) in regard to the minors (lit. small ones)."

- How can Hashem's command to Am Yisrael "You shall be holy, for holy am I" be achieved? Is it possible to resemble Hashem in His *kedushah*? Hashem is entirely spiritual. This is the connection between parshiyot *Kedoshim* and *Emor*. When a person is meticulous in performing ordinary mitzvot, he will ultimately be scrupulous in important matters. In this way, he will achieve elevation and sanctification in his level of *kedushah*.
- The way to become sanctified in Avodat Hashem is by cleaving to the attributes of Hashem, as it says, "Just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful, etc." Even though it is impossible to reach the exalted level of Hashem, nevertheless a person is rewarded for his progress in elevating his level of *kedushah*, while avoiding material pursuits.
- Sometimes, it is precisely the minute details that distinguish a product as complete and perfect. Therefore, one should be meticulous in fulfilling ordinary ("small") mitzvot, and thereby achieve perfection in Avodat Hashem. Furthermore, parents should be particular in educating their children while they are young, because their hearts are still open to accepting genuine guidance.

Serving as a Role Model

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

Rashi explains that the repetition of the words "say" and "you shall say" imply that the elders must enjoin the minors and educate them. The most effective method of education is when the elders conduct themselves in

an exemplary manner and are careful not to display negative behavior. This is because generally minors emulate their elders. If children see their elders observing Torah and mitzvot, they will also behave in this way. However, if children see the elders behaving improperly by transgressing, they will ultimately disregard the fulfillment of mitzvot as well.

Once, a young girl from France approached me for advice. She had spent a considerable amount of time in Eretz Yisrael with relatives, and had greatly strengthened her commitment to Torah and Avodat Hashem. She asked me if she should return to France to be with her family for the upcoming *chagim*. Since I understood the girl's nature and was familiar with her family, I realized that if she would return home, she would be exposed to a way of life contrary to Torah and lose all that she had gained spiritually in Eretz Yisrael. This is because the negative influences that she would be exposed to in her house and environment would impede her progress in Avodat Hashem and even cause her to deteriorate.

I advised her not to return home, but to remain with her relatives living in Yerushalayim. The girl accepted my advice and stayed in Eretz Yisrael for the *chagim*. However, her family unfortunately decided to come and spend the *chagim* in Eretz Yisrael. Instead of staying in Yerushalayim, they went to Hertzliya, a place almost completely devoid of Torah and religious observance. To my great sorrow, the girl joined her family and lost all that she had previously gained.

This illustrates how important it is to serve as a positive role model for one's family, and not be, *chas v'shalom*, a harmful influence. Ultimately, family and environment are a great influence on children's behavior.

The Torah commands the Kohen Gadol to always be in the Beit Hamikdash, not leaving its confines throughout his tenure. He must continue serving Hashem in all situations, even when one of his closest family members dies, such as his wife or parent. He is not allowed to leave to mourn their deaths (*Vayikra* 21:10-12), but must remain joyful as if nothing occurred. This is because it is not possible to serve Hashem properly in a sorrowful state.

How can a Kohen Gadol not feel despondent over the death of his father, mother, or other close relative? Everyone knows how difficult it is to lose a close member of one's family. It is overwhelmingly painful. How could a Kohen Gadol not mourn and participate in their burial, in order not to become *tamei*? How is it possible to fulfill this mandate?

After Am Yisrael received the Torah at Har Sinai, they were on a very high level, serving Hashem with all their heart. They possessed no personal will or desire other than to serve Hashem completely. This is because they succeeded in channeling all their emotions and passions to serving Hashem. However, when Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, they created a great schism, and their hearts were not in unity with Hashem as they had been before the sin. There was a tremendous deterioration in their Avodat Hashem. In order to remedy the situation, Hashem initiated the Avodah in the Mishkan, where His *Shechinah* would dwell. The Mishkan required a Kohen Gadol, who would serve as a role model for the nation. They would learn from him how they could have conducted themselves had they not sinned with the Golden Calf. This would cause them to recall the lofty level that they could have attained in their Avodat Hashem had they behaved properly. The Kohen Gadol was entirely dedicated to the Avodah, channeling his whole heart to His service of Hashem. Even when his father or mother passed away, he would continue serving Hashem with joy, and not mourn their deaths. Consequently, Hashem would assist and support him, giving him the emotional strength to overcome his difficulties to continue doing the Avodah with joy in the Beit Hamikdash.

Thus, the Kohen Gadol served as an example for the entire nation, who would observe his behavior and become strengthened in their Avodat Hashem. Ultimately, the personal example that a person demonstrates through his deeds, whether they are good or band, influence those around him, especially young children. If a person behaves properly, then his children, who observe him, will behave properly as well. If he does not behave properly, his children will follow his example and eventually leave the path of Torah.

Just as the Kohen served as a role model for all of Am Yisrael, teaching them how to serve Hashem, so too, we have the obligation to serve as role models for our community, by demonstrating dedication for the service of Hashem. When others observe us behaving correctly, they will learn from our example, and ultimately Hashem's Name will become sanctified in the world. Regarding this it says (*Devarim* 28:10), "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you." This indicates that when the nations see how Am Yisrael remain distinct from them through great self-sacrifice, shunning their deplorable deeds and hedonistic lifestyle, they will ultimately regard them with awe and not harm them.

In Summary

- Rashi explains that the repetition of the words "say" and "you shall say" imply that the elders must enjoin the minors and educate them. This is because children naturally learn from the deeds of the elders. Therefore, they are enjoined to educate the minors by serving as positive role models.
- The Torah forbids the Kohen Gadol from becoming *tamei* and mourning his closest relatives. Even when his father or mother passed away, he had to continue serving in the Beit Hamikdash and not mourn. We may wonder how the Torah prohibited the Kohen Gadol from mourning his parents' death. How could he avoid being sorrowful?
- The entire purpose of the Mishkan was in order that Hashem should be able to rest His *Shechinah* in this world. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem removed His *Shechinah* from among Bnei Yisrael, and therefore, the Mishkan was necessary in order to make it possible for the *Shechinah* to dwell among them once more. Through Bnei Yisrael's service of Hashem, He would reside in every member of Bnei Yisrael. The purpose of the Mishkan was to serve as an example of how each person should become a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*, enabling the *Shechinah* to dwell in his heart. The Kohen Gadol served as a role model for Am Yisrael, demonstrating how to serve Hashem with all one's heart, as they had done prior to the sin of the Golden Calf. Even after one of his close

relatives died, the Kohen Gadol did not become sorrowful, but continued to serve Hashem joyfully in the Beit Hamikdash.

- The most effective way of educating others is by serving as a positive role model. Children learn from such conduct and behave accordingly.

The Living Soul of Nature

"The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren, upon whose head the anointment oil has been poured or who has been inaugurated to don the vestments, shall not allow the hair on his head to grow long and shall not rend his garments"

(*Vayikra* 21:10)

Chazal praised Kimchit for her *tzeniut*, specifying that the beams of her house did not behold the hairs of her head. Therefore, she merited a great reward from Heaven that her seven sons each served as a Kohen Gadol (*Yoma* 47a). According to halachah, a woman is not prohibited from exposing her hair while alone in a room, especially when she is showering, etc. (see *Badei Shulchan*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Even Ha'ezer* 115:9). However Kimchit, who was outstandingly righteous, sanctified herself even in that which was permitted to her. Therefore, she merited an outstanding reward of being granted seven righteous, G-d-fearing sons, who were each chosen to serve as Kohen Gadol.

The Gemara relates the story (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) of Elazar ben Durdaya, who actively sought relations with every prostitute in the world. Elazar eagerly sought to transgress willfully. When he heard that there was a beautiful woman who lived in a distant land, he crossed seven oceans in order to sin with her. When he approached the prostitute, she emitted an offensive odor. She told him that just as it was impossible to take back the odor, so too, his teshuvah would not be accepted.

Elazar left the woman's house and began to cry bitterly. He begged the mountains to pray for him. But the mountains told him that they first were obligated to pray for themselves and could not devote themselves to him. Elazar turned to the moon, the sky, the sun, and the stars and begged them to pray for him that Hashem should accept his teshuvah. However, they did not come to his aid. Elazar realized that no outside source would help him. He reflected upon his dismal situation and concluded that his teshuvah was dependent only upon his sincere remorse. He cried out to Hashem with a heartrending prayer, begging for forgiveness until his soul departed. A Heavenly Voice declared, "Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is summoned to everlasting life in the World to Come." When Rebbi heard this story, he proclaimed in awe, "There are those who acquire their portion in the World to Come in a moment!"

Upon hearing this account, we may wonder why Elazar turned to the mountains, and heavens and earth to pray for him; they are inanimate creations and lack human intelligence. Why did he assume that they could each pray for him and be his advocate?

This is similar to the description of the dialogue between the mountains preceding *Matan Torah*. When Hashem proceeded to bestow the Torah to Am Yisrael, all the mountains begged that the Torah should be given on them (*Bereishit Rabbah* 99a). Chazal (ibid.; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shoftim* 47) say that the mountains desired that the Torah should be given on them, to the extent that they crossed oceans and rivers in order to reach the desert where the Torah would be given. This is difficult to understand. How did the inanimate mountains dislodge themselves from their location and move to the desert? Is it possible for mountains to suddenly think intelligently and behave as human beings? Moreover, why did the mountains want the Torah to be given on them?

We say in the song of Hallel (*Tehillim* 114:1-4), "When Israel went out of Egypt, Jacob's household from a people of alien tongue, Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominions. The sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned backward. The mountains skipped like rams; the hills like young lambs." These *pesukim* imply that the mountains actually dislodged

themselves from their locations and began to skip like rams in order that the Torah should be given on them. We need to clarify how the mountains acquired human qualities and became mobile, skipping along so that Hashem should reveal His glory on them.

The Zohar reveals (II, 161a) that Hashem "looked in the Torah and created the world." The entire Creation was created according to the blueprint of the Torah. If not for the Torah, the world would not exist. Thus, all creations, including the living animals, the vegetation, and the inanimate elements, clearly realize that their existence is dependent upon the Torah.

Even though the mountains are seemingly inanimate, a force of life surges within them and they clearly recognize that they were created by the utterance of Hashem. Thus, before *Matan Torah*, they had an overwhelming desire to go to the desert to have the Torah given on them. This served as a lesson for Bnei Yisrael, indicating that if inanimate creations so eagerly await the revelation of the Torah, how much more so should they, since they are the people chosen to receive the Torah.

When Elazar ben Durdaya turned to the mountains so that they should pray for him, he did not do so from despair. Elazar realized that even the inanimate creations possess a living spirit which enables them to recognize their Creator. Furthermore, Elazar turned to the mountains first, because he knew that they moved from their locations when Hashem gave the Torah to Am Yisrael, in order that the Torah should be given on them. He turned to them with a plea: "You revealed your animate qualities when begging that the Torah be given on you; therefore employ those animate qualities now and beg mercy for me."

Elazar did not immediately pray for himself that Hashem should forgive him, but chose to first turn to the mountains and the heavens and earth. This is because he assumed that his sins were so overwhelming that he was not worthy to stand in prayer before Hashem. However, upon seeing that the entire Creation would not beg mercy for him, he understood that doing teshuvah was up to him alone. Consequently, he turned to Hashem

with a heartrending cry, begging to be forgiven for his iniquities.

In light of this, we may assume that Kimchit covered her hair so that it would not be exposed to the beams of her house, since she sensed that the walls of her house possessed a living spirit despite being inanimate. Therefore, she behaved with modesty before them and was careful not to let them behold her hair that was meant to be covered.

Likewise, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, zy"a, was asked in what merit the mother of the Gaon of Vilna gave birth to such a tremendous tzaddik. Rabbi Chaim answered that the mother of the Gaon conducted herself as Kimchit did and was extremely cautious not to expose the hairs of her head even in the confines of her home, so that the walls should not behold her hair. Therefore, Hashem also repaid her as He did Kimchit, by granting her a son who was an outstanding *gaon*, enlightening Bnei Yisrael with his Torah.

Thus, we learn that one should respect all of Hashem's creations. Although they may seem inanimate and lacking spirit, this is not the case. They recognize Hashem, Who created the world, and they realize that the Torah is its foundation. This is an important lesson for Am Yisrael to internalize. Just as the entire Creation recognizes Hashem's supreme Kingship and realizes that the world depends upon the Torah for its existence, how much more so do His people need to internalize this truth.

Hashem demonstrated to Bnei Yisrael on several occasions that nature possesses a living spirit, which is capable of understanding and experiencing emotions. An example is Bilaam's donkey, which opened its mouth and chastised Bilaam. Also, at the Splitting of the Sea, it says that the sea "saw and fled" because of Yosef's coffin (*Tanchuma*, *Naso* 30) and then returned and washed the Egyptians away. We also find that the earth "opened its mouth" and swallowed Korach and his assembly.

Since Kimchit recognized nature's essence, that each creation possesses a living spirit, she exercised added caution in behaving modestly before the walls of her house. This teaches us that she did not view the beams of her house as completely inanimate. She realized that

every creation in Hashem's world possesses a living spirit and is capable of experiencing emotions. Therefore, she guarded her modesty at all times and in all situations.

Because of her modesty, Kimchit merited giving birth to seven righteous sons who all served as Kohen Gadol, fulfilling the pasuk (*Vayikra* 21:10), "The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren." This is measure for measure, since just as Kimchit conducted herself with outstanding modesty, so too, Hashem granted her outstanding sons, each one consecutively serving as Kohen Gadol, who is exalted above his brethren.

Not every Kohen is worthy of becoming a Kohen Gadol. In order to merit such status, one must be absolutely righteous, humble, handsome, wealthy, and a prophet. It is reserved for one who achieves total perfection, so that the *Yetzer Hara* should not be able to influence him. The fact that the Kohen Gadol entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* on Yom Kippur and merited exiting alive, testified to his absolute righteousness. Since Kimchit merited seven sons who each became Kohen Gadol, it proves that she was blessed with seven outstandingly righteous sons. This was all in the merit of her extraordinary modesty.

In Summary

- The Gemara relates the story (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) of Elazar ben Durdaya, who actively sought relations with every prostitute in the world. Once, upon approaching a prostitute, she let off an offensive odor. She told him that just as it was impossible to take back the odor, so too, his teshuvah would not be accepted. He immediately turned to all the creations so that they should pray for him, but was rebuffed. In the end, he sat and cried bitterly with remorse until he died. A Heavenly Voice proclaimed that he was summoned to everlasting life in the World to Come.
- We must clarify why he turned to the mountains and the heavens and earth. How could inanimate creations assist him?
- Chazal say that all the mountains wanted Hashem to give the Torah on

them. They crossed rivers and oceans in order to reach the desert. This is mystifying, since they were inanimate.

- It seems that even inanimate creations possess a living spirit and are capable of acting upon their will. Similarly, we find regarding Korach and his assembly that the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them. Another example is the Yam Suf, which fled at the sight of Yosef's coffin. Thus, Elazar ben Durdaya turned to all of the creations to beg mercy for him.
- This explains the conduct of Kimchit, who was careful that even the beams of her home should not behold her hair, and merited giving birth to seven righteous sons, who each served as Kohen Gadol. She understood that even inanimate objects possess a living spirit. Therefore, she made sure to behave modestly in every place.

The Link between Shabbat and the Festivals

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals which you shall designate as callings of holiness – these are My appointed festivals. For a six-day period labor may be done and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a calling of holiness, you shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your settled places"

(*Vayikra* 23:1-3)

Parashat Emor enumerates the festivals. Since they are termed "callings of holiness," Am Yisrael are enjoined to observe them meticulously. The

festivals include the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as well as the three Pilgrimage Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

Following the list of all the festivals, the Torah mentions Bnei Yisrael's obligation to observe Shabbat. Thereafter, all the festivals are described in detail. The Ohr Hachaim asks why the Torah links the subject of Shabbat to the festivals. If the Torah began enumerating the festivals, why did it not continue with their details but instead divert to a different subject, discussing Shabbat? One can see an in depth explanation for this in the Ohr Hachaim.

Shabbat is a day meant for self-examination and introspection (*Kuzari*, *Ma'amar Shelishi* 5). The seventh day of the week alludes to the seventy years that man is granted to live in this world. Since a person's days are numbered, he is obligated to halt from his daily routine once a week in order to make a reckoning of his actions during the preceding week. In this way he is able to correct his misdeeds before he dies.

However, man's nature is to become accustomed to his habitual routine. Since Shabbat recurs on the seventh day each week, a person becomes used to it. Consequently, Shabbat does not serve to arouse him to teshuvah. There are only a few elect people who consistently examine their deeds each week on Shabbat, despite the fact that it comes every week. Because people tend to observe Shabbat by habit, Hashem initiated the festivals, whose purpose is to halt the routine, arousing a person to consider his ways.

Rosh Hashanah is a holiday spanning two days, corresponding to the two *luchot*, representing the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The object of these days is to become aroused to doing teshuvah by strengthening one's commitment to learning Torah. This is hinted at by the name **ראש** השנה (Rosh Hashanah), which indicates a beginning, since Torah is also referred to as "beginning," as it says (*Bereishit* 1:1) "**בראשית** – In the beginning," which Rashi explains refers to the Torah, which is called "the beginning of His way."

Yom Kippur occurs soon after Rosh Hashanah. The Torah describes the day with the statement (*Vayikra* 16:30), "For on this day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you." We receive atonement for all our sins, especially for *bitul* Torah. The moment a person accepts upon himself on Rosh Hashanah to strengthen his Torah study, he becomes worthy of Hashem's pardon on Yom Kippur for his previous lack in Torah study.

Sukkot reminds a person that he lives only temporarily in this world. Even his house, serving as his shelter, is not his forever. After 120 years, he will eventually pass from this world and leave all his belongings behind.

The three Pilgrimage Festivals allude to the number seven, since Pesach and Sukkot both last seven days. Shavuot occurs at the culmination of seven weeks. They also hint to a person's transience, reminding him that he only lives for seventy years in this world. Thus, the essence of the festivals is to arouse the people to do teshuvah and remind them of their purpose in this world. The Torah intentionally links the mitzvah of observing Shabbat with the festivals in order to remind a person that ideally he should examine his deeds each week on Shabbat. However, because of its frequent recurrence, causing people to observe Shabbat by rote, Hashem instituted the festivals so that people would at least become aroused on them to examine their ways.

In Summary

- The Torah states the command to observe the festivals, and immediately mentions Shabbat. The Ohr Hachaim asks why Shabbat is linked to the festivals.
- Shabbat was given to man so that he should examine his deeds on it. However, since it is the nature of man to become accustomed to things that recur frequently, and only a few elite people are capable of examining their deeds every week on Shabbat, the festivals were established. In this way, a person will stop to examine his deeds at least on every holiday.
- The festivals are symbolic. They remind a person of his mortality, since the three Pilgrimage Festivals revolve around the number seven. This

alludes to the seventy years of a person's life in this world. Likewise, Shabbat occurs on the seventh day of the week.

- The subject of Shabbat was linked to the description of the festivals in order to teach us that ideally, a person should examine his deeds each week on Shabbat. However, since the nature of a person is to become affected by the force of habit, Hashem established the festivals. In this way, people will at least become aroused on the holidays to examine their ways.

Becoming Partners with Hashem

"For a six-day period labor may be done and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a calling of holiness, you shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your settled places"

(*Vayikra* 23:3)

Chazal (*Shabbat* 119b) say that whoever observes Shabbat and ceases performing prohibited work at sunset on the eve of Shabbat, is considered as if he became partners with Hashem in the Creation of the world. Just as Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, likewise those who observe Shabbat follow in His ways. They work six days to earn a living, and on the seventh day they rest from their work and sanctify the day entirely for Hashem.

Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt"l, raises a question in his sefer (*Chanukah* 56) about the following account in the sefer *Shevet Yehudah*. A gentile once entered the Beit Hamikdash. When he saw the logs of wood stored on the Mizbeach, he asked what their purpose was. The Jews answered him that

when a *korban* was sacrificed, the firewood was first placed on the Mizbeach, and then the offering was placed above it. Afterwards, Hashem sent a fire from Heaven, consuming the *korban* to testify that it had been favorably accepted. The gentile was confounded. If Hashem sent a fire from Heaven, then what was the purpose of placing firewood on the Mizbeach beneath the offering? Obviously, Hashem did not require firewood for burning the *korban*. Why was the fire from Heaven insufficient? The gentile concluded that the Torah is not true, *rachmana litzlan*, since he encountered a seeming contradiction in its ways.

Rav Pincus asks why the gentile was perplexed. The firewood was not a contradiction to the miraculous fire that descended from Heaven to consume the *korban*. The miracle remained a miracle. However, the purpose of placing the firewood on the Mizbeach gave Am Yisrael the opportunity to become partners with Hashem in His miracle. Rav Pincus explains that the gentile could not comprehend the concept of becoming a partner with Hashem; it was beyond his scope. Therefore, he concluded that the custom of placing firewood indicated a contradiction in the Torah, *rachmana litzlan*.

Hashem wants us to have a share in Creation so that we should take responsibility for the world in which we live. It obligates us to ensure the continued existence of the world through the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:19; *Shabbat* 10a). Clearly, when a person becomes a partner in a business venture, he is more dedicated in advancing its success. When Bnei Yisrael observe Shabbat, they become partners with Hashem in Creation. Consequently, they feel responsible for the maintenance of the world and seek to fortify its foundations.

There is a story of a man who lived in Haifa and earned his living by working in the port. One day, his boss notified him that he could no longer be absent on Shabbat, but would have to come to work. Devastated, the man turned to his Rabbi and asked him for advice. He explained that he had a large family to support and could not afford to lose his source of income. The Rabbi told him that aside from his family, there were millions of other people in the world whom Hashem supports.

Just as other people were sustained by Hashem's benevolence in various ways, likewise, when Hashem would observe his self-sacrifice in observing Shabbat, He would provide his sustenance in a different way.

The man approached his boss and told him that he was not going to wait until he got fired, but was quitting his job immediately. He repeated the words of his Rabbi, that Hashem has many ways in which to provide sustenance for him and his family. When the boss heard his worker's confident tone, he immediately responded by saying, "Since you have such burning *emunah* in Hashem, I will not stand against your faith. Therefore, you are permitted to continue working here only six days a week." It is important to note that the more a person learns Hashem's Torah, the more he shares in the partnership with Hashem. This is because the Torah, Hashem, and Am Yisrael are one (*Zohar* II, 90b; III, 4b). Through the Torah, we connect to Hashem, making us partners in Creation.

Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to place firewood on the Mizbeach despite the Heavenly fire that descended, because the wood of a tree alludes to the Torah, which is described as (*Mishlei* 3:18) "a tree of life to those who grasp it." By placing the firewood on the Mizbeach, Bnei Yisrael recalled that whereas the *korban* alludes to the connection between man and his Creator, the Torah and mitzvot, hinted to by the firewood, are what actually join man with Hashem, making them partners in Creation.

In Summary

- Chazal say that whoever observes Shabbat becomes partners with Hashem in Creation.
- There is a story told about a gentile who did not understand why it was necessary to place firewood on the Mizbeach, since a Heavenly fire descended from Heaven to consume the *korban*. He concluded that this seeming contradiction rendered the Torah invalid, *rachmana litzlan*. Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt"l, explains that the firewood on the Mizbeach did not

pose a contradiction, because it did not detract from the miracle. Its purpose was to make Am Yisrael partners in the miracle. The gentile could not comprehend the concept of partnership with Hashem, since it was beyond his scope.

- Hashem want us to be partners with Him in the sacrificing of *korbanot*, since partnership causes a person to feel responsibility toward a venture's successful conclusion. Similarly, when Am Yisrael observe Shabbat, they become partners with Hashem in Creation and therefore feel responsible in maintaining the world through the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot.
- Furthermore, Am Yisrael were required to place firewood on the Mizbeach, because a tree alludes to the Torah, described as "a tree of life." This reminded Bnei Yisrael that whereas *korbanot* allude to the connection between man and his Creator, the Torah and mitzvot, hinted to by the firewood, are what actually join man with Hashem, making them partners in Creation.

The Festival of Matzot to Hashem

"And on the fifteenth day of this month is the Festival of Matzot to Hashem; you shall eat matzot for a seven-day period"

(*Vayikra* 23:6)

The Torah refers to the *chag* of Pesach as a festival "to Hashem." This teaches us that the manner in which we celebrate Pesach, the time of our liberation from Egypt, is determined entirely by Hashem. Had He not redeemed us from Egypt "with a strong hand and outstretched arm," we

would not be able to enjoy sitting in our homes today with our families, expounding on the miracles of the Exodus.

There is an essential difference between a celebration that a person arranges for his personal reasons, and the Festival of Matzot, which is a festival to Hashem. When a person celebrates with his family on any occasion, such as a birthday, wedding, etc., he is the one who decides how the celebration will be conducted, how many people he will invite, in which hall it will take place, and what sort of band he will hire to entertain the guests. However, on Pesach, Hashem determines how the celebration should be arranged. While people generally say that it is "the people who make the event," by defining its character, regarding Pesach, it is Hashem Who decides the atmosphere and instructs us how to express the joy of our redemption from slavery.

The chief principle regarding the festivals of Hashem is (*Devarim* 16:14-15) that "You shall rejoice on your festival… and you will only be joyous." This is essential because celebrating Hashem's salvation with joy arouses our *emunah*. Consequently, our profound *emunah* results in added joy. There are many wealthy people who are blessed with abundance, but despite their affluence they are unhappy. Why is this so? It seems as if they have every reason in the world to be joyous, since they possess money, status, and success. They should be the happiest people on earth. However, in truth this is not so. In fact, many times it is exactly the opposite, and seemingly successful people are severely depressed. Ultimately, because they lack *emunah*, they lack happiness as well. It is only *emunah* which fills a person with contentment and joy. Conversely, the more one experiences such happiness, the more his faith is strengthened.

On Pesach, we celebrate our development into a nation who believes in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem commands us to be joyous on this festival and sanctify it only for Hashem. Our heightened *emunah* in Hashem increases our level of joy. Consequently, our *emunah* is further strengthened.

When Hashem redeemed His people from the Egyptian oppressors, all the nations witnessed the events. They saw the Egyptians being smitten by the Ten Plagues, and thereafter the miraculous Splitting of the Sea. Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Chabakuk* 565) say that the sea split into twelve paths, whereby each tribe followed in the path designated for them. The sea stood as solid walls on either side of them (*Shemot* 14:22). When the nations beheld this, they trembled in fear, and terror gripped their hearts (ibid. 15:14-15). Hashem redeemed His people with "a strong hand and an outstretched arm… with signs and with wonders… and with greatly awesome deeds." In this way, the whole world became aware that Am Yisrael is the nation of Hashem.

When we celebrate the festival for Hashem's sake, with the pure intention of expressing gratitude for all the wondrous miracles that He performed for us, we experience great joy. By giving Hashem pleasure, we are immediately gratified and become filled with happiness. A short while ago, a man approached me and humbly requested, "I came to get a blessing from the Rav, despite the fact that, thank G-d, everything is going well with me." When I began to probe his situation, I quickly discovered that he was experiencing many hardships. Nonetheless, the man was content and happy, sincerely declaring that everything was well with him.

From my experience with people, I have learned to differentiate between a genuine smile and a phony smile, which disguises one's true emotions. It was amazing that despite this man's many difficulties in life, his smile was sincere, conveying deep contentment and joy. I realized that this man retained a happy disposition because of his profound *emunah* in Hashem. Such *emunah* generates fulfillment and happiness, to the extent that one does not experience the pain from hardships in life.

The first mitzvah that Hashem commanded His people was the mitzvah of *korban* Pesach (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shemot* 195). Bnei Yisrael were commanded to take a sheep, which was the idol of the Egyptians, and tie it to the foot of their beds for four days. Afterwards, they had to slaughter it, roast it, and eat it as a *korban*. Despite the great danger they faced from the Egyptians by slaughtering their idols in public (*Pesikta d'Rabbi*

Kahana 5:17 (55); *Shemot Rabbah* 16:3; *Tur*, *Orach Chaim* 430), Bnei Yisrael obeyed Hashem's command, executing His will with elation.

The immense joy that Am Yisrael demonstrated in fulfilling the first mitzvah of Pesach serves as an example of how all mitzvot should be fulfilled. Mitzvot should be performed with intense happiness, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), "Serve Hashem with gladness." One cannot fathom a greater joy than a slave awaiting his imminent liberation. Overwhelming ecstasy permeated Am Yisrael upon performing the mitzvah of *korban* Pesach, since it was symbolic of their pending redemption. Hashem obligates each person to relive the same excitement each year upon celebrating Pesach. Furthermore, this fervor should not be reserved for Pesach alone, but should manifest itself in the performance of every mitzvah. This is because with each additional mitzvah that a person fulfills, he is freed anew from his greatest oppressor, the *Yetzer Hara*. By overcoming challenges and serving Hashem, one becomes truly liberated.

Therefore, Chazal (*Pesachim* 116b) say that "every person is obligated to view himself as if he just left Egypt." According to what we discussed, we can explain this to mean that each person is obligated to relive the same excitement that Bnei Yisrael experienced when performing the original mitzvah of Pesach. Their ecstasy was boundless, and their spirits soared sky-high from sheer delight.

To illustrate the importance of celebrating Pesach in high spirits, we can give the following example. The roots of a tree are the source of its sustenance. The nutrients are absorbed by the roots and are circulated via the trunk to all its branches and leaves. Similarly, Pesach is compared to the roots of a tree, because it nurtures all other mitzvot. This is because by reinforcing one's *emunah* on Pesach, one is inspired to fulfill all other obligations of the Torah.

Just as when the roots of a tree are uprooted they are unable to nourish the rest of the tree, so too, when people do not celebrate Pesach as Hashem commanded, they sever their ties with Torah and mitzvot. This corresponds to the statement of the Arizal (see *Be'er Heitev*, *Orach Chaim*

447a) that "whoever observes Pesach properly and is careful not to consume any trace of chametz is assured that he will not sin the entire year." This is because through the *emunah* which he acquires on Pesach, he is inspired to fulfill all the mitzvot of Hashem.

The Zohar relates (II, *Raaya Meheimana* 40b) that Hashem orders the angels to descend and visit the homes of Bnei Yisrael on Pesach. Hashem wants them to observe how Am Yisrael are meticulous in enthusiastically fulfilling every detail when celebrating the festival of Pesach. The angels fulfill their mission and descend to observe Bnei Yisrael gathered around the Seder table. When they hear Bnei Yisrael reading the Haggadah joyfully, recounting all the miracles of the Exodus, they return to Hashem and testify that, indeed, His people are fulfilling His commandments with joy.

Why is it important for the angels to descend and witness this scene? Hashem does not need their confirmation, since He observes all that occurs from Above. Certainly, Hashem knows exactly how the Seder is performed by His people.

This can be compared to a king requesting a summary following a conference, despite his own presence at the meeting. By having the information printed clearly, the facts are reinforced. *L'havdil*, Hashem's purpose in sending the angels is so that their testimony should reinforce the evidence of His people fulfilling the mitzvot and celebrating with splendor and joy.

In addition, causing the angels to witness Am Yisrael's joy in fulfilling Hashem's will, serves to bar their accusations against Bnei Yisrael on other occasions for not listening to Hashem and abandoning the Torah. When Am Yisrael is prosecuted, the scene of their joyous celebration stands witness to their overall dedication to Hashem and tips the scale in their favor.

This emphasizes the importance of maintaining a joyous atmosphere in one's home. However, the happiness is often marred by family feuds, causing friction between husband and wife. Many feuds stem from an

argument whether they will spend the holiday by his parents or by hers. Sometimes the contention reaches the point where it threatens to destroy the joyous atmosphere of the festival. As we discussed, Pesach is "a festival to Hashem." Its foremost purpose is to honor Hashem in the greatest way possible. Therefore, instead of being involved in petty arguments, one should attempt to rise above his personal agenda and invest his efforts in enhancing the joyous spirit among his family members. Consequently, he will fortify their *emunah* in Hashem.

One should also be aware that the happiness that accompanies the festival is not only dependent upon the meat and wine served at the festive meals. Although delicacies may put one into good spirits, they are not the main focus of the holiday. If one becomes overly absorbed in physical pleasures, neglecting spiritual pursuits, he may ultimately diminish the joy of the festival. In the city of Mogador, which was mainly Jewish, there were many poor people, who did not have the means to prepare lavish meals for the festivals. However, despite this, they would recite the Haggadah with great joy, and their voices would ring out throughout the city. It is not the quantity of meat and wine that increase our happiness, but our *emunah* in Hashem.

In Summary

- The Torah refers to Pesach as "the Festival of Matzot to Hashem." This implies that the manner in which we celebrate Pesach is determined by Hashem.
- The chief principle regarding the festivals of Hashem is (*Devarim* 16:14-15) that "you shall rejoice on your festival… and you will only be joyous." This is essential because celebrating Hashem's salvation with joy arouses our *emunah*. Our profound *emunah* results in added joy. It is an obligation to be especially joyous on Pesach, because it is the festival which expresses our *emunah*. Upon the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael began to believe in Hashem. Ultimately, this recognition led to receiving the Torah.
- Am Yisrael obeyed Hashem's command to slaughter the idols of the Egyptians with great joy, despite the inherent danger of doing so in public.

The joy with which Bnei Yisrael performed their first mitzvah serves as an example of how to fulfill all subsequent mitzvot.

- Pesach, which is the *chag* of *emunah*, is compared to the roots of a tree, which is the source of nourishment for the entire tree. Similarly, the *emunah* one acquires on Pesach impacts the performance of all his other mitzvot.
- The Zohar relates that on the Seder Night, Hashem orders the angels to descend to the world and observe how His people are praising and glorifying Him. Why does Hashem need the confirmation of the angels when He can observe everything from Above?
- Just as a king demands a summary following a conference despite his presence at the meeting, in order to reinforce the facts, Hashem orders the angels to observe His people on the Seder Night. This serves to reinforce the favor they have before Him. In addition, when the angels begin to prosecute Am Yisrael, the scene of Am Yisrael's joyous celebration stands witness to their dedication and tips the scale in their favor.

Cast upon Hashem Your Burden

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you shall enter the Land that I give you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the omer of the first of your harvest to the Kohen"

(*Vayikra* 23:9-10)

The Torah commands that "You shall bring the *omer* of the first of your harvest to the Kohen." Thereafter, one must begin to count seven weeks, which comprise fifty days, until the festival of Shavuot, the *chag* of Matan

Torah, as it says (*Vayikra* 23:15-16), "You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the *omer* of the waving – seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem."

Many commentaries discuss the reason for Hashem's command to bring an *omer* of the first of the harvest before the Kohen. Also, the reason for counting fifty days from Pesach till Shavuot needs clarification. Why did Hashem not instruct Bnei Yisrael to celebrate Shavuot on a fixed date, the sixth day of Sivan, without counting fifty days?

The purpose of the redemption of Am Yisrael from Egypt was in order for them to receive the Torah and inherit the Land, where they would fulfill the mitzvot and ultimately build the Beit Hamikdash. Hashem knew that Bnei Yisrael would begin to wonder how they would exist if they would dedicate all their time for the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot. Therefore, He commanded Bnei Yisrael that immediately upon entering Eretz Yisrael, they should set aside the first harvest and bring the *omer* offering to the Kohen. This would serve to reinforce the concept that their success was not dependent upon their efforts, but only upon Hashem, Who, in His abundant benevolence, sustains each person according to his deeds (*Alshich*, *Vayikra* 23:9-10).

If Bnei Yisrael would go in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot, Hashem would provide them with their livelihood in abundance, without their having to invest much effort in earning an income. Since man was cursed (*Bereishit* 3:19) "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread," he has to exert some effort in gaining his sustenance. However, there are various levels of effort. If a person meticulously follows in the ways of Hashem, he will not have to sweat excessively to earn a living.

Thus, bringing an *omer* of the first harvest of the land to the Kohen served to teach Bnei Yisrael that their sustenance was not dependent upon their efforts alone. Ultimately, only Hashem, Who sustains every

creature, from large to small (*Avodah Zarah* 3b) arranges for the sustenance of those who obey Him and cleave to His Torah.

Immediately after Bnei Yisrael brought the offering of their first harvest, they began to count the *omer* in anticipation of *Matan Torah*, in order to prove that their sole aspiration was for Torah. This is because they came to the realization that only the Torah brought them abundance and blessing. We can illustrate this by an example of a young man who anticipates his wedding day and begins to count the days until he marries his wife. The more the coveted date draws closer, the more are his excitement and joy heightened. Likewise, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to count the *omer* until *Matan Torah* to prove their great desire to receive the Torah, since it is the Torah which grants them life and opens the treasuries of the Heavens to pour down upon them abundance of blessing and success.

Parashat *Emor* discusses the observance of Shabbat and the festivals. The many holidays occurring in the cycle of the year might cause people to question how they will earn a living if they are required to abstain from work for so many days. Therefore, Hashem told His people to set aside an *omer* of their first harvest and bring it to the Kohen. By doing this they would witness that not only does their offering not diminish their livelihood, on the contrary, their observance of Torah and mitzvot bring blessing to their income. Ultimately, their land would yield a more successful crop.

The pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:15) states, "You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day." The word "rest day" refers to Pesach in this context, but it also alludes to Shabbat. It implies that one begins to merit blessings, as symbolized by the *omer*, specifically after observing Shabbat. Although one might mistakenly assume that by abstaining from work on Shabbat, his income will decrease, bringing the *omer* to the Kohen proves the opposite. Shabbat is linked to the *omer* to teach us that observing Shabbat is similar to the *omer*, since it does not decrease one's income, but on the contrary, brings abundance and blessings.

Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 52:3) relate a story about one of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students who travelled to a distant country to earn money and returned a wealthy man. The other students envied him and also aspired to travel far away in order to improve their impoverished living conditions. Upon perceiving their inner conflict, Rabbi Shimon took them to a large valley and prayed, "Valley, valley, fill up with gold coins." Immediately the entire valley began to fill with enormous amounts of valuable gold coins. The students rushed to collect the gold, but Rabbi Shimon warned them, "You may take as much as you please, but know that whatever you gather now, you are taking from your portion in the World to Come, since there is no [adequate] reward for Torah in this world, only in the World to come, as it says (*Mishlei* 31:25), 'She joyfully awaits the last day.'"

When the students heard this, they realized their error. They understood what great reward awaits those who follow in the ways of Hashem. They realized that it was their dedication to Torah that had filled the entire valley with gold. They did not want to waste it by exchanging it for temporary comfort. They left all the gold behind them, not even taking one coin, and fortified themselves with the lesson that infinite wealth and fortune are ultimately reserved for them in the World to Come.

According to the opinion of Rabbi Shimon, since the entire world exists only for Torah, he saw no need for man to invest efforts in earning a living. He was certain that whoever would study Torah diligently would have his needs provided for by Hashem (*Berachot* 35b; *Rambam*, *Shemittah v'Yovel* 13:13).

The Gemara recounts (ibid.) a conversation that Rabbi Shimon had with his colleague, Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Shimon argued that a person should be involved in Torah alone, while Rabbi Yishmael countered that one must combine the study of Torah with investing effort in earning a livelihood. Nevertheless, one's main objective should be to learn Torah. Most people conduct themselves according to Rabbi Yishmael's opinion; only a few elite individuals are able to adopt the lifestyle that Rabbi Shimon describes. The Gemara quotes Rabbi Abaye regarding this, "Many

people conducted themselves according to Rabbi Yishmael's opinion and succeeded; whereas, others who conducted themselves according to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai's opinion did not succeed."

The pasuk (*Tehillim* 68:19) says, "עלית למרום שבית שבי – You ascended on high, You have taken captives." The Arizal explains (*Shem Hagedolim*, *Chelek Hagedolim* 10:332) that the word שבי is an acronym for רבי שמעון בן יוחאי. This implies that when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven and saw the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon, he recognized his greatness and wanted to "capture" him and bring him down to the world in order to learn Torah with him. Why was Moshe Rabbeinu impressed specifically with Rabbi Shimon? He encountered the *neshamot* of all the outstanding tzaddikim, who eventually became famous in their generations. What was unique about Rabbi Shimon that Moshe desired to bring him to this world? Moreover, why did Moshe not choose the *neshamah* of Rabbi Akiva, since we know that Moshe considered Rabbi Akiva more worthy than himself to transmit the Torah to Bnei Yisrael?

Moshe Rabbeinu saw that the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon was lofty and purified, since he was destined to invest all his efforts and ambitions only for Torah. He had unwavering faith that all his needs would be provided for by Hashem. Indeed, we find that when Rabbi Shimon hid in the cave due to the threat of the Romans, Hashem planted a carob tree and created a stream of water at the entrance of his cave, from which he sustained himself. When Rabbi Shimon left the cave after many years, he had attained an outstandingly high level of Torah, revealing its many secrets. He could not tolerate seeing people toil in menial labor for their livelihood. Because of his intense *kedushah*, he burned them with his gaze. When Hashem saw that Rabbi Shimon was not suited for a world composed of spiritual and material elements combined, He ordered him to return to the cave for another year so that he should not destroy the world with his overwhelming *kedushah* (*Shabbat* 33b).

We cannot compare to Rabbi Shimon's greatness. However, since he sanctified himself entirely for Hashem, we can reinforce our own *emunah* by reflecting on his exalted level. We become strengthened by the

realization that man's income for the coming year has already been fixed by Hashem at the beginning of the year (*Beitzah* 16a). This corresponds to the directive (*Tehillim* 55:23) "Cast upon Hashem your burden and He will sustain you." By placing all of one's trust in Hashem to provide his sustenance, he will be worthy of the guarantee "and He will sustain you." Moshe Rabbeinu specifically chose Rabbi Shimon as a partner for learning Torah, because he did not associate at all with the materialistic pursuits of this world.

In Summary

- Why are we commanded to offer an *omer* of the first harvest? In addition, why do we count the *omer* until Shavuot? Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to offer the first crop of their harvest and bring it to the Kohen in order to teach them that their income is not dependent upon their efforts alone. It is according to their deeds, and on condition that they go in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot, that Hashem provides them with thriving income.
- Counting the *omer* proves that the aspiration of Am Yisrael is to study Torah. Counting toward Shavuot can be compared to a person who counts the days until his wedding. The anticipation stems from the realization that one's attachment to Torah is what grants him life and sustenance.
- The festivals and Shabbat are also mentioned in this parashah. The introduction of the *omer* allays a person's fears that by observing the holidays his income may be diminished. Just as the offering of the *omer* brings blessing and abundance, so too, observing the festivals will ultimately increase his profits.
- According to the opinion of Rabbi Shimon, a person should involve himself only in the study of Torah, and Hashem will provide for his livelihood. However, the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael is that a person should combine the study of Torah with investing effort in earning an income. Nevertheless, his main objective should be to learn Torah. The Gemara concludes that many have conducted themselves according to the

opinion of Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded, whereas others who conducted themselves according to the opinion of Rabbi Shimon did not succeed.

♦ "עלית למרום שבית שבי – You ascended on high, You have taken captives." The word שבי alludes to רבי שמעון בן יוחאי. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to bring the *neshamah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai down to the world, since he recognized its vast *kedushah*. Why was Rabbi Shimon's *neshamah* unique? It is because he believed that one should invest all his efforts in Torah, placing his faith in Hashem to provide for his needs, as it says, "Cast upon Hashem your burden and He will sustain you."

The Significance of the Days between Pesach and Shavuot

"You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the omer of the waving – seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days"

(*Vayikra* 23:15-16)

What is the connection between the mitzvah of Sefirat Haomer and the period between Pesach and Shavuot?

During these days, two major events occurred. One is that Amalek went out to battle against Am Yisrael, as it says (*Shemot* 17:8), "Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim." Chazal explain that the name Rephidim (רפידים) alludes to the fact that Bnei Yisrael "had become lax (רפו ידיהם) in the study of Torah." This reflected a flaw in their relationship with Hashem.

The other incident was that 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished during these days because they had not treated each other with adequate respect (*Yevamot* 62b). This represented a flaw in their interpersonal relationships.

The negligence of Rabbi Akiva's students certainly could not have been severe, because they had learned from Rabbi Akiva, who taught, "You shall love your fellow as yourself – this is a fundamental law of the Torah" (*Sifra Kedoshim* 4). Surely, he stressed the importance of interpersonal relationships. What were they ultimately blamed for?

Moreover, it is astonishing that in this period 24,000 students died. By dividing the number of deceased students by number of days in which they died, we see that hundreds of funerals took place each day. When a couple of members of a family die suddenly, usually their relatives begin to examine their deeds. In fact Chazal (*Shabbat* 106a) say, "When one member of the group dies, the entire group should be concerned." In this case, hundreds of students died every day. Why did Rabbi Akiva's students not make a personal accounting?

Because of their overwhelming righteousness and special emphasis on interpersonal relationships, they did not perceive any flaw among themselves. They were convinced that they were not to blame for their colleagues' deaths. Therefore, they did not connect the plague to any personal lacking. For this reason they were accused of "not treating each other with adequate respect." Their lack of introspection demonstrated their disregard for the responsibility that one Jew bears for another. Therefore, they were accused of not treating each other with respect.

After the students died, the world was desolate of Torah until Rabbi Akiva came to the scholars residing in the South, including Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness, and others. They ultimately ensured the dissemination of Torah throughout the world (*Yevamot* 62b). It is amazing that Hashem orchestrated that these scholars should specifically be situated in the South, far from the group of students that perished, so that Torah should continue to exist in the world.

In Summary

- What is the connection between Sefirat Haomer and the period between Pesach and Shavuot? During this time, Amalek went out to battle against Bnei Yisrael because they had become lax in the study of Torah. This reflected a flaw in their relationship with Hashem. Similarly, Rabbi Akiva's students died because they had become lax in their interpersonal relationships. The period of Sefirat Haomer is a time of preparation for receiving the Torah, when one improves both his relationship with Hashem and with his fellow man, in order to repair the flaws that occurred during these days.
- The sin of Rabbi Akiva's righteous students was that they did not examine their deeds after witnessing their colleagues perish.
- Hashem preceded the remedy to the malady by placing scholars in the South so that Torah should continue to exist in the world.

The Festival of Matan Torah

"You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the omer of the waving – seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 23:15-16)

From the pesukim above we learn about the obligation to observe the festival of Shavuot. Why does the Torah not specify in detail how one is supposed to celebrate their holiday, as it does concerning the other

festivals? Why does the Torah merely hint to Shavuot with the command to bring "a new meal-offering to Hashem" and not indicate that following Sefirat Haomer there is a festival called Shavuot, which is a holiday in honor of *Matan Torah*?

Perhaps we can explain with the following idea. The words "you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem" symbolize the study of Torah. Through learning Torah, a person constantly offers "new meal-offerings to Hashem," which refer to his innovative Torah thoughts. The study of Torah is not limited to a specific period of time during the year; it is meant to be studied constantly, at every possible moment. For this reason, the Torah does not call the festival of Shavuot by name here, nor does it mention the specific date upon which it occurs, but refers to it by mentioning the number of days that we count toward it. This teaches that the mitzvah of the day, which is to offer a new meal offering to Hashem (i.e., novel Torah thoughts), applies every day and is not limited only to the day of Shavuot.

We do not find any other nation who raise their book of laws as their banner and rejoice with it. Only Am Yisrael, who is the Chosen Nation, take the Sefer Torah, replete with prohibitions and restricting laws, and dance jubilantly with it. At first glance, this seems surprising. Undoubtedly, no other nation can proudly dance with their doctrines. This is because they only abide by their laws in public. However, in secret, they transgress all its guidelines without hesitation. There is a famous question asked in jest, "Why is the priest prohibited to marry, but his son allowed to do so?"

The gaon, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt"l, once told me that since the Arabs are descendants of Avraham Avinu, they are known as being extremely hospitable. This generosity is outlined in their religion. However, as soon as their guest finishes his lavish meal and turns to leave, it is common for his host to stab him in the back.

In contrast, Am Yisrael elatedly dance with the Torah, despite its many prohibitions. This is because they know that it is precisely the

prohibitions which elevate them and define them as the Chosen Nation. If not for their strict adherence to them, they would resemble the other nations, who follow their religion when it suits them.

When Bnei Yisrael sang the Song of the Sea, they said (*Shemot* 15:15), "Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the mighty of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan melted..." Considering this, it is difficult to understand why the nations refused to accept the Torah when it was offered to them. They trembled before Hashem, realizing that Hashem and His Torah are absolute truth. Whoever is submerged in physical pleasures and folly cannot taste the sweetness of the Torah. They cannot have any appreciation for its qualities. Therefore, despite their overwhelming fear of Hashem, the nations did not want to accept the Torah.

This clarifies another reason why Am Yisrael dance with the Torah. Since Am Yisrael adhere to all its laws and mitzvot not only because of their belief in Hashem, but because it is favorable and appealing to them, they ultimately acquire a taste for Torah. This draws them to perform additional mitzvot, as it says (*Avot* 4:2), "One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah."

If not for a person's taste for Torah, he would not be able to faithfully perform all its mitzvot. It is the appealing flavor for Torah that one acquires that lends appreciation for abiding by all its restrictions. The spiritual taste buds of the nation were dulled to the sweetness of Torah. One can compare this to a child with a candy. He will prefer receiving a small candy over a hundred dollar bill, since he does not yet possess appreciation for the value of money. The sweet taste of the candy in his mouth seems more tempting to him, leading him to choose the trivial treat over the valuable bill. Similarly, the passion for physical pleasures and vanities prevented the nations from choosing the everlasting delights of the Torah.

Many times, when I am compelled to travel from place to place in order to strengthen the various institutions of Torah, I experience an intense

longing for the delightful taste of Torah. I am overcome with a desire to abandon my heavy responsibility for the maintenance of these Torah centers and just sit absorbed in the study of Torah. Once when these feelings surfaced, I approached great Torah scholars to ask them for their advice on the matter. They explained to me that each person has a mission in life through which he perfects himself. It was not advisable for me to desist from building Torah centers, since the Torah study of many people are dependent upon me. Without the financial support that I provide for them, the voice of Torah would not continue to be heard in these places.

I was further warned that I should not relinquish my privilege, since so much Torah study was hinging on my efforts. Certainly, all the Torah learned because of my efforts would ultimately be credited to me. They encouraged me to seek gratification from my mission, since my objective is the proliferation of Torah and glorification of Hashem in the world.

In Summary

- The Torah does not specifically mention the festival of Shavuot, but states that at the conclusion of the counting of the omer "a new meal-offering" should be offered, which refers to Shavuot. It is surprising why all other festivals are described in detail, but Shavuot is merely hinted at.
- The festival of Shavuot commemorates *Matan Torah*, and the study of Torah is considered as "a new meal-offering to Hashem." This is why the Torah alludes to the festival of Shavuot in this way. Chazal teach that each day that a person learns Torah, he should feel as if he received the Torah anew.
- Am Yisrael is the only nation who takes their book of laws and dances with it enthusiastically. It is truly amazing, since the Torah is replete with prohibitions and restrictions. Why are people excited about it? The other nations only follow their religion in public. However, in private, they do not live according to their belief. Therefore, they do not rejoice with their religious doctrines. Since the Torah is Am Yisrael's lifeline, Am Yisrael rejoice in it and willingly abide by its laws.

♦ Furthermore, although the nations heard of the miracles at the Splitting of the Sea, they did not want to accept the Torah, because one does not choose to accept the Torah out of fear, but only because he has tasted its pleasant flavor and acquires an appreciation for it. Am Yisrael take delight in the Torah, since they recognize its inherent value.

Rejuvenation in Avodat Hashem

"Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 23:16)

The Torah relates that the first meal-offering that was brought from the new crop was brought on the fiftieth day, after Am Yisrael concluded the Counting of the Omer from Pesach till Shavuot. There are two types of *korbanot*. One is a sacrifice of an animal or vegetation, grain, etc., that is placed upon the Altar. This type of *korban* serves to atone for one's sins, bringing pleasure to Hashem. The other type of *korban* is when a person sacrifices his own desires for Hashem's sake by relinquishing his will in order to fulfill the will of Hashem. This is alluded to in the words (*Vayikra* 1:2) "When a person from among you will bring an offering to Hashem" (literally meaning, "When one will sacrifice of himself.") It implies that each person should aspire to sacrifice his own desires for Hashem's sake.

In fact, the loftiest level of Avodat Hashem is self-sacrifice. This is accomplished when a person overcomes his passion and places Hashem's will as his priority, even when it requires extreme effort and much self-sacrifice. I remember that my father, zy"a, once asked us to prepare a certain dish for him. After we served it to him, he tasted a bit of the

food and then immediately pushed the plate away. Upon seeing this, we asked him why he did not finish his meal when he had requested that we prepare this specific dish for him. Why did he refuse to finish eating it? My father answered us saying, "I tasted the food, and that was enough for me."

We learned an important lesson from this. Concerning one's physical matters, one should suffice only with a little taste in order to sustain his body. If one indulges in his passions, he is never satisfied. This is because the vanities of this world resemble salty water, which cannot quench his thirst. On the contrary, the more one drinks, the thirstier he will be. Regarding this, Chazal (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1:32) say, "One who possesses a portion, desires double." Furthermore, Chazal (ibid.) say, "No one dies having acquired half of what he desires."

In contrast to material matters, which must be restricted and used only according to halachah, spirituality may be accessed without limit. The pasuk says (*Vayikra* 23:16) that the *korban* was "a new meal-offering" to teach us that it was brought from the new wheat. The word "new" indicates that one's Avodat Hashem must always be done with renewed enthusiasm, as it says (*Pesikta Zutrata*, *Va'etchanan*, 11a) "Each day they shall seem new in your eyes."

A person generally becomes accustomed to routine and does not approach the mitzvot he does with appreciation and awe. Clearly, one cannot compare the excitement he experiences when making the special blessing over the sun, which is done only once in twenty-eight years, to the mitzvah of blessing the moon, which is done each month. Chazal instruct us that in order to feel rejuvenation in Avodat Hashem, one should not allow the force of habit to control him. He should consider it as if he received the Torah each day anew. Only then will he truly be able to experience the feeling of bringing "a new meal-offering" for Hashem.

The Torah, which recognizes the essence of a person's nature, warns him about the force of habit with the words (*Devarim* 7:12) "And it will be because of (עקב) your listening." The word עקב means "heel." Thus,

Rashi explains the pasuk to mean "You shall listen to," i.e., keep, the relatively light mitzvot that "one tramples with his heels," i.e., does not take seriously enough. One should approach even the seemingly trivial mitzvot with renewed zest, just as one would approach rare mitzvot. The force of habit is a danger to us. Each person must make an effort to sacrifice of himself "a new meal-offering to Hashem" each day by constantly rejuvenating his Avodat Hashem. He should ideally advance each day in his Avodat Hashem by constantly searching for new meaning in mitzvot.

It seems appropriate here to reinforce the true purpose of *bein hazmanim*. Essentially, it is supposed to provide some relaxation from the rigorous schedule of the previous term. However, whichever way I look at it, I realize more and more that most often one's gain is offset by his loss. During *bein hazmanim*, one is at risk of losing everything he achieved during the term. The *Yetzer Hara* seduces a person with the argument that he must relax from his toil in Torah so that he will be able to return to his daily schedule with renewed strength. He convinces him that if he would constantly engage in his studies, it would affect his diligence and make him lose his flavor for learning Torah. We should be aware that this argument is utterly false. Its entire purpose is to blind a person in order to detract from his self-sacrifice and dedication to Avodat Hashem.

I read in a sefer that everything stems from the earth and is destined to return to the earth (*Bereishit Rabbah* 12:11). Similarly, we can say that since the whole world is sustained by the Torah, the way to refresh oneself and relax is also by learning Torah. However, during *bein hazmanim*, one should learn lighter subjects and easier *masechtot*. In this way, he will be able to silence the *Yetzer*, who demands that one should relax. Those who argue that the way to relax is by eating and drinking a lot, touring, and pursuing all sorts of entertainment, fall into the trap of the *Yetzer Hara*. Unfortunately, we have witnessed many good people who had been exceptional students, but suddenly ceased their Torah studies

and deteriorated spiritually, because their *Yetzer Hara* overcame them during *bein hazmanim* and led them to sin.

It is told about the holy Rebbe of Satmar, ztk"l, that when he wanted to rest a bit from receiving people for advice, which sapped all his strength, since he would empathize with each person's suffering, he would take a Gemara into his hand and begin to review it. Thus, while toiling in Torah, he would relax from the demands of the public and renew his strength in Avodat Hashem. It is interesting to note that the word מנחה (meal-offering) is a derivative of the word מנוחה (rest). This implies that true rest and relaxation is achieved specifically through learning Torah with enthusiasm and dedication, as it says (*Avot* 6:2), "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of the Torah."

I once came across a question in a sefer asking why Hashem commands His people to abstain from working the land in the seventh year. Many explanations are given for this. One is that a person should not attribute success to his own efforts, but realize that everything stems from Hashem. The sefer I saw states that another reason for the mitzvah of *shemittah* is because during the six years that one works the land, he is liable to reduce his Torah study, since he is occupied with plowing, planting, fertilizing, and reaping the crop, etc. Because Hashem desires the farmer's Torah studies, He instructs him to abandon his fields in the seventh year, in order that the study of Torah that he lacked during the six years of laboring in the fields should be offset by the seventh year, which he entirely consecrates to Hashem. This demonstrates how precious Am Yisrael's study of Torah is to Hashem.

Chazal (*Zohar* II, 90b; III, 4b) reveal that Hashem, the Torah, and Am Yisrael are one. Staying connected requires much hard work, which is not simple. To prevent the loosening of this connection, he should dedicate himself entirely to the study of Torah, increasing his appreciation of Avodat Hashem each day. In this way he will succeed in securing these three factors, upon which the existence of the world depends.

In parashat *Ki Tavo*, Hashem warns the people that if they do not serve Him with gladness, they will eventually be forced to serve their enemies through pain and suffering, as it says (*Devarim* 28:47), "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness." From the negative phrase, one can infer a positive lesson. This indicates that one must serve Hashem with great joy. Consequently, he will acquire success in his Avodat Hashem. Regarding this, the Rambam says (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 89) that the study of Torah can be accomplished only by taking pleasure in it. When a person is overcome by pain and suffering, his heart is not open to embracing the service of Hashem with dedication.

Similarly, we find that when Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt, their minds and hearts were not aroused to serving Hashem because of their "shortness of breath and hard work" (*Shemot* 6:9). When Hashem wanted to redeem them and give them the Torah, He knew that He must first bring them pleasure by exposing them to extraordinary wonders and miracles. Consequently, their hearts would be open to serving Hashem with devotion. In fact, we learn that Am Yisrael left Egypt in a hurry, and did not even prepare food for their journey. They placed their trust totally in Hashem (*Rashi*, *Shemot* 12:39). The Torah testifies to this with the words (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), "Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth… following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land."

Chazal (*Avot* 1:3) teach us, "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; instead be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward." This is because when a person serves Hashem only in order to receive a reward, his service is not done with love and dedication, but only from his desire to profit from it. Also, when one does not serve Hashem with self-sacrifice but only to gain a reward, then when he gets tired, or when his objective contradicts the Torah, he will fail in his task and ultimately transgress.

In contrast, one who serves Hashem not for the sake of receiving reward, does so with dedication and intense love. He cleaves to the Torah with all his might and constantly searches for ways to improve his Avodat Hashem. In Eichah it says (3:23), "They are new every morning; great is

Your faithfulness!" This implies that a person should revitalize his Avodat Hashem each morning, and not allow it to become habitual. Ultimately, all his deeds will be performed with the intention of bringing pleasure to Hashem.

In Summary

- There are two types of *korbanot*: a *korban* of an animal or vegetation, grain, etc., and a *korban* in which one sacrifices a part of himself by relinquishing his will in order to fulfill Hashem's will. This corresponds to the words of the pasuk, "And you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem."
- The word "new" indicates the need to constantly rejuvenate one's Avodat Hashem, as it says, "Each day they (the mitzvot) shall seem new in your eyes."
- A person should be careful not to perform routine mitzvot by habit, as it says, "And it will be because of (עקב) your listening." The Torah warns about meticulously fulfilling even mitzvot which seem trivial and are generally trampled upon, indicated by the word עקב (heel), and not taken seriously.
- The way to rest from one's rigorous schedule is by learning Torah. This is contrary to the voice of the *Yetzer Hara*, who convinces one to relax by seeking all sorts of entertainment which are not compatible with a Torah lifestyle. The ideal manner of relaxation is alluded to by the word מנחה (meal-offering), which is a derivative of the word מנוחה (rest). This indicates that the way to truly relax is by dedicating oneself to Torah, as it says, "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of the Torah."
- I came across a sefer stating that one of the reasons for *shemittah* is for the farmers to make up for their lack of Torah study during the six years that they are engaged in working the land. From this one can understand how precious Am Yisrael's study of Torah is to Hashem.

- One must serve Hashem with gladness, because his success in Avodat Hashem is dependent upon it. Hashem revealed many wondrous miracles to Bnei Yisrael prior to their Exodus from Egypt so that they should feel pleasure. In this way they would willingly accept the Torah and cast their burden upon Hashem.
- It is ideal for one to serve Hashem "not for the sake of receiving reward." Consequently, he will serve Hashem at all times and in every situation with dedication and constant rejuvenation.

The Clouds of Glory Symbolize Unity

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Sukkot, a seven day period for Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 23:33-34)

Chazal discuss the essence of Sukkot at length. They indicate that it is called "The Festival of Gladness" and "The Festival of *Emunah*," and the sukkah is called (*Zohar* III, 103a) "The Shadow of Faith." The reason for this is because Am Yisrael leave their homes and dwell in a temporary shelter, which is the sukkah (*Sukkah* 2a). It commemorates the seven Clouds of Glory that surrounded Bnei Yisrael during their journey in the Wilderness for forty years (ibid. 11b). Just as Bnei Yisrael followed Hashem into the Wilderness, in an unsown land, with complete faith that He would provide for all their needs, so too, they leave the comfort of their homes each year and seek closeness with Hashem in a temporary sukkah. This testifies to their absolute faith in Him.

The obligation to observe Sukkot implies that the message of the festival possesses important qualities which are relevant for all future

generations. The seven Clouds of Glory surrounded Bnei Yisrael in the merit of Aharon Hakohen. What is the connection between them? In addition, why are we required to celebrate the festival of Sukkot, which commemorates the Clouds of Glory? Why does Sukkot immediately follow the Yamim Nora'im? This question is heightened by the fact that Chazal (*Shulchan Orach*, *Orach Chaim* 624:5) say that it is preferable to begin building the sukkah immediately upon the conclusion of Yom Kippur. The many references of Chazal regarding the festival of Sukkot teach us of the great importance that this festival is accorded in comparison to the other festivals.

Perhaps we can answer with the following thought. The Clouds of Glory symbolize unity, since they enclosed Bnei Yisrael, serving as a fort to protect them from all harm. Consequently, they caused Am Yisrael to unite and bond with each other, forming a united nation, with Hashem in their midst. This was a fulfillment of the Zohar (II, 90b; III4b) "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one."

Thus, we celebrate this festival specifically following the Yamim Nora'im, when our hearts are open to improvement. After a person is forgiven for all the sins that he committed toward Hashem, he pursues even greater levels of perfection. By building the sukkah, which commemorates the Clouds of Glory and thus symbolizes peace, he is reminded to fulfill his obligations toward his fellow man. Upon making peace with his fellow, he merits atonement for any misdeeds he may have committed against his fellow.

The seven Clouds of Glory, which symbolize unity, were provided in the merit of Aharon Hakohen, who symbolized peace. He loved peace and pursued peace, arranging peaceful settlements between man and his fellow (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 17). Furthermore, the seven Clouds correspond to the seventh day of Shabbat, which is referred to as "Shabbat Shalom" (peace). The tranquility of Shabbat has the potential to promote harmony among family members and friends (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Tehillim* 888). Similarly, Sukkot has the capacity to reinforce unity among Am Yisrael, to the extent that one may attain complete atonement for

misdeeds that he committed toward his fellow. This is why the festival of Sukkot, commemorating the Clouds of Glory, was established for all future generations as well. Unity and harmony is of paramount importance, and in its merit Am Yisrael is worthy of being the Chosen Nation.

On a deeper level, the Zohar reveals (I, 21b; *Eitz Chaim* 32:6) that Aharon corresponds to the *sefirah* of *hod*, whereas Moshe corresponds to the *sefirah* of *netzach*. Both these *sefirot* are closely linked to each other (*Zohar* III, *Raaya Meheimana* 236a; *Pardes Rimonim* 8:24). The *sefirah* of הוד (*hod*) has the numerical value of fifteen, which corresponds to the numerical value of Hashem's Name י-ה. Chazal explain that the Name of Hashem י-ה-ו-ה denotes supremacy by perfecting the Heavenly Throne of Hashem. Ever since Amalek created a schism in the Name of Hashem and its unity, the Heavenly Throne was likewise damaged. Instead of being a complete כסא (throne), it is referred to as כס (incomplete throne). Likewise, instead of י-ה-ו-ה, Hashem's Name is written as י-ה alone. Therefore, we are commanded to erase the memory of Amalek throughout each generation. In the future, when Amalek will be entirely eliminated from the world, Hashem's Heavenly Throne will return to its original perfected state. Similarly, the Name י-ה will be completed, forming the full Name י-ה-ו-ה (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Ovadiah* 549).

Chazal (*Sotah* 17a) teach that in the word איש (man) there is the letter י', whereas in the word אשה (woman) there is the letter ה'. Thus, when man and wife live in harmony, they merit the *Shechinah* dwelling among them, bringing them blessing. However, when this harmony is disrupted by discord and feud, Hashem removes His Name י-ה, which symbolizes unity, and the husband and wife are left with the letters אש (fire), signifying "heated" dispute.

Since Aharon Hakohen symbolized peace and harmony (*Avot* 1:12), the Clouds of Glory were provided in his merit. Likewise, the *sefirah* of *hod*, which corresponds to the Name י-ה, symbolizing accord and harmony, is also linked to Aharon Hakohen. Moshe Rabbeinu is symbolic of the Torah, which is called by his name, as it says (*Malachi* 3:22), "Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant." Since Moshe merited learning Torah from

Hashem and transmitting it to Bnei Yisrael, he corresponds to the *sefirah* of *netzach*, expressing eternity, because the Torah is eternal. Chazal (*Zohar* I, 21b; *Eitz Chaim* 32:6) say that the *sefirah* of *hod*, corresponding to Aharon, and the *sefirah* of *netzach*, corresponding to Moshe, are closely linked to each other (*Zohar* III; *Raaya Meheimana* 236a; *Pardes Rimonim* 8:24).

Chazal say that Bnei Yisrael merited receiving the Torah only because they were united and camped by the foot of the mountain "as one man with one heart" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:9). Likewise, throughout the generations, it is the Torah that unites Bnei Yisrael and provides them with the ability to withstand the derision and malevolence of their enemies with fortitude. However, when Bnei Yisrael are not united, and "each man eats his fellow alive," the Torah cannot reside among them, causing much harm to befall them, *rachmana litzlan*.

When Bnei Yisrael dwell in their sukkah, which is a temporary shelter, they all feel equal, since both rich and poor, the honorable leaders and the simple people, all share the same portion. The similar living conditions shared by everyone are conducive to promoting unity among Am Yisrael. Consequently, they merit fulfilling the pasuk (*Vayikra* 16:30), "For on this day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed."

The sefer *Megaleh Amukot* (*Lech Lecha*) relates that the number of *neshamot* of Am Yisrael correspond to the number of letters written in the Torah. When a single letter is missing from the Torah, the entire Sefer Torah is rendered invalid and cannot be used until it is corrected (*Rambam*, *Tefillin* 1b). Likewise, when Am Yisrael is not united, it is considered as if a *neshamah* is absent, similar to a letter missing from the Sefer Torah. In order to ensure the unity among Am Yisrael, resembling a flawless Sefer Torah, the festival of Sukkot is followed by the festival of Simchat Torah. This arouses Am Yisrael to consider the importance of unity, which made them worthy of receiving the Torah, and ultimately grants them protection against all the harmful influences of the nations.

The Gemara states (*Berachot* 64a), "Rabbi Elazar said, in the name of Rabbi Chanina, "Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: 'And all your children will be students of Hashem, and your children will have peace' – do not read [בניך] 'your children,' but [בוניך] 'your builders.'" This implies that the Torah learned by its scholars builds the world and fortifies its foundations, because the Torah is the symbol of peace. When there is an increase in the study of Torah, there is an increase in harmony in the world. It is as if the Torah scholars build the world, brick by brick.

Chazal (*Shabbat* 88a) say that when Hashem gave the Torah to Am Yisrael, He raised Har Sinai above them threateningly, and told them, "If you agree to accept the Torah willingly, fine. If not, you will be buried here." Many commentaries (Introduction to *Ohr Chadash*; *Ye'arot Devash* 1:8) are surprised by the words "you will be buried here." Hashem has given man free will. Although there are two paths, one good and the other evil, a person was given the right to choose between them. Forcing the Torah upon Am Yisrael contradicts free will. Although there is a positive command in the Torah (*Devarim* 30:19) "And you shall choose life," (*Rabbeinu Yonah*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Sha'ar* 3:17), one still retains his free will. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why Hashem denied Bnei Yisrael the ability to choose freely by raising the mountain over their heads, to compel them to accept the Torah.

It is the Torah that grants Am Yisrael the ability to retain their identity and status as a nation. Furthermore, it says (*Safra Kedoshim* 4), "You shall love your fellow as yourself – this is a fundamental principle of the Torah." This indicates that the entire Torah is based on the principle of unity. Since Am Yisrael already acquired this virtue by proclaiming "as one man with one heart *We will do and we will obey!*" (*Shemot* 24:7), Hashem wanted His people to continue pursuing this lofty conduct. However, it could only be achieved if Am Yisrael would accept the Torah implicitly. This explains why Hashem raised the mountain over them as a threat. He knew that if not for the Torah, which is founded on the

principle of unity, Am Yisrael would not succeed in surviving the difficult exiles and remain united as one nation.

The festival of Sukkot emphasizes the importance of unity, since it commemorates the seven Clouds of Glory, which were given in the merit of Aharon Hakohen, who "loved peace and pursued peace." When Am Yisrael will succeed in achieving complete unity, they will merit the building of the "fallen Sukkah of David," referring to the Beit Hamikdash, which was destroyed because of baseless hatred.

In Summary

- What is the connection between the seven Clouds of Glory and Aharon Hakohen? Why is Sukkot celebrated immediately following the Yamim Nora'im? Why do we continue to commemorate the Clouds of Glory by celebrating Sukkot in our days?
- The Clouds of Glory signify the unity of Am Yisrael, since they enclosed all of Bnei Yisrael, protecting them from all harm. Since Aharon symbolized love of peace, he is linked to the Clouds, which signify unity.
- The festival of Sukkot occurs immediately following the Yamim Nora'im, because precisely at the time when Am Yisrael achieve atonement for their sins between man and Hashem, they are reminded to correct misdeeds between man and his fellow by building the sukkah, which represents the Clouds of Glory, symbolizing peace. We also celebrate Sukkot in our days, because of its symbolic implications, which is an important lesson for all generations, since it is the foundation for Am Yisrael's existence.
- Hashem raised Har Sinai over Am Yisrael to compel them to accept the Torah. It seems that this coercion contradicts free will. However, because Am Yisrael had already acquired the virtue of unity when they proclaimed "We will do and we will obey!" as one unit, Hashem wanted them to continue conducting themselves in this manner, since only unity ensures their existence.

Your Departure Is Difficult for Me

"For a seven-day period you shall offer a fire-offering to Hashem; on the eighth day there shall be a calling of holiness for you and you shall offer a fire-offering to Hashem, it is a restraining, you shall not do any work of labor"

(*Vayikra* 23:31)

After spending seven days in the sukkah on the festival of Sukkot, basking in the proximity of Hashem and our forefathers, there is an additional day upon which we celebrate the festival of Shemini Atzeret (a day of restraining – עצרת).

Rashi explains (ibid.) the words "it is a restraining" in the following way: "I have held you back, next to Me, like a king who invited his sons to a banquet for a certain number of days. Once their time to depart arrived, the king said, "My sons, I request of you, linger with me one more day. Your departure is hard for me."

Hashem becomes especially attached to Am Yisrael, the Chosen Nation, during the long period of the Holidays, which extends for almost two months. Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are considered days of teshuvah, in which "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him – to all who call upon Him sincerely" (*Tur*, *Orach Chaim* 581). In these days, Hashem descends to the world and is exceptionally close to His people so that they should acquire an appreciation for (*Tehillim* 73:28) "G-d's nearness is my good," and they should do complete teshuvah. Furthermore, on the days of Sukkot, Am Yisrael leave their comfortable homes and dwell in a temporary sukkah. In this way, they demonstrate that they desire Hashem's proximity and Presence among them.

When the time comes for Hashem's *Shechinah* to ascend to the Heavenly Throne Above, it is hard for Hashem to part from His people.

Therefore, He requests that they celebrate an additional day and remain with Him also on the eighth day of Shemini Atzeret. This seems surprising. How would one additional day help ease the difficulty in parting? On the contrary, the more Hashem lingers with His people, the more difficult the parting becomes. In that case, why would He hold His people back another day?

Hashem's request to linger an additional day teaches us an important lesson. By asking His people to remain with Him one extra day, it demonstrates the value that Hashem attributes to a single day. One day alone makes all the difference. Since each day possesses the potential to attain unparalleled greatness, one should not regard it lightly, saying, "What is one single day worth?" A person should utilize each day to the fullest. From the example of Shemini Atzeret, we learn how each day of the year possesses supreme significance, because it can be used to acquire closeness with Hashem.

Chazal relate that David Hamelech begged Hashem to reveal to him the day of his death. Hashem told him that it was His intention to take his *neshamah* from him on Shabbat. David Hamelech pleaded that since Shabbat possesses enormous *kedushah*, he wished to die on Friday instead. Hashem responded that He was not prepared allow this. One day in the life of David Hamelach was worth more to Him than all the *olah*-offerings and *korbanot* that Shlomo Hamelech was destined to sacrifice during his entire life, as it says, (*Tehillim* 84:11), "For one day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand."

Hashem ensured that David would complete his allotted years. Consequently He took his *neshamah* on Shabbat, because each day in the life of David was valuable and important to Him (*Shabbat* 30a). On the other hand, Hashem did not extend his life for an additional day until Sunday, because Adam Harishon had granted seventy years of his life for David to live. If Hashem would have extended David's life an additional day, it would have robbed Adam of a day in his life, and it would have been considered stealing. Consequently, David would not have benefitted from it.

Hashem requests that Am Yisrael should remain with Him another day, because the parting is difficult for Him. This indicates the enormous value of time and how much one can attain through additional moments. Each day filled with Torah and mitzvot has the ability to bring pleasure to Hashem. How much more so can one accomplish in many days.

Chazal (*Sukkah* 28a) relate that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai testified that no one ever entered the Beit Hamidrash before him, and he never left the Beit Hamidrash while there were still people there. This indicates that Rabbi Yochanan resided most of the time in the Beit Hamidrash, and rarely left its confines, only leaving to care for his basic needs of food and sleep. In addition, he testified that he never fell asleep in the Beit Hamidrash. Rav Yochanan's diligence stemmed from the fact that he greatly valued Hashem's words (*Rashi*, *Vayikra* 23:36) "Your departure is hard for me." Likewise, Rabbi Yochanan found it hard to depart from the Beit Hamidrash. He could not fathom leaving when the *Shechinah* was present. Rabbi Yochanan knew that as long as there are people sitting in the Beit Hamidrash and learning Torah, the *Shechinah* joined them. Therefore, he would precede the people, coming first to the Beit Hamidrash, and he would leave last, so that he should not miss out on an opportunity to be in the proximity of the *Shechinah*.

Once I was walking to the Beit Hakeneset on Yom Kippur, wearing white clothes, as has been customary in my family for generations, since it expresses a desire to resemble angels who never experienced sin (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 610:4). When I arrived at the Beit Hakeneset, I noticed another person, who was unaffiliated to Torah and mitzvot, also dressed in white clothes. At first I felt resentful, wondering what purpose he had in wearing white clothes; during the entire year, he publicly desecrated Shabbat. Similarly, once in the middle of the *Ne'ilah* prayer, a person who was far from religious affiliation suddenly entered. He proceeded to buy the *petichah* for *Ne'ilah* for a substantial sum of money. This is despite the fact that until then he had never bothered entering the Beit Hakeneset.

I began to wonder how it is possible that people who had never in their lives engaged in Torah and mitzvot suddenly woke up in the Days of Awe to come pray in the Beit Hakeneset with a fervency that belied their previous irreligious lifestyle. They resemble a person who immerses himself in a *mikveh* to become purified while holding onto an impure insect (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Mishlei* 961). It is a blatant contradiction. After much thought, I came to the conclusion that one is aroused to seek closeness with Hashem during the Days of Awe by Hashem's words: "Your departure is hard for me." Each person suddenly feels the need to draw close to Hashem and bring Him pleasure by praying even one prayer in the Beit Hakeneset, or by fasting on Yom Kippur.

The words of Hashem achieve different results with each individual. There are those who remain oblivious to spirituality all year, but awaken only after experiencing a shocking incident. On the other hand, there are those who are aware of Hashem's Presence and His desire to be attached to His people. Therefore, they are careful to fulfill the mitzvot meticulously the whole year, and not just during a specific period. The loftier the level a person achieves, the more he senses the difficulty in Hashem's parting from His people. Therefore, he constantly strives to draw closer to Him.

Just as a tree withers unless it is constantly watered, so too, the relationship of man to his Creator needs constant revitalization through the study of Torah, which is compared to water, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 55:1), "Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water." Chazal explain that water is an allusion to the Torah (*Bava Kama* 17a).

It is told about the Gaon of Vilna, zy"a, that all his life he bemoaned the fact that upon arising in the morning, he could not begin to learn Torah until he had washed his hands and recited the *bircot hashachar*. He would grieve over these precious moments that were not utilized for learning Torah. I am sure that this regret emanated from his deep appreciation for Hashem's words, "Your departure is hard for me." This is why he sought to sanctify every available moment, utilizing his time to bring pleasure to Hashem.

In Summary

- After the Days of Awe, Hashem requests that His people celebrate another day with Him on Shemini Atzeret, since their departure is hard for Him. Can one additional day really ease the difficulty of the parting? It would seem that each additional day spent together makes the separation more painful. What is the reason for this request?
- This teaches us how important each day is to Hashem, and how much one can accomplish in one single day. This is portrayed by the story of David Hamelech. Hashem did not agree to detract a day of David's life, because each day was more precious to Him than all the *korbanot* that Shlomo Hamelech was destined to sacrifice. Even though David explicitly requested not to die on Shabbat, Hashem refused to take his life one day earlier, on Friday. On the other hand, Hashem did not grant him an additional day, allowing him to live until Sunday, since it was beyond the timespan allotted to him.
- Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai rarely left the Beit Hamidrash, since he recognized the value of each day engaged in learning Torah. Likewise, because of the appreciation he had for basking in the Presence of Hashem's *Shechinah*, he did not want to miss the opportunity by being absent.
- Each person should aspire to cleave to Hashem during the entire year, and not only on the special festival days, because of the importance of each day spent in Avodat Hashem and the study of Torah.

The Destructive Consequences of Anger

"The son of an Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel; they contended in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and the Israelite man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed – so they brought him to Moshe; the name of his mother was Shelomit the daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan"

(*Vayikra* 24:10-11)

Rashi explains this pasuk (ibid. 24:11) in the following way. The son of an Egyptian, who had a Jewish mother, pronounced the Ineffable Name, publicly cursing it. How did he know the Ineffable Name? When he had stood at the foot of Har Sinai at *Matan Torah*, he had heard the Name mentioned, and he remembered it. It is impossible to imagine this. How could a person who had accepted upon himself the Torah at Har Sinai curse Hashem with His Ineffable Name? Since he remembered the pronunciation of the Name, it signifies that he possessed unique qualities. How did he deteriorate to such a low level?

In addition, Rashi explains that this person scoffed after learning about the show-bread that was put on the Table in the Mishkan. The pasuk says, "On the Sabbath day he shall arrange it." He questioned how one could serve Hashem bread which had been left in the Sanctuary during the entire week? Normally the king eats warm, fresh bread every day.

This argument was unfounded, because the bread placed on the Table stayed fresh and warm during the entire week, as if it had been baked on that day. This was one of the ten miracles that occurred daily in the Sanctuary (*Chagigah* 26b). The blasphemer was well aware of this fact.

Why did he choose to scoff at something that everyone clearly knew was unfounded? In addition, why did he compare the bread sanctified for Hashem to food served to a human king, when it is clear that Hashem "has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal," and He did not consume the bread, but designated it for the Kohanim to eat?

These questions can be resolved by understanding the circumstances leading to the blasphemy. The pasuk (*Vayikra* 24:10) says, "The son of an Israelite woman went out." Rashi explains (ibid.) "From where did he go out? Rabbi Levi says: He went out of his world… A Beraita says, "He went out of the court of Moshe at fault in the following case: He came to pitch his tent in the camp of the tribe of Dan. They said to him, 'What is your connection here,' i.e., 'By what right do you come to pitch your tent here?' He said to them, 'I am of the sons of the tribe of Dan.' They said to him that it is written, 'Each man at his banner, by signs, to their paternal house, shall the Children of Israel encamp.' He entered the court of Moshe to claim the right to pitch his tent in the camp of Dan and went out of the court wanting, i.e., he lost the case. He got up and blasphemed."

Rashi clarifies that the blasphemer was involved in a dispute with the tribe of Dan. He wanted to pitch his tent in their camp, since his mother, Shelomit bat Divri, was from the tribe of Dan. The sons of Dan told him that the Torah specifically states that regarding land, a person's lineage is determined by his father. Since his father was a gentile, he had no claim to their land. This response angered him and he went to the court of Moshe to rule on the matter. Ultimately, he lost the case, and in his extreme anger, he blasphemed Hashem's Name.

From this we learn how destructive anger is. When he is angry, one loses his self-control entirely. Chazal (*Nedarim* 22a) say, "Whoever gets angry, all sorts of Gehinnom master him." Besides for the fact that he is destined to suffer in Gehinnom, there are many harmful side effects of anger in this world. There are numerous cases of people who suffered a nervous break-down, heart attack, or a stroke from a fit of anger, *rachmana litzlan*.

From Rashi's explanation, we learn that the blasphemer deteriorated to the lowest level by lashing out at Hashem, cursing the Ineffable Name in his great anger. In addition, he was guilty of heresy, denying the existence of Hashem. Although he witnessed the extraordinary miracle that occurred with the show-bread placed on the Table, he scoffed at it. This is because anger ultimately causes one to become irrational.

We can also learn another lesson from this account. The members of Shevet Dan are also to blame for not behaving properly. They should not have dealt so harshly with the son of Shelomit. Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 30b) teach, "Why was Yerushalayim destroyed? Because they were exacting in justice regarding each other and did not treat each other leniently." Perhaps, if Shevet Dan would have allowed him to pitch his tent in their camp, he would not have disgraced Hashem's Name, nor scoffed at the bread placed on the Table in the Sanctuary. Since they were inconsiderate, they were also held accountable for the outcome of his anger. Had they adopted a more lenient attitude toward him, his outburst of rage would have been avoided.

I once heard of a story about a man who went to the bank to deposit a check. He generally did not visit this particular bank. While there, he met a stranger who looked at him and began to accuse him bitterly: "You should know that my whole life is ruined because of you. If you would not have offended me, today I could have been teaching Torah, even composing my own sefer." The man visiting the bank was confused, and asked him to explain who he was. He answered that when he was a young man, he went to learn in the Yeshiva of Gateshead. On his first day there, the Rosh Hayeshiva directed him to the lunchroom to get some food. Since the dining area was relatively small, it was very full, and there were no available places left to sit. Suddenly, he noticed a vacant seat and hurried to sit down. However, after a few moments, a student approached him and scornfully informed him that he had been there first and therefore the seat belonged to him, making him leave the place in disgrace. Being profoundly hurt, the young man decided to leave yeshiva forever.

The man concluded that the student who had disgraced him was none other than this person. He continued to accuse him that his low spiritual status was his fault. If he would have treated him pleasantly, he would have remained to learn Torah in yeshiva. Who knows what great levels he could have achieved? However, because of the disgraceful attitude with which he was treated, all was lost.

The man who had been accused of disrespect had eventually become an honorable Torah authority, and he was devastated. He came to see me and cried bitterly. He said that if he had known then, when he was young, how harmful words could be, he would have been much more careful. However, now it was too late, and it was impossible to reverse the situation. Similarly, the disregard for Hashem's honor through the blasphemy was blamed on Shevet Dan as well. They should have treated Shelomit's son compassionately, especially since he was a member of their nation and had also merited hearing Hashem's voice clearly at Har Sinai.

Why does the Torah mention that the blasphemer was the son of an Egyptian? He had accepted the Torah with his brethren at Har Sinai. Ultimately, his lineage was determined by his Jewish mother. Why is it necessary to mention the origin of his gentile father? This teaches that when a person gets into a fit of rage, his anger makes him lose control, even causing him to deny Hashem. The Egyptians symbolized those who deny Hashem, since they were idol worshippers. Therefore, the Torah specifies the Egyptian father of the blasphemer. This signifies that because of his anger, he shed his Jewish identity and affiliated with his father's Egyptian origin, since they denied Hashem.

Furthermore, we may wonder why the Torah mentions the name of his mother, Shelomit bat Divri. This is puzzling, since the Torah already says (*Vayikra* 24:10), "The son of an Israelite woman went out." Why does the Torah repeat itself and mention his mother twice? Once, she is mentioned as "an Israelite woman," and the second time by her name Shelomit bat Divri. Moreover, if her name is important, why is it mentioned only afterwards, in the next pasuk?

A name indicates the essence of a person. She was called *Shelomit* because she would chatter incessantly and greet everyone, men and women alike, with a cheery "Shalom" (Hello). The appellation *bat Divri* (the daughter of speech), signifies that she was a chatterbox; speaking to every person she met. This is why she ultimately behaved immorally. Since she did not guard her modesty and adhere to the words of the pasuk "(*Tehillim* 45:14), "The honor of a princess is within, [she will be worthy of sons who are clothed] in raiment of golden settings." her son ultimately became corrupt, profaning Hashem's Name.

The Torah did not mention her name immediately, referring to her as "an Israelite woman" in the beginning, and only specified her name in the next pasuk in order to teach us about the role of a mother. It is the mother's responsibility to educate her son to conduct himself properly. She must observe her son's behavior and admonish him when he misbehaves, so that he should correct his ways. This is why the Torah did not mention his mother's name immediately, in the hope that she would guide her son to the proper path. However Shelomit did not pay attention to her son's corruption. Therefore, the Torah identified her, holding her accountable for his deeds.

A tree whose roots are rotten will ultimately sprout inferior fruit. Since Shelomit bat Divri was lacking in modesty and allowed herself to chat with strangers, her son also did not guard his tongue. In the end, he scoffed at the show-bread placed on the Table in the Mishkan and blasphemed the Name of Hashem, pronouncing the Ineffable Name in his uncontrollable anger.

In Summary

- How did the son of Shelomit bat Divri dare to curse the Name of Heaven, mentioning the Ineffable Name, and also scoff at the show-bread placed on the Table in the Mishkan? Rashi explains that at that time, he had just lost his case in Moshe's court, complaining that the Tribe of Dan had not allowed him to pitch his tent in their camp. It seems that in a fit of rage he blasphemed the Name of Hashem and scoffed at the show-bread. We

learn how destructive anger is, causing one to lose control and behave irrationally.

- The members of Dan's tribe are blamed for treating the blasphemer harshly. They should have conceded to his request. However, since they did not display compassion, Hashem's Name was ultimately disgraced.
- Why does the Torah mention that the blasphemer's father was an Egyptian? After all, he was a Jew and had accepted the Torah together with his brethren. This teaches us that whoever gets angry, behaves in essence like the Egyptians, who denied Hashem.
- Why does the Torah specify the name of his mother, Shelomit bat Divri, after it already says that "the son of an Israelite woman went out." It seems redundant. Also, why was her name mentioned only in the following pasuk and not immediately?
- The name Shelomit bat Divri testifies to her essence. She would inquire about everyone's affairs, chatting freely with women and men alike. Likewise, her son did not guard his tongue. At first, he is called "the son of an Israelite woman," hinting that she had the responsibility as a mother to admonish her son and guide him on the proper path. However, since she failed in her responsibility, the Torah then calls her by her full name, indicating that her lack of modesty in speech was inherited by her son, leading to his downfall.

The Source Determines the Outcome

"The son of an Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel; they contended in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and the Israelite

man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed – so they brought him to Moshe; the name of his mother was Shelomit the daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan"

(*Vayikra* 24:11-12)

The Torah states that the son of an Israelite woman "went out." From where did he go out? Also, if he went out of a specific place, why does the Torah not specify from where? The Ohr Hachaim (ibid.) explains that often a person does not intend to execute a specific action, but in the end, he performs it unintentionally. Many times we use the phrase "he happened to say such and such," implying that although he did not intend to say those words, they slipped out inadvertently. Similarly, when Bnei Yisrael threw their wives' gold jewelry into the fire, the image of a molten calf emerged unexpectedly. From the words of the pasuk we infer that Bnei Yisrael did not imagine that their actions would fashion a molten calf. However, in the end a calf emerged from the fire.

Many commentaries question how it was possible for a person who witnessed Hashem giving the Torah on Har Sinai to deteriorate so drastically by cursing Hashem. How could someone who heard Hashem proclaiming, "I am Hashem, your G-d" betray his Creator and profane His Name?

We can explain this according to the continuation of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 24:10), "And he was the son of an Egyptian man." Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Vayikra* 657) clarify that this person was the son of Shelomit (שלומית) bat Divri (דבר – speech), who was called by this name because she would inquire about the welfare (שלום) of all the people, men and women alike. Moreover, she would chat with each person without adhering to the laws of modesty. Because of this conduct, she was eventually violated by an Egyptian. From this union, a son was born, who ultimately cursed Hashem. It seems that the blasphemy emanated from his mouth, because

his origin was impure. Since his roots were defective, he misused his faculty of speech in the worst way possible, by blaspheming.

This can be attributed to the fact that the results of an action are dependent upon one's initial intentions. For example, if a person enters the Beit Hamidrash with the intention of progressing in Torah, in the end he will leave the Beit Hamidrash spiritually elevated. Conversely, a person who goes to the Beit Hamidrash only because he is forced to go will leave devoid of spiritual content, because he did not initially intend to absorb *kedushah*. An example of this is the spies. The pasuk (*Bamidbar* 13:26) states, "They went and came." Rashi explains that "just as their coming was with an evil scheme, so too, their going was with an evil scheme," they had bad intentions from the start of their mission. This indicates that because their initial departure was with the intention of distorting the truth, they returned corrupt. They portrayed Eretz Yisrael in a negative light and demonstrated a lack of faith in Hashem.

Similarly, the Torah informs us that when Moshe Rabbeinu gathered the entire nation, instructing them to donate toward the Mishkan, it says (*Shemot* 35:20), "The entire assembly of the Children of Israel left Moshe's presence." This is perplexing. How did the hundreds and thousands of participants leave all at once? It is actually a figurative expression implying that all Bnei Yisrael left feeling highly motivated to raise the funds necessary for the building of the Mishkan. Since their original intention in joining the gathering with Moshe was worthy, they left with the lofty intentions of joining in the building of the Mishkan in order to draw from its *kedushah*.

This teaches us that a person should always venture out of his house with positive intentions of becoming elevated, since he does not know where he will ultimately end up. If his intentions upon leaving his home are virtuous, his feet will eventually carry him to the Beit Hamidrash. However, if his initial departure is with the intention to indulge in vanities, his feet will carry him to fulfill his passion in pursuit of materialistic acquisitions. Regarding this, David Hamelech says in Tehillim (119:59) "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies." Since

David Hamelech's original intentions were virtuous, his feet automatically carried him to the direction of the Beit Hamidrash, where he absorbed *kedushah* and became elevated through Torah.

The pasuk states (*Devarim* 28:6), "Blessed are you in your coming, and blessed shall you be in your going." This signifies that just as a person enters this world without a shadow of sin, his exit from this world should be with a clean slate (*Bava Metzia* 107a). If his origins stem from *kedushah* and purity, he will naturally aspire to follow in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot when he matures. Conversely, a child born from impure origins remains lacking in his *kedushah* because of his defective source. This is manifested by the son of the Egyptian man and the Israelite woman, Shelomit bat Divri. Since his origin stemmed from an impure source, he was lacking in *kedushah* and ultimately blasphemed Hashem's Name.

Rashi explains (*Vayikra* 24:10) that the word "went out" alludes to the incident of the blasphemer going to court and leaving in anger after losing his case. This is why he began to profane Hashem's Name. Evidently, if he would have entered Moshe's court with the intention of accepting his judgment unconditionally, he would have accepted the guilty verdict with equanimity, as it says (*Devarim*, 17:10), "You shall do… everything that they will teach you." However, since he did not enter Moshe's court with the intention of accepting his verdict, he left with resentment. In his fit of rage, he dared to turn against Hashem and blasphemed, *rachmana litzlan*.

One should attempt to remain objective and unbiased. In this way, he can readily accept the decisions of a Torah authority. However, when a person is predisposed and cannot rid himself of his partiality, he will complain bitterly about losing his case, which will ultimately lead to disaster, as in the example of the blasphemer.

The Torah records this account to teach us a lesson. A king would never want to publicize that his subjects rebelled against him. He would only want to focus on the positive aspects of his kingship, so he should be remembered favorably for posterity. He would attempt to hide objectionable incidents, so that they should be forgotten. Rabbeinu

Bachya writes that it is not fitting for the honor of Hashem to write such a story in His Torah. If the Torah wants to teach us that one is prohibited from cursing Hashem's Name, this could be elucidated without publicizing the example of the blasphemer.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the Torah wants to teach us that a Jew born in purity could never stoop to cursing Hashem's Name. If such an incident did take place, it is only because his origin was defective. The Torah brought proof of this from the son of the Israelite woman and the Egyptian man, who was born from impure sources. This is why he eventually deteriorated to such a low state.

Thus, we see that the successful education of one's children in Torah and mitzvot begins already from the moment of their formation. Thereafter, the entire period that the child is in his mother's womb, he is affected by everything that she is exposed to. If she surrounds herself with *kedushah* and purity, he will absorb its effects, which will become part of his essence and accompany him for the rest of his life.

A person who is trained from youth to constantly praise Hashem's Name could never commit such an offense. Even during his most difficult moments, he would proclaim, "It is all for the best!" This is why the Torah repeats itself in the pasuk (*Vayikra* 21:1), "**say** to the Kohanim… and you shall **say** to them." This indicates that is not enough to recite the words of the Torah once, but one must repeat them constantly for them to penetrate his heart and become part of his essence. If one gets into the habit of always expressing his recognition of Hashem's greatness, then he will accept Hashem's judgment with complete faith and not lash out in anger, even under stress.

When I was a young boy, I used to collect old cigarettes. I would extract the tobacco that was left inside and roll it in strips of newspaper. Then, I would sell the recycled cigarettes to my friends. At first, I tried to sell my product to adults. However, when I saw that they were not interested in my merchandise, I tried my luck with children. When my father, zy"a, became aware of my new business venture, he gave me a sound beating.

Sometime later, before going to sleep, my father gave me a second beating. I imagine that the first beating corresponded to the obligation of the Torah "Say," and the second beating was in order to fulfill "and you shall say." The second beating was in order to instill deep within me the severity of my misbehavior, and to warn me not to repeat it again. My father told me that if he would have hit me only once, it would not have prevented me from repeating my foolishness. However, since he hit me the second time, I realized how grave my error was. Consequently, I would never repeat my folly.

It seems that this is the connection between the beginning of the parashah and its conclusion. When one does not implement the lesson implied by the repetition of the words "Say… and you shall say," implying that one must constantly review the words of the Torah, then he will deteriorate to the lowest level, as in the example of the blasphemer. Had his mother at least made an effort to guide him properly, perhaps it would have compensated for his defective origin. Ultimately, he would not have sinned to such a degree. However, in addition to her immoral conduct that resulted in the birth of her son, she was also negligent in her duty to train him properly. Ultimately, she mothered an unworthy person, whose sinful deeds became publicized.

The deeds of our forefathers are a portent for the children. The blasphemer was the son of an Egyptian who struck a Jew mercilessly, until Moshe Rabbeinu was compelled to kill him and bury him in the ground (see *Tanchuma*, *Shemot* 9). Furthermore, his mother was lacking in modesty. It is no wonder that their union resulted in a corrupt son.

In Summary

- The Torah states that the son of an Israelite woman "went out," but does not specify from where he went out. The Ohr Hachaim explains that this implies that his actions were not premeditated. This sheds light upon the question of the commentaries that deliberate how it was possible for a person who stood at Har Sinai and witnessed the miracles of Hashem to

ultimately curse His Name. Apparently, he did not intend to behave in this way. However, his defective origins caused him to sin unintentionally.

- The pasuk describes the illegitimate origins of the blasphemer. He was the son of Shelomit bat Divri, who behaved immodestly. His father was an Egyptian, whom Moshe killed for mercilessly striking a Jew. Moreover, the blasphemer originated from illicit relations, after his mother was violated by the Egyptian. His immoral origins led him to ultimately curse Hashem.
- Rashi explains that he "went out" of Moshe's court after being found guilty and therefore cursed Hashem's Name. When a person consults with a Rav, he should remain entirely impartial in order to accept the decision of the Torah authority. Since the blasphemer entered the court only with the intention of validating his argument, and not in order to hear an objective judgment, he became enraged and ultimately cursed Hashem's Name. We can learn from this that one's actions are determined by his prior intentions. For example, the spies initially intended to view Eretz Yisrael in a negative way. Therefore, they ended up speaking disparagingly about it.
- One should be careful to depart from his house with positive intentions, in order that his feet should ultimately lead him to fulfill mitzvot. This corresponds to David Hamelech's statement: "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies."
- Why is this account recorded in the Torah? It is shameful for a king's subjects to curse him. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the example of the blasphemer, who was born as a result of illicit relations, teaches us that if a Jew curses Hashem's Name, it testifies to his deficient origins. One should be careful to educate his children from youth to go in Hashem's ways. Furthermore, he should ensure that his children should be born in *kedushah* and purity. Even during a woman's pregnancy, she should cautiously filter what she sees and hears.

Gems on Parashat Emor

The Connection between Kedoshim and Emor

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

A person is obligated to consider that after his death he will have to give an accounting for his deeds before Hashem. He will be answerable for the level of *kedushah* that he achieved in this world. He will be judged as to what degree he guarded himself from sin and sanctified himself with *kedushah*, and if he lived his life in accordance with how he measures up to his responsibility as the son of the King.

The Torah repeats the words "say… and you shall say." This indicates that a person should repeat to himself many times the message that his allotted time to live on this earth is limited. The purpose of his life is to fulfill Hashem's will, as the Torah specifies (*Vayikra* 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I." When a person seeks to fulfill Hashem's will, cleaving to His ways, as it says (*Shabbat* 133b), "Just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful," he merits inheriting a portion in the World to Come. The

Torah's repetition of the words "say… and you shall say" refers to the issue of *kedushah*, which is described in parashat *Kedoshim*.

Although Hashem commands us to guard our *kedushah*, this does not imply that it is prohibited to delight in His creations. Had Hashem intended us to be devoid of pleasure, He would not have created beautiful arrays of color, smells, sounds, and tastes. Since Hashem has provided man with five senses with which to derive pleasure, it clearly testifies that His intention is that we enjoy His world. However, we may partake of these pleasures only in a manner of *kedushah*.

I read in a sefer that it is impossible for a person not to feel pleasure when having relations with his wife. Along with the commandment (*Bereishit* 1:28), "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" and the obligation of man to fulfill the mitzvah of *onah* (*Shemot* 21:10), Hashem has given him the ability to experience gratification when performing this mitzvah, because otherwise the perpetuation of mankind would be jeopardized. The pleasure does not contradict *kedushah*. It is actually part of the reward that Hashem bestows upon one who abstains from physical contact with his wife during the period of her *niddah*, sanctifying and elevating himself, and only having relations with her when she is *tehorah* and permitted.

A person who constantly seeks to elevate and sanctify himself in *kedushah* and *taharah* will be able to testify, when he will ascend to the Heavenly Court, that he indeed guarded his *kedushah*.

Torah Scholars Are Compared to Kohanim

"Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

The Kohanim were warned in this pasuk not to become *tamei* through contact with a deceased person, because they are sanctified by serving Hashem. Similarly, Am Yisrael were warned in the previous parashah (ibid. 19:2), "You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d," since their mission is also to serve Hashem. However, the *kedushah* of the Kohanim is greater than the *kedushah* of Am Yisrael. Therefore, a separate parashah is dedicated to Kohanim, describing their added *kedushah*, which manifests itself in the prohibition to become *tamei*, except for participating in the burial of their closest relatives.

There are other people who are considered just like Kohanim. These are the Torah scholars. They correspond to Shevet Levi, who serve Hashem (*Rambam*, *Shemittah and Yovel* 13:13). They also have special limitations in order to safeguard their *kedushah* (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shemot* 343), as it says (*Tehillim* 12:7), "The words of Hashem are pure." The Kohanim and the Torah scholars are like the king's legions, who escort him everywhere he goes. Because of their proximity to the king, they must exercise added caution in their behavior.

There is a story told about the Chafetz Chaim, zy"a, who asked a visiting Rabbi why he did not consider himself a Kohen. He clarified his question by explaining that although the Rabbi's father was not a Kohen, every person has the ability to adopt the unique qualities of Shevet Levi by learning Torah. Shevet Levi's elevated status was established when they were in Egypt and defied enslavement by dedicating themselves

exclusively to learning Torah. Whoever assumes this conduct connects to the essence of Shevet Levi.

The Kedushah of Am Yisrael

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

This pasuk hints to an important lesson. Am Yisrael is destined to be a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation. Therefore, they are obligated to sanctify their speech and exercise caution not to speak nonsense. However, if they abuse their power of speech, they will ultimately violate their *kedushah* through *tumat keri*.

The Elevated Status of the Kohen Gadol

"Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people"

(*Vayikra* 21:1)

The Torah forbids Kohanim to become *tamei* through contact with the dead, except for their seven closest relatives: their father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. Since the Torah knows that a person cannot bear to refrain from participating in the burial of his closest relatives, the Torah permits the Kohen to become tamei on their account when they die.

Although a Kohen is permitted to become *tamei* on account of his seven closest relatives, the Kohen Gadol is forbidden to do so. He does not even practice the laws of *onein* and continues to serve in the Sanctuary despite his close relative's death (*Zevachim* 16a). This corresponds to the words of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 21:10-12), "The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren… He shall not come to any souls of the dead; he shall not make himself impure for his father or his mother. He shall not leave the Sanctuary, and he will not defile the Sanctuary of his G-d."

It is difficult to understand how the Torah, that recognizes the depths of a person's emotions, prohibited the Kohen Gadol to become *tamei* on account of his relatives. He is human; how is he expected to rise to the challenge of subduing his grief and refraining from becoming *tamei* on account of his close relatives? This is explained by the words "The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren." It implies that the Kohen Gadol is in a different category than the other Kohanim, because he is exalted above his brethren. Since he is on a loftier level, he is infinitely closer to Hashem, regarding Hashem as his father and mother.

A person who delves in the study of Torah is on a similar level. This is expressed in the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:6) with the words, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation." Who are the "kingdom of ministers"? They are the Torah scholars (*Gittin* 62a). Just as the Kohen Gadol does not cease from his service in the sacrifice of *korbanot* even when his father or mother die, likewise a person who is totally immersed in the study of Torah is oblivious to all other matters.

Once, when I visited my mentor, the gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian, zt"l, I asked him to give me some words of guidance, which would direct me in all my endeavors. He responded with the following story. When the *Ketzot Hachoshen* would get ready to begin learning Torah, he would open the Gemara and begin to cry, quoting the words of Tehillim (50:16), "To the wicked, G-d said, 'To what purpose do you recount My decrees?'" Only after soundly admonishing himself, doing complete teshuvah, would he calm down and begin to learn Torah with awe.

In contrast, how do we approach learning Torah? Many people first browse through the newspaper, light a cigarette, prepare a steaming cup of coffee, and only afterwards listlessly open a sefer and leaf through its pages. However, a person who is like the Kohen Gadol, exalted above his brethren, experiences something entirely different. His whole approach to Torah is with trembling and awe.

The Kohen Gadol's Responsibility to His Father and Mother

"The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren … shall not come near any dead person; he shall not contaminate himself to his father or mother"

(*Vayikra* 21:10-11)

How did Hashem require the Kohen Gadol to withstand the challenge of mourning his father and his mother? This is because the Kohen Gadol, who elevated himself constantly until he was worthy of entering the inner chambers of the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, did not consider his father and mother as his closest kin. To him, his father and mother were Hashem and the Torah. His father was Hashem, and his mother was the Torah.

Learning Ahavat Hashem from the Kohen Gadol

"The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren – upon whose head the anointment oil has been poured or who has been inaugurated to don the vestments – shall not leave his head unshorn and shall not rend his garments. He shall not come near any dead person; he shall not contaminate himself to his father or mother"

(*Vayikra* 21:10-11)

Hashem told Moshe to command the Kohanim that they should not become *tamei* through contact with the dead, except for his seven

closest relatives: his father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. However, the Kohen Gadol was forbidden to become *tamei* even on account of his closest relatives, as in the example of Aharon Hakohen, who was not allowed to participate in the burial of his two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who died in the sanctification of Hashem's Name. The Kohen Gadol must subdue his emotions, reserving them only for the service of Hashem.

It is truly amazing how a Kohen Gadol was capable of controlling his instinctive concern for his close relatives because the Torah commanded him to do so. He had to submit all his love reserved for family to Hashem, fulfilling His will.

For example, Rabbi Akiva left his home and separated from his wife for twelve years. After this long period of time, in which he had not visited his house nor seen his wife, he returned home. However, while still outside, he heard his wife saying to her neighbor that she would be happy even if her husband would stay away learning Torah for another twelve years, because of her overwhelming appreciation for Torah. When Rabbi Akiva heard this, he did not hesitate for a moment and immediately returned to the Beit Hamidrash for another twelve years, without even entering his house and greeting his wife (*Ketubot* 63a).

It is unfathomable to imagine how Rabbi Akiva was able to leave his home for such a long period of time. Moreover, when he was already standing at the entrance of the house, he did not enter after hearing his wife's declaration. The only possible way to explain Rabbi Akiva's resolve is to attribute it to the burning love that he and his wife shared for Torah. For this reason they were able to control and subdue their instinctive emotions, reserving them for the Torah alone. From this we learn that when a person tastes the flavor of Torah and becomes aware of Hashem's awesome Presence, everything else becomes insignificant compared to the desire to cleave to Hashem and fulfill His will.

Similarly, when Yaakov Avinu met his beloved son Yosef after many long years of separation, during which he thought that he had died,

Yaakov did not cry on Yosef's shoulders, but chose to recite Kriyat Shema, which is a declaration of exclusive love and dedication to Hashem (*Rashi*, *Bereishit* 46:29). This teaches us how overwhelming his love was for Hashem.

These examples shed light on how the Kohen Gadol was able to overcome his instinctive feelings of affinity for his family members and dedicate them for Hashem instead. Since the service of the Kohen Gadol was entirely for the sake of Heaven, demanding undivided attention in fulfilling Hashem's will, there remained no room in his heart for other affiliations. Therefore, he was capable of refraining from *tumah*, even if it meant abstaining from participating in the burial of his closest relatives.

Hashem Is Compared to the Kohen Gadol; Yisrael to His Wife

"A widow, and a divorcee, and a chalalah, a zonah – he shall not marry these; only a virgin of his people shall he take as a wife"

(*Vayikra* 21:14)

This law refers to a Kohen Gadol, who is not allowed to marry a widow or divorcee. He may also not remarry a woman whom he had previously divorced. Chazal (*Zevachim* 102a) say that Hashem is compared to the Kohen Gadol, and Am Yisrael is compared to the wife of a Kohen Gadol. This gives rise to a question. A Kohen Gadol is not allowed to remarry his divorcee, and in addition, if his wife was held captive and later released, he cannot resume relations with her, because of the possibility that she was violated after being captured (*Ketubot* 22a). How then is Am Yisrael, who is held captive by the *Yetzer Hara*, and occasionally distanced from

Hashem, able to return to Hashem if He is compared to a Kohen Gadol? After all, if Am Yisrael is compared to His wife, it would be prohibited to reunite according to the terms of the Torah.

In truth, Hashem never divorced Am Yisrael. Even if at times He exhibits an angry countenance, Am Yisrael continues to remain bound to Hashem and favorable to Him. Hashem's conduct can be compared to a father who becomes angry at his son. Although he may banish him, he will always remain his son, no matter what, as it says (*Tehillim* 91:15), "I am with him in distress." Even when Hashem exiles His people, making them suffer, He joins in their pain. Hashem can always return Am Yisrael to Him, since He remains bonded with Am Yisrael through thick or thin. There is no contradiction in this to the laws of the Kohen Gadol.

Physical Flaws vs. Spiritual Flaws

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aharon, saying: Any man of your offspring throughout their generations in whom there will be a blemish shall not come near to offer the bread of his G-d"

(*Vayikra* 21:16-17)

"Moshe spoke to Aharon and to his sons, and to all the Children of Israel"

(*ibid.* vs. 24)

The Torah prohibits a Kohen who is blemished to serve in the Sanctuary, as it says, "Any man of your offspring throughout their

generations in whom there will be a blemish shall not come near to offer the bread of his G-d." The Torah further states that Moshe Rabbeinu transmitted these laws to Aharon and his sons and to all of Bnei Yisrael. It is perplexing why these laws were significant to Am Yisrael, since they were only relevant for Kohanim. It seems as if it was only necessary for Moshe to inform Aharon and his sons about these laws. Rashi explains (ibid. 21, 24) that this commandment was "to alert the court, i.e., to make the court responsible, with regard to the Kohanim keeping the commandments that apply to them alone." According to Rashi, it seems that it would have been sufficient to write, "Moshe spoke to Aharon and to his sons and to the courts."

It is also puzzling why Hashem punished the Kohanim suffering from blemishes, not allowing them to serve in the Sanctuary. It would seem that since Hashem is compassionate, He would have mercy on them and not add to their distress. We can explain this point according to Kabbalah, which reveals that every limb in a person's body corresponds to its spiritual component. When there is a blemish in a physical limb, it testifies that there is a blemish in its spiritual source. Therefore, the blemish of a Kohen did not signify a physical blemish alone, but indicated an inherent spiritual lack. This is why Hashem did not allow disabled Kohanim to serve in the Sanctuary.

Perhaps we can explain the relevance this commandment has to Bnei Yisrael in the following way. Every Jew must attempt to achieve spiritual perfection so that no spiritual blemish should flaw his *neshamah*, preventing him from cleaving to Hashem in *kedushah*. Just as a Kohen with a blemish is not able to serve in the Sanctuary, so too, a Jew with a spiritual blemish is unable to achieve greatness and cleave to Hashem with *kedushah*.

The Son of the Israelite Woman

"The son of an Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel; they contended in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and the Israelite man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed – so they brought him to Moshe; the name of his mother was Shelomit the daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan"

(*Vayikra* 24:10-11)

The Torah relates that when Am Yisrael journeyed in the Wilderness, a man, who was the son of an Israelite woman called Shelomit bat Divri, and the son of an Egyptian man, began to argue with another person. In the midst of their argument over pitching his tent in his camp, the man began to curse Hashem. Chazal (*Tanchuma*, *Shemot* 9) say that this man was the son of the Egyptian man whom Moshe Rabbeinu had killed by pronouncing the Ineffable Name, when he saw him mercilessly beating a Jew.

This man was born from the union of the Egyptian man and his mother, Shelomit bat Divri, after the Egyptian man violated her as a result of her immodest behavior. She was accustomed to chatting with everyone, men and woman alike, and inquiring about their welfare. According to the law, this man was a Jew, since his mother was Jewish (*Yevamot* 17a). Consequently, he had been present at the Revelation at Har Sinai when the Torah was given. It is difficult to comprehend how a person who heard Hashem's mighty voice and witnessed the wondrous miracles first hand could dare to profane Hashem's Name publicly.

There is a similar story told by Chazal (*Sukkah* 56b) about Miriam bat Bilga, who was the daughter of the Kohen during the era of the Greek rule.

One day, Miriam entered the Beit Hamikdash and kicked at the Mizbeach. She scornfully turned against Hashem and voiced heretical views. This also arouses wonder. How could the daughter of a Kohen behave in such a despicable way? It would be expected of the daughter of a Kohen to be more respectful and to sanctify Hashem's Name.

Everything is dependent on one's initial education. Although Miriam was the daughter of a Kohen, she did not necessarily receive the proper education to lead a pure lifestyle. There are many people who are hypocritical. On the outside they portray themselves as righteous tzaddikim. However, in the confines of their homes, they behave as they please. Similarly, the man who cursed Hashem's Name evidently did not receive a genuinely pure education. This is obvious, since his father was an Egyptian, and his mother is blamed in the Torah for behaving immodestly, causing the Egyptian to violate her. Her name (שלומית בת דברי) testifies to her essence: that she would chat (דבר) with every person and inquire about their welfare (שלום). Since this man did not stem from a pure source and lacked pure education from youth, he ultimately departed from the ways of the Torah and cursed Hashem, *rachmana litzlan*.

This teaches the great importance of proper education. It demands the untiring efforts of the parents. Since generally the source determines its fate, the initial education of a child determines his future, for good or bad.

Behar

The Land Is Entrusted as a Deposit

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-2)

Why does the Torah emphasize that specifically the mitzvah of *shemittah* was transmitted at Har Sinai? All the mitzvot were presented there. In addition, what is the purpose for the mitzvah of *shemittah* itself?

In parashat *Shemot* (3:22), Hashem commands, "Each woman shall request from her neighbor and from the one who lives in her house silver vessels, golden vessels, and garments." The connotation of the word ושאלה (request) indicates to borrow something or taking something with the intention of returning it. It is a surprising choice of words, since Hashem knew that Am Yisrael were destined to leave Egypt and never return. When they took the belongings of the Egyptians, it was most certainly not with intention of giving them back. If so, why does the pasuk use the word שאלה (borrow) and not the word לקיחה (take) when describing Am Yisrael's actions?

The word "borrow" imparts an important lesson. Hashem wanted Am Yisrael to understand that the possessions that they gathered from the Egyptians were not payment for their work during their years of slavery. Even though it may have seemed to them that they were rightfully entitled to receive compensation for their work, all that they had acquired was considered "borrowed" money, because it did not actually belong to them. It was in their possession only as a deposit. In the end, only Hashem could decide how it should be dispensed, and how much would be allotted to each individual. They were not getting paid for their slavery to the Egyptians, because in reality they were never slaves to them, only to Hashem, who intentionally delivered am Yisrael into their hands.

When Moshe Rabbeinu was about to redeem Am Yisrael from the Egyptians, they had already descended to the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash*, beginning of parashat *Yitro*). They were only a step away from the fiftieth level, from which they could not have been redeemed (*Ohr Hachaim*, *Devarim* 32:10). Hashem quickly took Am Yisrael out, with a "strong hand and outstretched arm," only because they were destined to accept the Torah (*Shemot* 3:12). Consequently, it is in the merit of the Torah that Am Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt, since they were not worthy of redemption in their own right. If not for their eventual declaration of "We shall do and we shall obey," all of us today would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.

Many mitzvot of the Torah require self-sacrifice and absolute dedication. This is especially true of the mitzvah of *shemittah*, since it demands of a person to overcome his instinctive passion for money (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1a). After successfully producing a thriving crop from one's land, Hashem commands him to abandon his produce in the seventh year, and let the public help themselves to it freely. He must do so despite the financial harm that such conduct is liable to cause him.

Hashem wants to teach His people that their land and possessions do not belong to them, but are only given to them as a deposit. Hashem hinted at this when Bnei Yisrael took the possessions of their Egyptian captors. Hashem told them to "borrow" the belongings, and not "take"

them, in order to impart to them the lesson that in truth they were not worthy of the booty, and it did not actually belong to them. It was only entrusted to them as a deposit.

This concept is also manifested through the mitzvah of *shemittah*. It reminds Bnei Yisrael that the land and its produce are not their personal possessions, but are only deposited in their hands. Hashem is the one who ultimately decides if they are worthy of continuing to occupy the land, or if they will be exiled from it.

Chazal (*Shabbat* 33a) explain that one of the reasons that Bnei Yisrael were exiled from their land is because they did not fulfill the mitzvah of *shemittah*. This strengthens the awareness that one's land and possessions ultimately belong to Hashem. He Who deposited it in the hands of a person may also retract it from him if he is unworthy. It is all dependent upon his deeds and the manner in which he performs his mitzvot. Am Yisrael inherited Eretz Yisrael in order to fulfill all the mitzvot of the Torah in it, and specifically the mitzvot that are dependent upon the Land. When Am Yisrael turn against Hashem and His Torah and neglect these mitzvot, they lose their right to live in the Land of Hashem. Consequently, Eretz Yisrael ejects them.

The Torah mentions Har Sinai in reference to the mitzvah of *shemittah* in order to teach us that the only reason that Am Yisrael was redeemed from Egypt, merited acquiring the belongings of the Egyptians and the booty at Yam Suf, and ultimately inheriting Eretz Yisrael is all because when they stood at Har Sinai, they accepted the Torah. Otherwise they would not have been redeemed from Egypt, nor inherited the Land. Their only right to Eretz Yisrael is because of their study of the Torah and fulfillment of its mitzvot. The Torah testifies to this in the pasuk (*Shemot* 13:18), "וחמשים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים – And the Children of Israel were armed when they went up from Egypt." Rashi explains that "the word חמשים can be understood as being derived from חמשה (five). Taken in this sense, it implies that only one out of five Israelites departed from Egypt, and the other four fifths died in Egypt during the three days of darkness." Which people died in the plague of darkness and were not

redeemed? Those who did not want to accept upon themselves the yoke of Hashem's kingship and leave Egypt.

In a similar vein, a person's expenses for Shabbat and the festivals are not included in his income, as it says (*Beitzah* 15b), "Borrow on my account, and I will repay." One will not feel a loss due to the expenditures he makes for Shabbat and festivals. Moreover, whoever is particular in purchasing meat, fish, and wine for Shabbat will be reimbursed many times over. Consequently, a person should not worry how he will earn his livelihood if he closes his shop on Shabbat, since Shabbat is the source of all blessings. Whoever guards Shabbat is guaranteed manifold blessings from Heaven. Similarly the year of *Shemittah* begins in the seventh year, corresponding to Shabbat. Whoever is particular in fulfilling this mitzvah, and allows his land to lie fallow, without worrying how he will earn an income, is promised by Hashem (*Vayikra* 25:8), "I will ordain My blessing." Not only will he not incur a loss because of *shemittah*, he will merit overwhelming abundance in its merit.

In the year of *Shemittah* 5768, the government wickedly decided not to import fruit and vegetables from Turkey, Jordan, and Europe. Instead, they encouraged the farmers to grow crops locally, blatantly trampling over all the laws of *shemittah*. They schemed that since there would be a terrible shortage of permissible fruit and vegetables, the prices would escalate sky high, and many families would be compelled to spend huge sums of money, which would have been avoided by importing products from overseas. In the Galil, there were farmers who agreed with the government's decision and planted crops in the seventh year. However, soon after planting their fields, there was a very severe hail storm that destroyed all the crops, causing them heavy losses. On the other hand, the farmers who meticulously heeded the mitzvah of *shemittah* were not affected by the hail, since they had not planted their fields.

From this account, we see that Hashem protects those who observe His commandments. Conversely, those who attempt to outwit Hashem, are quickly shown Who is the true Master of the world.

Har Sinai is mentioned in reference to the mitzvah of *shemittah* to emphasize that the Land is bestowed on condition. If Am Yisrael observe the mitzvot of the Torah that were given on Har Sinai, including the mitzvah of *shemittah* that requires unswerving dedication (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1a), then the land will remain in their possession. However, if they choose to become lax in their observance, and they continue to work the land even in the year of *Shemittah*, then the land will reject them (*Tanchuma*, *Behar* 1), reminding them Who is the real Master of the world.

At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael became clearly aware of Hashem's Presence, which was revealed to them there when He proclaimed, "I am Hashem." Similarly, whoever observes *shemittah* strengthens his *emunah*. He demonstrates that he is solely dependent upon Hashem to provide him with his needs, just as an infant relies on the compassion of his parents. He places his trust in Hashem, Who sustains all living creatures, that he will devise an alternative method of providing him his livelihood. The mitzvah of *shemittah* arouses *emunah* in the hearts of people just as intensely as the Revelation at Har Sinai did, when Hashem spoke directly to Bnei Yisrael.

In Summary

- Why is Har Sinai mentioned specifically in connection to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? Furthermore, why did the Torah command Bnei Yisrael "ושאלה אשה משכנתה – Each woman shall **request** from her neighbor" gold and silver, since they had no intention of returning the items? Hashem wanted to teach Bnei Yisrael that they were not entitled to the wealth of Egypt because they were slaves there, but it was only granted to them as a deposit. Ultimately, Hashem decides who is destined to maintain his wealth.
- Similarly, the mitzvah of *shemittah* reminds Am Yisrael that the land is not their personal possession. It is only given to them as a deposit. Therefore, they must leave it fallow in the seventh year according to Hashem's directive.

- The Torah mentions Har Sinai specifically in reference to *shemittah* to teach Am Yisrael that their entire claim to inheriting Eretz Yisrael is only because they accepted the Torah at Har Sinai. If they observe the Torah, they are worthy of settling the Land. However, if they do not heed the Torah, they are exiled from it.
- In addition, the mitzvah of *shemittah* strengthens one's emunah, since a person becomes totally dependent upon Hashem's compassion. This is similar to the *emunah* experienced at the time that Am Yisrael stood at the foot of Har Sinai and clearly saw the *Shechinah* of Hashem.

Har Sinai and the Mitzvah of Shemittah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-2)

What is the relevance of Har Sinai to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? Since the Torah mentions Har Sinai in connection to s*hemittah*, it indicates that there is a lesson to be learned from it. Rashi explains (ibid. 25:1) that it is written here to teach us that just as the general laws of *shemittah*, as well as all their fine points were stated at Sinai, so too, the general rules and all the fine points of all the commandments were stated at Sinai.

How does this answer the question? Why would one assume that the other mitzvot and laws were not given at Har Sinai? Am Yisrael believes that everything written in the Torah is the word of Hashem. Certainly these directives were transmitted to Bnei Yisrael as they stood at Har

Sinai at *Matan Torah*. Furthermore, we believe that every future novel insight in Torah was already mentioned at Har Sinai (*Vayikra Rabbah* 22a). How much more so is this true of mitzvot that are clearly stated in the Torah.

There is another question that arises from the words of the pasuk. Concerning the mitzvah of *shemittah*, it says (*Vayikra* 25:2) "The land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem." On the other hand, regarding the command for Bnei Yisrael to observe Shabbat, it says (*Shemot* 20:8), "Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it," and also (ibid. 31:16), "The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbat." Regarding the mitzvah of Shabbat, it does not state, "The land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem" as it does in reference to *shemittah*. How is the mitzvah of *shemittah* different than Shabbat, since on Shabbat it is also forbidden to work the land?

Moreover, it says in Tehillim (115:16) "As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem's; but the earth He has given to mankind." Why did the pasuk repeat the word "heaven" twice, while the word "earth" is mentioned only once? In what way are the heavens unique?

All these questions are interconnected, as we shall explain.

Hashem created the world during the six days of Creation, and He instilled His Name in each creation (*Sha'arei Kedushah* 3a). It is Hashem's Name within each creation that enables it to exist. The moment that Hashem removes His Name, the creation loses its ability to continue and disappears. This is how all animals eventually die, and likewise how flowers and leaves wither and fade away. Every person recognizes that Hashem is the Master of the world. When His Name permeates nature, then it thrives. However, the moment He removes His Presence from it, it wilts and loses its essence of life.

Chazal (*Avot* 4:16) say, "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." This indicates that this world is the world of action and deeds, whereas the World to Come is the world where one receives reward or

punishment. There is no possibility to mend one's ways and do teshuvah in the World to Come. Let us imagine a person who is preparing to encounter the king, who receives people in his chamber. An intelligent person will be particular to groom himself properly while he is still in the lobby leading to the chamber, and will not leave it to the last minute, when he is already in the presence of the king. Just as this is clear regarding a human king, how much more should this be understood in regard to the Master of the World.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says (*Avot* 3:7), "One who walks on the road while reviewing [a Torah lesson] but interrupts his review and exclaims, 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!' – Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul." This alludes to a person who is coursing diligently through the depths of Torah, but suddenly his *Yetzer Hara* assaults him, causing his mind to wander from Torah in order to observe his surroundings. His attention is entirely averted from his studies, and therefore he is liable for the death penalty. This statement of Rabbi Shimon is perplexing. If a person is aware that a short break in learning Torah would make him liable for death, he would fear studying Torah at all. On the other hand, if Rabbi Shimon determined this to be true, and it is quoted in the Mishnah, it indicates that it is possible to successfully undertake this assignment.

We can explain that "one who walks on the road" is referring to a person who believes that Hashem exists and that He created the world. Therefore, he must always be aware of Hashem's Presence, as it says in *Tehillim* (16:8), "I have set Hashem before me always." According to the mystical analysis of the Mishnah, the word אילן (tree) has the *gematria* of ninety-one, which corresponds to the *gematria* of the sum of Hashem's Names י-ה-ו-ה and א-דוני. Thus, the word אילן alludes to Hashem's Names with which He created the world, giving Creation the ability to exist. The tree also alludes to the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 3:18), "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy."

In light of this, if a person interrupts his study of Torah and says "How beautiful is this tree!" it indicates that for a moment he ceased to be aware

of the Presence of Hashem in the world, and in the existence of His Name instilled in every creation, including the tree. Had he been aware of it, he would not have interrupted his learning in order to suddenly notice the beauty of the tree. The awareness of Hashem's Names which corresponds to אילן (tree) should be constant. Therefore, if one stopped learning because he became aware of the magnificence of a tree, it indicates that he had formerly been distracted from Hashem's Presence in the world. This is why he is liable for death.

Whoever behaves in this disgraceful manner resembles a person who did not properly prepare himself before he entered the king's chamber. Although he should have groomed himself while still in the lobby, his disregard for the king's glory caused him to stand before the king in an unworthy state.

The word "heavens" is repeated in the pasuk (*Tehillim* 115:16), "As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem's," in order to inform a person that he, too, has a place reserved for him in Heaven. Initially, the heavens were created for Hashem. However, if a person elevates his character traits, fulfilling the pasuk (ibid. 16:8): "I have set Hashem before me always," then he will merit dwelling in Gan Eden after his death. In Gan Eden, the tzaddikim crowd around the presence of the *Shechinah*. Regarding this Chazal (*Avot* 6:4) state, "You are praiseworthy" – in this world; "and all is well with you" – in the World to Come."

This line of thought helps us understand why Har Sinai is mentioned in reference to *shemittah*. Hashem told Bnei Yisrael that the Land was aware of its obligation to rest in the seventh year from the day that it was created by Hashem's Name. This is especially true since Hashem referred to the Torah when creating the world (*Zohar* II, 161a), fashioning it according to its mitzvot. This is why the mitzvah of *shemittah* is ingrained in the earth. The earth's entire existence is dependent upon Bnei Yisrael fulfilling Hashem's will. It was initially founded upon this condition. The earth agreed to lie fallow in the seventh year, as it says (*Vayikra* 25:2), "The land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem." On its part, the earth

is prepared to cease work on *shemittah* to adhere to the conditions agreed upon during the six days of Creation.

This sheds light upon the reason that the Torah specified that the land should rest on *shemittah* in comparison to Shabbat, where there is no mention of abstaining from working the land. The command to rest on Shabbat is directed at a person, obligating him to cease his work. However, the mitzvah of *shemittah* is associated with the land.

Since the earth already agreed to fulfill the mitzvah of *shemittah* upon its formation, man cannot excuse himself from keeping this mitzvah by saying that the earth's needs must be tended to. Since the mitzvah of *shemittah* requires courageous strength (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1a), and at times even self-sacrifice and loss of income, Har Sinai is mentioned in reference to it, in order to encourage people. It reminds one how Am Yisrael stood at Har Sinai and proclaimed "We shall do and we shall obey" with perfect faith. They realized clearly that accepting the Torah obligated them to ultimately fulfill its mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael, the Promised Land. They trusted that Hashem, Who had taken them out of Egypt and split the sea, would guide them through the Wilderness and sustain them. Even after bringing them into Eretz Yisrael, He would continue to provide them with a livelihood.

Am Yisrael possessed strong *emunah* when they stood at Har Sinai. Likewise, all future generations should courageously perform the mitzvah of *shemittah*, despite the hardships that it entails. They should trust with unwavering faith that Hashem will sustain them in the seventh year, despite ceasing to work the land, just as He had sustained Bnei Yisrael upon their Exodus from Egypt, bringing down manna from Heaven for them.

In Summary

- Rashi asks what the connection is between the mitzvah of *shemittah* and Har Sinai. He explains that just as the mitzvah of *shemittah* was transmitted with all its fine points at Har Sinai, likewise all the mitzvot, including their fine points, were given there.

- Why do we have to specify that the mitzvah of *shemittah* was given on Har Sinai? How does *shemittah* differ from Shabbat? In reference to *shemittah* it says, "The land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem," whereas concerning Shabbat this is not stated.
- Furthermore, we may wonder why the word "heaven" is repeated in the pasuk, "As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem's."
- Hashem's Name is instilled in every creation, giving it the ability to exist. One who interrupts his study of Torah and says, "How beautiful is this tree" is liable for death. The word אילן (tree) has the same *gematria* as the Names of Hashem, which are the essence of Creation. Therefore, if a person suddenly becomes impressed with an aspect of Creation, it demonstrates that he momentarily forgot Hashem's Presence, which is instilled in every creation. This makes him liable for death. The land is aware of its purpose, since it had already agreed to lie fallow during *shemittah*, when it was created during the six days of Creation, as it says, "The land shall observe a Sabbath." On the other hand, Shabbat is different. There are many prohibitions regarding Shabbat that do not concern the land at all and are dependent upon man abstaining from work.
- A person should prepare himself in the "lobby," referring to this world, before he enters the "banquet hall," referring to the World to Come. If he does so, he merits eternal life. This is why the word "heaven" is repeated in the pasuk, "As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem's." In truth, the heavens are Hashem's domain. However, if a person follows in the right path, he ultimately merits a place in the heavens, dwelling among the tzaddikim.
- Har Sinai is mentioned in reference to the mitzvah of *shemittah* to signify that just as Am Yisrael had proclaimed with complete faith "We shall do and we shall obey" at Har Sinai, and believed that Hashem would sustain them in the Wilderness, so too, a person should fully trust that Hashem will provide him with his needs in the year of *shemittah*.

Guests of Hashem

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-2)

Many commentaries discuss why the Torah specifies that the mitzvah of *shemittah* was given at Har Sinai. After all, the entire Torah, including all the mitzvot, was presented there. Why is *shemittah* singled out? Rashi explains (ibid. 25:1) that just as the general laws of *shemittah*, including all their fine points, were stated at Sinai, so too, the general rules and all the fine points of all the commandments were stated at Sinai.

Nevertheless, it is still perplexing why specifically the mitzvah of *shemittah* was selected to convey this lesson, since all the mitzvot were transmitted at Har Sinai in detail. In order to explain this, we must first note the continuation of the pasuk, concerning the mitzvah of *Yovel*. After seven cycles of *shemittah*, there is a year of *yovel*. Then, in addition to allowing the land to lie fallow, in the fiftieth year, all slaves are freed, and all properties purchased during the past forty-nine years are returned to their original owners. The Torah specifies the method in which to herald the year of *yovel* (*Vayikra* 25:9): "You shall sound a broken blast on the shofar, in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month; on Yom Kippur you shall sound the shofar throughout your land."

Only after the sounding of the shofar, were all slaves set free and estates returned to their original owners (*Rosh Hashanah* 8b). Commentaries confirm that even if Yom Kippur occurs on Shabbat it is permissible to blow the shofar to herald the *Yovel*. This mitzvah was difficult for masters of slaves and landowners. In contrast, it brought great joy to the slaves and to those who had sold their estates during the past

forty-nine years, since in the year of *Yovel* their property was returned to them. Clearly, this mitzvah requires enormous self-sacrifice, since it undoubtedly threatens a person's financial status.

The Torah emphasizes that the sound of the shofar signified that the time had come to free slaves and return property. Why was the sound of the shofar specifically chosen to be the sign that the year of *Yovel* had begun?

The sound of the shofar reminds people of the Revelation at Har Sinai, when the Torah was given. It was heard throughout the camp (*Rabbeinu Bachya*, *Bereishit* 22:13). The shofar's blasts aroused trepidation and trembling in the hearts of the people, until their *neshamot* departed out of fear. Likewise, the entire Creation stood silent; the birds did not chirp and the cows did not low (*Shemot Rabbah* 29:9). The sound of the shofar reminded Bnei Yisrael that just as they had all been willing at Har Sinai to accept upon themselves the entire Torah, proclaiming, "We will do and we will obey" (*Shemot* 24:7), likewise on the *Shemittah* and *Yovel* year, Am Yisrael should be prepared to listen to Hashem and fulfill these mitzvot, despite their difficulty.

In addition, the sound of the shofar reminds people of the circumstances leading to *Matan Torah*. Bnei Yisrael had been redeemed from Egypt, where they had been enslaved by the Egyptians. Just as in those days Bnei Yisrael had personally experienced what it was like to be a slave who is freed, so too, they should sympathize with their slaves and free them happily in the year of *Yovel*. Thus, the shofar's blasts help them execute the requirements of these mitzvot with enthusiastic joy.

When describing Moshe Rabbeinu's ascent to Heaven to receive the Torah, the pasuk says (*Tehillim* 68:19), "You ascended on High, You have taken captives, You took gifts of man and even of rebels." Why did Hashem ask Moshe to ascend to Heaven in order to receive the Torah? Could Hashem not have given it to Moshe on earth? This question is further reinforced by the danger that Moshe encountered in Heaven. The angels wanted to kill him, saying, "What is a mortal doing among us?"

Moshe was saved by grabbing on to the Heavenly Throne. He explained to the angels that Am Yisrael require the Torah because only they possess a *Yetzer Hara*. Upon hearing this, the angels were reconciled, and showered him with gifts. Even the Angel of Death revealed to him the secret of the *ketoret*, which has the ability to halt a plague (*Shabbat* 89a).

Hashem wanted Moshe Rabbeinu to ascend, despite the dangers, in order to prove to him and to the entire nation that when a person cleaves to the Torah, he is treated as a guest of Hashem. Consequently, he does not have to fear any persecutors. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded in escaping being harmed by the angels because of his attachment to Torah, so too, Am Yisrael will be protected from all their enemies if they listen to the voice of Hashem.

Both the mitzvah of *shemittah* and the mitzvah of *yovel* require much self-sacrifice (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1a). Har Sinai is mentioned in reference to these mitzvot to remind us how Moshe Rabbeinu merited protection from Hashem when he was a guest of Hashem in Heaven. He ultimately received gifts and was granted the secret of the *ketoret*. Similarly, a person acquires the status of being Hashem's guest when he listens to Hashem's commands and ceases to work the land in the seventh year, returns property to its initial owner on *Yovel*, and frees his slaves. It can be compared to a king's guest, who receives royal treatment and is protected by the king's guards.

Apart from meriting protection, one who cleaves to the Torah is also showered with gifts from Hashem, just as Moshe Rabbeinu received from the angels, even from the Angel of Death. This was because Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated his absolute dedication to Torah and his aspiration to transmit it to the Chosen Nation.

When a person remembers that he is only a guest in this world, just as Moshe Rabbeinu was in Heaven, it is easier for him to perform these mitzvot, which demand self-sacrifice. Since Hashem recognizes the extent of the sacrifice necessary, He promises explicitly to those who execute

His will (*Vayikra* 25:21), "I will ordain My blessing for you." He will award him with abundance.

Once during the year of *shemittah*, a story was publicized about two neighboring landowners, one who meticulously adhered to the laws of *shemittah*, and the other who disregarded the mitzvah and worked his land as usual. Amazingly, in that year there were heavy rain storms that destroyed the entire crop of the landowner who planted his fields in the seventh year. All his financial investment and physical efforts went down the drain. In contrast, the neighbor who kept *shemittah* was saved from financial loss and trouble. Furthermore, in the eighth year, his land yielded a far greater abundance.

This demonstrates that when a person behaves like Hashem's guest in this world, Hashem provides him with success in his livelihood. However, when a person views himself as the master of the world, Hashem quickly proves to him who is the real Boss.

In Summary

- Why is Har Sinai mentioned specifically in reference to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? All the mitzvot were transmitted at Har Sinai with all their details. In addition, why was the sounding of the shofar chosen to herald the *Yovel*?
- The sound of the shofar reminds us of *Matan Torah*, when the shofar's blasts caused the entire nation to tremble. Just as at that time, Am Yisrael willingly accepted the Torah, so too, each person must be prepared to fulfill the mitzvot of *shemittah* and *yovel* in their entirety. Additionally, at *Matan Torah*, Am Yisrael still recalled how it felt to be a slave and appreciated their freedom. Consequently, they are required to demonstrate compassion for their slaves and free them happily on *yovel*. Thus, by mentioning Har Sinai in reference to *shemittah* and *yovel*, one is aroused to execute these mitzvot with enthusiasm and joy.
- Why did Hashem request that Moshe ascend to Heaven in order to receive the Torah, when He could have given it to him on Earth? This teaches us

that one who listens to Hashem and cleaves to His Torah is considered His guest. Consequently, he merits special protection. Likewise, one who fulfills the mitzvot of Hashem, including the mitzvot of *shemittah* and *yovel*, becomes worthy of Divine intervention, granting him much abundance and blessing, just as Moshe gained when ascending to Heaven to receive the Torah. Even the Angel of Death gave him a gift, revealing to him the secret of the *ketoret*.

A Nation That Dwells in Solitude

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying"

(*Vayikra* 25:1)

Chazal (*Shabbat* 89b) ask: Why is Har Sinai, where the Torah was given, specifically called by this name? This is because ever since the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, hatred permeates the world. The word סיני (Sinai) is similar to the word שנאה (hatred). Why did hatred result from the Giving of the Torah? Hashem had offered the Torah first to all the nations of the world, and they had refused to receive it. Only Bnei Yisrael proclaimed (*Shemot* 24:7) "We will do and we will obey." In fact, the nations of the world should rejoice over Am Yisrael's consent to accept the Torah. They had heard their prophet, Bilaam, determine that the world would not exist without Torah, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25), "If My covenant with the night and with the day would not be; had I not set up the laws of heaven and earth." This indicates that the world and all it inhabitants exist only in the merit of the Torah. Consequently, the nations should be grateful to Am Yisrael for undertaking the task, which ultimately sustains their very existence.

When Hashem offered the Torah to Am Yisrael, He said to them (*Shabbat* 88a), "If you agree to accept the Torah – fine. If not, there will be your burial." Since the entire world exists and is sustained only for the purpose of providing for Am Yisrael's needs, the nations would be destroyed if Bnei Yisrael would be eliminated. This is because they would lose their reason to exist. For this alone, the nations should have been grateful to Am Yisrael for accepting the Torah; at least not despise them.

Throughout history, Am Yisrael was constantly persecuted by the nations. Avraham Avinu was the first one to oppose their worldview and was thus called Avraham Ha'Ivri. He stood on one side of the world, and the entire world stood against him. This is how he established the Jewish people. Even before the Jewish Nation was established, intense hatred toward him was apparent. He was cast into a burning furnace because of his beliefs. Afterwards, Bnei Yisrael were exiled in Egypt and were brutally beaten and enslaved for 210 years. When they merited redemption and settled in their land, the kings of the world did not cease to battle them.

Eventually, the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, and thereafter, the second one. Bnei Yisrael were scattered among the nations, but this was not the end of their suffering. They continued to be persecuted by the Crusades, the Cossacks, the decree of the Cantonists, and more recently by the Third Reich, who brought a devastating Holocaust upon the Jewish settlements in Europe, annihilating millions of people. Ever since Am Yisrael has returned to their Land, there has been no peace. Each day their enemies rise against them to destroy them. If Hashem would not save them from their hands, in the merit of the Torah being learned in the Holy Land, they would be obliterated entirely, *chas v'shalom*.

A while ago, I saw in the *Sefer Hachinuch*, the following concerning the mitzvah of immersion in a *mikveh* (173): "It is a mitzvah to immerse in the *mikveh*, because the water purifies all that is *tamei*. The simple reason for this is because a person should consider himself after immersing as if he was created anew at that moment." Just as before Creation, the entire cosmos was full of water, likewise, the waters of the *mikveh* purify one's *neshamah*, to the extent that he is considered a new creation, born at that

moment. There are more references to this in the sefer of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, zt"l (*Likutei Moharan*, *Mehadura Kama* 56, *Likutei Eitzot*, *Mikveh*).

After reading this, I came to the conclusion that only a Jew can achieve such a lofty level of feeling reborn after immersing in a *mikveh*. It leads him to do teshuvah and renew his efforts to preserve his pristine state. In contrast, if one would tell a gentile to immerse himself in the *mikveh* and thereby purify his soul, he would undoubtedly scoff at it, since he could not fathom such a concept. Similarly, a gentile would not be able to comprehend the mitzvah of *niddah*, in which a woman is distanced from her husband for days, requiring much self-sacrifice and commitment. Only a Jewish soul, hewn from the Upper Spheres, is capable of fulfilling this mitzvah. I personally know a most admirable man, who was at one point forbidden to have relations with his wife for nearly four years, and he guarded himself strictly not to sin with her.

The nations sense that Am Yisrael is unique, differing from them in essence. This ideally should result in high esteem for them, and not hatred. One who attempts to rationalize the hatred of the nations throughout the generations will certainly fail to understand it. It is uncanny how the State of Israel, which is so small and can barely be identified on the map, attracts the hostility of every distant country. There is no logical explanation for it. We are compelled to conclude that it is simply a decree from Heaven, which was enacted on the day that the Torah was given on Har Sinai. Notwithstanding, this decree also serves to prevent the Jewish Nation from assimilating. Because of the virulent hatred of the nations toward us, they do not seek to marry us. In this way, Am Yisrael remains eternal, as an inextinguishable flame.

In order for Am Yisrael to survive as (*Bamidbar* 23:9) "a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations," the Torah commands us to abstain from forbidden foods and from drinking *yayin nesech* (*Shabbat* 17b). This is in order to prevent a Jew from dining together with a non-Jew, since this breeds affinity, which may eventually

lead to intermarrying. The Torah imposes various limitations in order to create a natural barrier between a Jew and a gentile.

Alternatively, a person is obligated to respect a gentile, since he is fashioned by Hashem (*Avot* 3:14). In addition, it is forbidden for a Jew to incite a gentile, so that it should not ultimately cause Hashem's Name to be desecrated. The Ben Ish Chai (*Shanah Rishonah*, *Ki Teitzei* 7) cites the words of *mekubalim*, who say that the reason that it is forbidden to steal from a non-Jew is in order to prevent the prosecution of the Ministering Angel of that gentile. Such prosecution could potentially rob a person of all the abundance in store for him. I remember that my father, zy"a, would benefit all his Arab neighbors and help them. In this way he would ultimately bring honor to Hashem. Nevertheless, one must tread carefully, guarding his Jewish identity that he was graced with, in order that "the eternity of Israel" should prevail.

In Summary

- Chazal say that ever since the Torah was given on Har Sinai, hatred descended to the world. This is why Har Sinai is called by this name, since it is a derivative of the word שנאה (hatred). Why do the nations hate us? On the contrary, they should honor Bnei Yisrael for sustaining the world by learning Torah. Had Bnei Yisrael not accepted the Torah, the nations would have lost their right to exist. Therefore, they should be grateful to Am Yisrael.
- Their hatred has no rational explanation. We are compelled to conclude that it is a decree from Heaven, which serves to prevent Bnei Yisrael from assimilating.
- The Torah commands a Jew to eat kosher food and forbids *yayin nesech*, in order to distance the Jew from the gentile. In this way, he will not assimilate.

♦ Notwithstanding the distance one must keep from the gentiles, he must show them respect and help them. In this way, Hashem's Name is sanctified.

It Is a Tree of Life for Those Who Grasp It

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-2)

What is the relevance of Har Sinai to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? After all, all the mitzvot were transmitted at Har Sinai. Why is Har Sinai mentioned specifically regarding this mitzvah? It indicates that there is a lesson to be learned. Rashi explains (ibid. 25:1) that it is written here to teach us that just as the general laws of *shemittah*, including all their fine points, were stated at Sinai, so too, the general rules and all the fine points of all the commandments were stated at Sinai. However, it is not clear how this answers the question, since this statement applies to all other mitzvot. Why is it mentioned specifically in connection to *shemittah*?

The Gemara explains (*Shabbat* 88b) that when Hashem requested Moshe Rabbeinu to ascend to Heaven, the Administering Angels wanted to burn him, saying, "What is a mortal doing among us?" When Moshe sensed that he was in danger, he turned to Hashem to save him from the angels. Hashem told him to grab on to the Heavenly Throne and to give them a satisfying response. Moshe Rabbeinu did as he was told, and while

holding on to the Heavenly Throne, he refuted the angels' argument. Thereafter, they did not seek to kill him anymore.

Why did Hashem tell Moshe to hold on to the Heavenly Throne and refute the arguments of the angels by himself? We would expect Hashem to defend Moshe against their accusations. It is natural that when a host invites a guest, he should protect his guest's life if his family members seek to harm him. Certainly, he would not turn to his guest and tell him to deal with his household members on his own. Likewise, we would expect Hashem to contend with the angels and remove Moshe from any danger. Why did Moshe grasp the Heavenly Throne in order to argue with the angels? Could Moshe not have answered them otherwise?

This teaches us an important lesson. Holding on to the Heavenly Throne resembles grasping the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 3:18), "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." This indicates that as long as a person holds on to the Torah, the Torah grants him life. It resembles a tree, which draws life from the water deep in the earth. Since the Torah is compared to a tree, we must grasp on to it with all our strength. In this way we will merit life.

Hashem directed Moshe to seize the Heavenly Throne and contend with the angels because it signified holding on to the Torah, which corresponds to the Heavenly Throne. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu was saved from the angels by grasping the Heavenly Throne, likewise those who cleave to Torah will be saved from danger and merit life. Obviously, Hashem could have refuted the arguments of the angels Himself. However, since Hashem wanted to teach this important principle, He instructed Moshe to personally grab on to the Heavenly Throne and contend with the angels. In this way, Am Yisrael would learn from his example that whoever clings to the Torah, merits being saved.

This sheds light upon the connection between Har Sinai and the mitzvah of *shemittah*. The mitzvah of *shemittah* requires much self-sacrifice and dedication. One must let his land lie fallow and abandon all his crops for a whole year. The nature of a person is to carefully guard

his property. However, because the Torah instructs each person to abandon his fields, one behaves in a manner contrary to his instinctive nature.

The mitzvah of s*hemittah* provides the foundation for all other mitzvot. Since a person trains himself to sacrifice his personal will in order to fulfill the will of Hashem, he becomes strengthened in his dedication and self-sacrifice for Hashem. Consequently, he is capable of performing all other mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh*. Thus if a person wants to fulfill the mitzvot given at Har Sinai, he should first be punctilious in performing the mitzvah of *shemittah*, which is the foundation of *mesirut nefesh*. Thereafter, he will have the fortitude to meticulously fulfill all the other mitzvot given at Har Sinai.

The word שמיטה (*shemittah*) is a derivative of the word לשמוט (to abstain). Besides for abstaining from working the fields in the seventh year, a person should abstain from indulging in all physical passions that prevent him from fulfilling mitzvot. Instead, he should strengthen his commitment to studying Torah and performing its commandments, which is his essence in life, as it says (*Mishlei* 3:18), "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." Consequently, the Torah will protect and save him (*Sotah* 21a).

In Summary

- What is the relevance of Har Sinai to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? Rashi explains that just as all the details of the mitzvah of *shemittah* were transmitted at Har Sinai, likewise the details of all other mitzvot were given there as well. But this could have been learned from any other mitzvah. According to the Midrash, when Moshe ascended to Heaven, the angels sought to kill him. Hashem told him to grasp on to the Heavenly Throne and contend with the angels. Why did Hashem not refute the arguments of the angels Himself? Also, why was it necessary for Moshe to seize the Heavenly Throne?

- Whoever holds on to the Heavenly Throne of Hashem, which corresponds to the Torah, known as the "tree of life," merits protection and salvation, as it says, "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." Hashem wanted to impart this important lesson. Therefore, He told Moshe to grasp the Heavenly Throne and respond to the arguments of the angels by himself.
- The mitzvah of *shemittah* requires enormous dedication. Precisely through performing this mitzvah, a person will become accustomed to meticulously fulfilling all mitzvot given on Har Sinai. This is the connection between *shemittah* and Har Sinai.
- Furthermore, the word שמיטה (*shemittah*) is a derivative of the word לשמוט (abstain). This indicates that a person must abstain from indulging in his passions in this world and hold on to the Torah, which is "a tree of life." Consequently, the Torah will protect and save him.

For in G-d, Hashem, Is the Strength of the Worlds

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-2)

It says in the Torah, "The land shall observe a Shabbat rest for Hashem." The word *Shabbat*, which means rest, signifies that just as the seventh day is a day of rest for Hashem, likewise in the seventh year, the

land must lie fallow. Rashi asks why the Torah specifically mentioned that "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai?" He explains that it teaches us a lesson. Just like the mitzvah of *shemittah* was transmitted with all its fine details on Har Sinai, so too, all the mitzvot, including all their details were given there.

I found another explanation to this question in the sefer *Ma'aglei Tzedek* (p 347), written by Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzeira, zy"a, who reveals that the *gematria* of the word בהר (Behar) is 207. Correspondingly, the word רז (secrets) shares the same *gematria*. This indicates that in addition to all the general mitzvot, Moshe Rabbeinu also transmitted all the secrets of the Torah on Har Sinai. Frequently, one fulfills a mitzvah, certain that he fulfilled it perfectly. However, this is not so. Corresponding to every simple facet of a mitzvah, there lays a deeper hidden aspect within, which is referred to as the secrets of the Torah. These secrets were also revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. The more a person delves into the Torah, the more he is aided by Heaven to plumb the infinite depths of its secrets.

In Yeshayahu it says, (26:4) "כי בי-ה ה' צור עולמים – For in G-d, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds." From this pasuk we learn that Hashem created the World to Come with the letter י' and this world with the letter ה'. Together they form the Name of Hashem י-ה (*Menachot* 29b). A person's mission is to join these two worlds through the study of Torah and the revelation of its secrets. The more one invests in the study of Torah, delving into its secrets, the more closely he attaches and reinforces the connection between the two worlds that were created with the Name י-ה.

When Hashem brought the Torah down to the world and presented it to Am Yisrael on Har Sinai, it says (*Shemot* 19:20), "Hashem descended." This implies that Hashem came down from His dwelling in the Upper Spheres to the world below of human beings, in order to give them the Torah. The descent of Hashem created a connection between the Upper Spheres and the world below. This signifies that a person should likewise connect the two worlds through the study of Torah. In this way, he

commemorates the joining of Hashem's Name י-ה through which the Heavens and Earth were created. It also commemorates the day the Torah was given, when the world below became sanctified and united with the Upper Spheres.

It says in *Shemot* (17:1), "They encamped in Rephidim." The Gemara (*Bechorot* 5b) asks: What is the meaning of the name רפידים (Rephidim)? According to Rabbi Yehoshua, it seems that such a place did not exist, but this is only the name by which the Torah refers to it. Chazal (*Tanchuma*, *Beshalach* 25) say that the Torah called the place Rephidim in order to teach us that "רפו ידיהם מן התורה – Bnei Yisrael became lax in the study of Torah." Consequently, Amalek was aroused to battle against them, aiming to annihilate them.

Amalek acquires its ability to overcome Bnei Yisrael when they are lax in their study of Torah. When the voice of Yaakov is not strong (in learning Torah), the hands of Eisav prevail (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20). Amalek's approach is to stir doubts in the hearts of Am Yisrael and cool off their devoted service of Hashem. When do they succeed in their wicked scheme? When Am Yisrael become lax in their Avodah and their study of Torah.

The pasuk (*Shemot* 17:16) says, "ויאמר כי יד על כס י-ה מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדור דור – For there is a hand on the throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation." Rashi asks why the word כס is used for *throne*, which is an abbreviated form of the word כסא? Also, why is the Divine Name divided in half? The implication of these two shortened words is as follows. Rashi explains that The Holy One, Blessed is He, swore that neither will His Name be whole nor His Throne whole until the name of Amalek will be completely eradicated. The entire objective of Amalek is to plant seeds of doubt in the hearts of people and create a schism between them and Hashem's Heavenly Throne. Consequently, Hashem's Name will only be complete when the memory of Amalek is obliterated.

The way to erase the memory of Amalek is by strengthening the study of Torah and fulfilling mitzvot. Only this can unite the Upper Spheres with the world below and repair the flaw to the Name of Hashem, completing it as it was initially. This is alluded to in the explanation given by the Torah for the mitzvah of *tzitzit* (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "You shall see it and you shall remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." *Tzitzit* thus promote the fulfillment of mitzvot, which connect and unite the World to Come that was created with the letter י' with the world below that was created with the letter ה'.

In addition, the pasuk states regarding *tzitzit* (ibid. 15:38), "And they shall place upon the *tzitzit* of each corner a thread of turquoise wool." Chazal (*Menachot* 43b) explain that Am Yisrael were commanded to die the thread of the *tzitzit* in a sky blue color in order to arouse people to contemplate the heavens, which is exclusively the realm of Hashem. Thus, a person will remember his Creator, Who commanded him to fulfill the mitzvot. Amalek's entire purpose is to create a division between Am Yisrael and Hashem by planting doubts in their hearts and cooling off their burning faith. Unfortunately, they succeeded in ensnaring Am Yisrael in their trap and caused them to sin. How is it possible to repair the flaw created by the people who were seduced to sin by Amalek? This is repaired by reinforcing the study of Torah and fulfilling mitzvot. Also, by wearing *tzitzit*, a person's heart will be aroused to love Hashem and His Torah.

The word שמיטה (*shemittah*) can be divided into two parts שמי-טה. This can be literally translated as "My Name is טה." This is based on the fact that the letters ט"ה (including one for the unit itself) have the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem י-ה. Thus, by keeping *shemittah*, Hashem informs us that His Name is י-ה. This implies that although the mitzvah of *shemittah* requires self-sacrifice and is not easy to perform, since the heavens and earth were created by the Name י-ה (*Menachot* 29b), Am Yisrael must fulfill the mitzvot and let the land lie fallow in the seventh year.

Let us imagine a person who has thousands of acres of land, with orchards of luscious fruits. Certainly, this man would be able to live comfortably from the fruits of his labor. Indeed, during six years he is allowed to earn his living off his fields, provided that he is meticulous in adhering to all the halachot, such as *leket*, *shichechah*, and *pe'ah*. However, in the seventh year, Hashem commands him to abstain from working his land, despite the heavy losses he may potentially incur.

Professionals who are employed in hi-tech or in the Diamond Exchange cannot appreciate the sacrifice of the farmers in performing Hashem's command by abandoning their fields for an entire year, despite the financial loss it may cause. How would the diamond dealer react if he would be compelled for various reasons to cease his work for just a few months? Certainly, it would create many hardships, and may even take a toll on his health. Accordingly, how can we fathom the courageous heroism of those who fear Hashem and meticulously fulfill the mitzvah of s*hemittah* with absolute self-sacrifice (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:1)?

There is great difficulty involved in performing the mitzvah of *shemittah*. The *Yetzer Hara* attempts in every way to plant doubts in the hearts of people to cool off their faith, which is the foundation of this significant mitzvah. It is important to be aware that the *Yetzer Hara* regarding this mitzvah resembles the spirit of Amalek, who invested all their efforts in diminishing Am Yisrael's *emunah* by planting doubts in their minds. The way to conquer this adversity is by repairing the flaw caused to the Name of Hashem and His Throne. This is done by strengthening one's *emunah*, learning Torah, and observing mitzvot, including the mitzvah of *shemittah*, which the Torah specifies was transmitted at Har Sinai.

Perhaps the reason that Hashem emphasizes that *shemittah* was commanded at Har Sinai is because of the difficulty involved in executing this mitzvah properly. Since it requires much self-sacrifice, the *Yetzer Hara* to refrain from fulfilling it is extraordinarily great. When a person conquers his *Yetzer Hara*, he will recall that concerning *Matan Torah* the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:20) states, "Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai." At

that time, the Upper Spheres and the world below united as one. Therefore, when a person scrupulously fulfills the mitzvah of *shemittah*, with all its fine points, he revives the event in which the Name of Hashem became whole and complete, and the world was sanctified, joining with the World to Come. Thus, the way to battle Amalek is to perfect the Name of Hashem by joining the two worlds, which were created with the letter י and the letter ה. Our mission is to fight them and not allow them to succeed in their evil scheme.

By keeping *shemittah*, the mitzvah in which Har Sinai is mentioned, we become worthy of the day that Hashem descended with the celestial hosts in order to give the Torah to Am Yisrael, and His Name י-ה with which He created the Heavens and Earth became sanctified (*Menachot* 29b).

Those who live elsewhere, and do not merit living in Eretz Yisrael and performing the mitzvah of *shemittah*, can at least dedicate time to study the halachot of this significant mitzvah, which strengthens the *emunah* of man in his Creator. Hashem considers a person's worthy thought as if he performed the deed. Just by studying the subject, he will be rewarded greatly from Heaven, in addition to the instant benefit gained in this world, of strengthened *emunah* and renewed devotion in serving Hashem.

In Summary

- Why does the Torah specifically mention that "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai?" Rashi explains that it teaches the following lesson. Just as the mitzvah of s*hemittah* was transmitted with all its fine details on Har Sinai, so too, all the mitzvot, including all their details were given there.
- Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzeira reveals that the word בהר (Behar) and the word רז (secret) share the same numerical value of 207. This indicates that all the secrets of the Torah were transmitted by Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. The more a person delves into the Torah, the more he reveals its hidden secrets.

- The World to Come was created with the letter י', and this world was created with the letter ה', as it says, "כי בי-ה ה' צור עולמים – For in G-d, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds." The task of a person is to join these two worlds through the study of Torah, just as Hashem did when He descended to this world at *Matan Torah*.
- The pasuk says, "And they camped in Rephidim." The word רפידים (Rephidim) implies that Am Yisrael became lax in the study of Torah, as it says, "רפו ידיהם מן התורה – Bnei Yisrael weakened their hands from Torah." This is what provided Amalek with the ability to plant seeds of doubt in their heart, eroding their *emunah*. As long as the progeny of Amalek exists, Hashem's Name and His Throne are flawed and incomplete.
- The way to eradicate Amalek is by fulfilling mitzvot, which serve to combine the Upper Spheres with the world below. For example, the mitzvah of *tzitzit* reminds a person to fulfill Hashem's will.
- The word שמיטה (*shemittah*) can be divided into two parts שמי-טה. The combination of the letters ט"ה (including one for the unit itself) shares the same *gematria* as the Name of Hashem י-ה. This is because by keeping *shemittah*, Hashem informs us that His Name is י-ה. This indicates that Am Yisrael must fulfill this mitzvah, despite all the difficulties involved, because Hashem is our Master, Who created the Heavens and the Earth with the Name י-ה.
- Har Sinai is specifically mentioned in reference to *shemittah* because of the enormous *Yetzer Hara* one has to contend with when fulfilling it. The *Yetzer Hara* resembles Amalek, attempting to cool a person's burning faith. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the significance of this mitzvah by mentioning that it was transmitted at Har Sinai, when the two worlds united. This indicates that each person is obligated to combine the two worlds specifically by performing the mitzvah of *shemittah*, aside from all other mitzvot.

The Essence of Shemittah

"For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in its crop. But on the seventh year a complete rest there shall be for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune"

(*Vayikra* 25:3-4)

Hashem instructs His people regarding *shemittah* that they may work their fields for six years, but in the seventh year it is *kodesh* for Hashem, and they must let their land lie fallow, as it says, "A complete rest there shall be for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem." Rashi explains that the words "Shabbat for Hashem" imply that it will ultimately be a Shabbat dedicated to Hashem, since this mitzvah brings glory to Hashem's Name. It demonstrates how Hashem is the true Master of the world and determines its function.

Hashem does not challenge a person with something that he cannot withstand. The teachers of *mussar* say that if a person is challenged with a certain difficulty, although it may seem overwhelming, he is provided with the means to succeed in persevering. If he would not have the ability to overcome the challenge, Hashem would not test him in this way.

In light of this, we may wonder how Hashem tests a person with the mitzvah of *shemittah*, which requires supernatural strength. For a whole year one must abandon his field, which is the source of his family's livelihood. Hashem tells a person that he must have faith that He will sustain and provide for them in the seventh year just as He provided for them during all other years. This is an awesome challenge. During six years a person labors for his sustenance, feeling secure in his income. However, in the seventh year he needs incredible *emunah* that Hashem will provide for all his needs despite his inactivity.

There is even a greater challenge than *shemittah*: *Yovel*, when a person must return property that he bought to its original owner. Besides for abandoning his fields, he must also free his slaves. The pasuk clearly states (*Vayikra* 25:10), "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants; it is a *Yovel* year for you, and you shall return, each man to his ancestral heritage." Rashi explains that the fields which had previously been sold are now returned to their owners.

How can Hashem require a person to perform a mitzvah which results in financial loss? Chazal (*Bava Batra* 8b) say that it is forbidden to extract money from a person by force, since money is considered דמים (blood). Money is as necessary for one's survival as the blood that flows through his veins. Correspondingly, Chazal (*Chulin* 49b) say that the Torah is concerned with the money of Yisrael and does not want that it should be wasted. Since a person generally guards his money like his most precious item, the Torah commands to deduct only ten percent of one's earnings to be distributed as *ma'aser*. The Torah recognizes the difficulty in parting with one's hard-earned income. If it would be required to give more than one tenth to charity, it would be almost impossible for people to comply.

From where can a person draw strength to withstand the challenges of *shemittah* and *Yovel*? This question is reinforced by the fact that these commands were issued to the entire nation without exception, and not only to righteous individuals, who gladly sacrifice themselves for Hashem's sake without question.

This difficulty can be explained according to the words of Rashi in reference to the pasuk, "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying." Rashi asks why Har Sinai is specifically mentioned regarding the mitzvah of *shemittah*, since all the mitzvot were transmitted on Har Sinai. He explains that just as the general laws of *shemittah*, including all their fine points, were stated at Sinai, so too, the general rules and all the fine points of all the commandments were stated at Sinai.

However, we need to further analyze the explanation of Rashi by clarifying why the mitzvah of *shemittah* was specifically chosen to teach this lesson. We could have learned it by mentioning many other important mitzvot, such as Shabbat, *tefillin*, etc. What is unique about *shemittah* over the other mitzvot that it was chosen to serve as the example that all the details of all mitzvot were transmitted at Har Sinai?

The mitzvah of *shemittah* requires extraordinary *emunah* in Hashem that He will provide one's livelihood despite his not being actively involved in working the land. When Bnei Yisrael journeyed in the Wilderness for forty years, Hashem provided for all their needs, by bringing down manna from heaven and having the Well of Miriam escort them to quench their thirst. In addition, Hashem also provided for all the livestock in their possession. Clearly, the desert that Bnei Yisrael traversed was dry, with no pasture to feed their animals. Notwithstanding, Hashem sustained all the cattle in a supernatural way, and they continued to thrive despite the harsh conditions of the desert.

This demonstrates the great extent of Hashem's mercy and benevolence. Through the mitzvah of *shemittah*, Hashem is conveying to Bnei Yisrael that just as He provided for all their necessities in the Wilderness for forty years in an honorable and comfortable manner, without them having to exert any effort, likewise He will provide for all the needs of those who observe *shemittah* properly. Therefore, they should not worry at all. The Torah mentions Har Sinai in reference to *shemittah* in order to reassure the people that they have nothing to fear by fulfilling this mitzvah. They should just strengthen their faith by recalling how Hashem sustained them in the Wilderness, when they had camped at Har Sinai.

Formerly, we raised the question: How can Hashem command His people to fulfill a mitzvah which causes them financial loss? If Hashem commands one to do so, clearly it is possible to accomplish it. Bnei Yisrael were already accustomed to witnessing Divine intervention and miracles in the Wilderness. Just as a person must observe Shabbat, which is a day of rest, without worrying about monetary loss, likewise he must

strengthen his *emunah* that Hashem will provide for him in the seventh year of *shemittah*, which is considered a complete Shabbat to Hashem.

Furthermore, the mitzvah of *shemittah* reinforces the relationship between man and his fellow, since a person abandons his fields and allows the public to help themselves freely to his crops. Likewise, *Yovel* also promotes interpersonal relationships, because in addition to abandoning his field and returning property to its original owner, all the slaves are freed to go home. The Torah specifically mentions Har Sinai in reference to the mitzvah of *shemittah*, in order to teach Bnei Yisrael that the condition and foundation for receiving the Torah on Har Sinai is unity and camaraderie between man and his fellow. Hashem gave Am Yisrael the Torah only after they camped by Har Sinai "as one man with one heart" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:9).

Conversely, when there is dissension and strife among Am Yisrael, the Torah cannot save them from calamity. Chazal say that when Am Yisrael did not adhere to the laws of *shemittah* and Yovel, the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed (*Tanchuma*, *Behar* 1). Although Am Yisrael engaged in the study of Torah, the Torah did not protect them, and the Beit Hamikdash was nevertheless destroyed. This is the reason that the *Navi* laments (9:12), "Why was Yerushalayim destroyed? Because they left my Torah." However, most of Am Yisrael did in fact cling to the Torah. Why then did the *Navi* state that they had abandoned the Torah? Since Bnei Yisrael had abandoned the mitzvot of *shemittah* and *Yovel*, which are the foundations for promoting interpersonal relationships, they were blamed for a lack in their Torah study, as Rabbi Akiva says (*Sifra Kedoshim* 4), "Love your neighbor as yourself; this is an important principle of the Torah."

Before the *neshamah* of a person descends to the world, he is made to swear that he will go in the right path and avoid evil (*Niddah* 30b). This promise infuses a person with the ability to cleave to the Attributes of Hashem, and to fulfill His will despite all hardships.

The pasuk (*Devarim* 13:5) says, "Hashem, your G-d, shall you follow and Him shall you fear; His commandments shall you keep and to His voice shall you listen; Him shall you serve and to Him shall you cleave." Chazal (*Sotah* 14a) ask how it is possible to command a person to cleave to Hashem if He is like a consuming fire.

Chazal say that the way to emulate Hashem is to emulate His conduct, as it says (*Shabbat* 133b), "מה הוא רחום אף אתה רחום מה הוא חנון אף אתה חנון – Just as He is merciful, so shall you be merciful; just as He is compassionate, so shall you be compassionate." Rashi adds, "Emulate His ways: perform deeds of loving-kindness; bury the deceased; visit the sick, just as Hashem did."

The word מה (just as) shares the same *gematria* as the Name י-ה-ו-ה, when the letters are spelled out. Likewise, the word מה has the same *gematria* as the word אדם (man). This similarity alludes to the fact that man possesses a G-dly aspect from Above (*Pardes Rimonim* 32a). Since man was formed through the Names of Hashem, he is able to emulate Hashem's conduct. This is why the Torah can obligate a person to fulfill the mitzvah of *shemittah*. Since man was created in the image of Hashem, he has the ability to succeed in this challenge. By emulating Hashem, he acquires the fortitude necessary to observe *shemittah*.

When a person abandons his fields and allows all needy people to help themselves to his crops, his conduct resembles the manner of Hashem, Who created the world and allows people to utilize it for their sustenance. Following in the ways of Hashem grants a person the ability to observe *shemittah*. Moreover, by observing *shemittah* and abandoning his fields for the benefit of the public, a person reinforces his G-dly conduct, since Hashem also allows the inhabitants of the universe to utilize His world for their needs.

David Hamelech says in Tehillim (73:28) "ואני קרבת א-לוהים לי טוב – But as for me, G-d's nearness is my good." This implies that David Hamelech experienced satisfaction in the proximity of Hashem. Even though Hashem related to him with the Attribute of Justice, which is

alluded to in the pasuk by the Name א-לוהים, David Hamelech delighted in Hashem's closeness, which gave him more pleasure than anything in the world. The ability to enjoy Hashem's nearness and cleave to His ways is achieved by forgoing one's physical passions and seeking connection with Hashem. Conversely, when a person feels that he is not capable of following in Hashem's ways, it indicates that his lust for the physical is preventing him from achieving *kedushah*.

By keeping *shemittah*, a person actualizes the potential planted within him during the six days of Creation, since this mitzvah is a fulfillment of the statement of Chazal (*Shabbat* 133b): "Just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful." When issuing the mitzvah of *shemittah*, the Torah does not use the word צו (command), which implies urging one to perform the deed. This is because a person inherently tends to cleave to Hashem's conduct, since he was formed through Hashem's Names. He does not need urging; he performs Hashem's will happily. The mitzvah of *shemittah* is an essential part of him.

On the other hand, the Torah urges the Kohanim to be meticulous in the sacrifice of *korbanot* (see *Rashi*, *Ramban* and *Gur Aryeh* on *Vayikra* 6:2). This does not contradict what we have just said, because one might complain about spending large sums of money for *korbanot*, since he grows accustomed to them. Therefore, the Torah uses the stronger language of צו concerning *korbanot*, to urge the Kohanim in bringing them. Conversely, since *shemittah* occurs only once every seven years, one is not in danger of growing accustomed to it. A person retains his inherent desire to fulfill its laws, without complaining about the loss of income.

The pasuk in parashat *Terumah* (*Shemot* 25:2) says, "They shall take [give] to Me a donation." Rashi explains that the words "to Me" imply that it should be "dedicated to My Name." Concerning s*hemittah*, the pasuk (*Vayikra* 25:2) says, "A complete rest there shall be for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem." The words "for Hashem" also imply that it should be for the sake of Heaven. Just as the donations for the Mishkan were intended for the sake of Hashem, likewise *shemittah* is performed for His sake.

According to this, we can explain the connection between parashat *Behar* and parashat *Bechukotai*, which follow each other. In parashat *Bechukotai*, the pasuk (ibid. 26:3-4) says, "If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time." This indicates that if a person fulfills the mitzvah of *shemittah* described in parashat *Behar*, abandoning his fields and diligently engaging in the study of Torah, without worrying about his income, Hashem will ultimately (ibid.) "provide for rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit."

In Summary

- It is difficult to comprehend how Hashem could command a person to abandon his fields in the seventh year. Moreover, in *Yovel*, the fields which have previously been sold must be returned to their owners. It seems that these are insurmountable challenges. Furthermore, a person may incur a great financial loss. The Torah is generally concerned with the money of Bnei Yisrael. For example, when giving *ma'aser*, there is a specified amount of charity that one is commanded to give.
- These questions can be resolved by contemplating an additional question raised regarding the explanation of Rashi, that just as the general laws of *shemittah*, including all their fine points, were stated at Sinai, so too, the general rules and all the fine points of all the commandments were stated at Sinai. We need to clarify why *shemittah* was specifically chosen over all other mitzvot in order to teach us this lesson.
- *Shemittah* teaches Bnei Yisrael that just as Hashem sustained and provided for them and for their cattle in the Wilderness, likewise they should trust that He will provide them with their livelihood during *shemittah*, a year in which they abandon their fields.
- Bnei Yisrael were able to fulfill the mitzvah of *shemittah*, despite the loss of money, since they had already experienced Hashem's supernatural support during their sojourn in the Wilderness. Just as a person shuts his business down on Shabbat without worrying about his loss of income, he

should be aware that Hashem will compensate him even more for the seventh year, which is a complete year of rest.

- Furthermore, the mitzvot of *shemittah* and *yovel* reinforce interpersonal relationships. Similarly, the Torah was given to Am Yisrael at Har Sinai only after they camped there "as one man with one heart."
- A person acquires the ability to perform mitzvot which require self-sacrifice by emulating Hashem's conduct, as it says, "**מה הוא... אף אתה...** – Just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful, etc." The word **מה** shares the same *gematria* as the Name **י-ה-ו-ה**, when its letters are spelled out. Furthermore, the word **מה** also has the same *gematria* as the word **אדם** (man). This alludes to the G-dly portion infused in man, which provides him with the ability to emulate the conduct of Hashem.
- The Torah does not use a language that conveys urging when commanding the people about *shemittah*. This is because man was formed through the Names of Hashem, which enable him to cleave to Him, performing His will with joy.
- The connection between parashat *Behar* and parashat *Bechukotai* is as follows. When a person fulfills the mitzvah of *shemittah* as described in parashat *Behar*, he merits that Hashem will "provide for rains in their time, and the land will give its produce," as is promised in parashat *Bechukotai*.

Reinforcing Kedushah

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest

for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in its crop. But on the seventh year a complete rest there shall be for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-4)

The sefer *Pituchei Chotam* (*Behar* 221) explains the six years mentioned here allude to the six thousand years in which Hashem created the world (*Sanhedrin* 97a). In the seventh thousand, it is *kodesh* for Hashem. Regarding this, it says (*Yeshayahu* 2:11) "And Hashem alone will be exalted on that day." At that time, Hashem will be joyful, and everyone will rejoice, because the Satan will be eliminated, as it says (ibid. 25:8), "He will eliminate death forever."

Then Yisrael will neither have to plow or plant, nor work their fields at all. Whatever they desire will be presented to them ready-made. In those days, it will be possible to differentiate between the tzaddik and the rasha, between one who serves Hashem sincerely and one who does not serve Him (*Malachi* 3:18). It will be a time when everyone will receive their full reward. This corresponds to the statement of Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 3a), "Whoever labored to prepare on Erev Shabbat, will eat on Shabbat." The initial six thousand years of the world's existence is considered Erev Shabbat; the seventh thousandth is Shabbat itself, the day of complete rest (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a).

Therefore, while a person is still alive, he must remember his mission. He should pursue any opportunity that presents itself which will reinforce his *kedushah*, so that he should ultimately be included in those who will be inscribed for life in Yerushalayim (*Yeshayahu* 4:3). In the seven thousandth year there will be no more work to do; it will be a time only for receiving reward. This explains the repetition in the pasuk above,

"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them." This implies that they shall be told repeatedly, and warned time after time, to be dedicated to the service of Hashem in the first six thousand years, so that they will merit reward in the seven thousandth. The first six thousand years resemble the six days of the week, and the seventh is like Shabbat. Obviously, one who prepares food during the six days of the week for Shabbat will have what to eat on Shabbat. However, those who do not prepare themselves adequately during the six days designed for work will find themselves eternally lacking (*Avodah Zarah* 3a).

This is why Moshe was instructed to warn Am Yisrael to diligently prepare in the first six thousand years, which are considered as the days of the week. In this way, "When you come into the land that I give you," which is the Land that they will be in at the time of Hashem's supreme Kingship in the seven thousandth year, "the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem." This implies that there will be no work left to accomplish other than awarding those who labored and prepared themselves properly. According to this, the "six years you may sow your field" written in the pasuk above is an allusion to the six thousand years in which the world exists. This is hinted at in the words of the pasuk "**שש שנים** – For six years," which has the *gematria* of one thousand, indicating the initial six thousand years. In addition, the first letters of the words "**שש שנים תזרע** – For six years you may sow" has the *gematria* of one thousand. This signifies that these six years allude to the six thousand years of the world's existence. Thus, in these six thousand years people are obligated to "sow their fields," implying that they should labor, investing all their efforts in doing so. The reason that the pasuk instructs to "sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard" is because the purpose of Avodat Hashem and study of Torah is to repair the flaw caused to the Name of Hashem and the *Shechinah*, and to eliminate what the sefer terms as "the thorns and weeds from His vineyard."

According to this sefer, it seems that the reason that Hashem created the world specifically in six days was to remind people that the world

would exist only for six thousand years (*Ramban*, *Bereishit* 2:3). A person should labor in Avodat Hashem and not waste his precious time, in order to be worthy of reward in the future.

It seems that this is also the reason why the festival of Pesach and the festival of Sukkot last for seven days. It indicates that only now can we enjoy the *kedushah* of these festivals that allude to the seventh thousand year in the future, which is termed "Yom Tov." In the future, these festivals will cease, because at that time (*Zechariah* 14:9) "Hashem will be the King over all the land; on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One," because (*Yeshayahu* 11:9) "The earth will be filled with knowledge of Hashem as water covering the sea bed," and (*Yirmeyahu* 31:33), "They will no longer teach – each man his fellow, each man his brother – saying, 'Know Hashem!' For all of them will know Me."

Shemini Atzeret is an independent festival and not an extension of Sukkot. The first day of Sukkot hints at the beginning of Creation, corresponding to the first thousand years of the existence of the world. The seventh day of Sukkot corresponds to Shabbat, which alludes to the seven thousandth year, corresponding to the words of the pasuk, "But on the seventh year a complete rest there shall be for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem." This alludes to the days in the future, when all those who engaged in the study of Torah will receive their reward. Only one who "stood before Hashem" as the word Atzeret (stop) signifies, and ignored the vanities of the world in order to engage in the study of Torah will receive this reward.

Thus, there is a distinction between the festival of Sukkot, which alludes to the six thousand years of work and receiving reward in the seventh thousand, and the festival of Shemini Atzeret, which is the festival of Simchat Torah. While Sukkot alludes to the days of toil and labor in studying Torah, Shemini Atzeret, the time of Simchat Torah, alludes to the conclusion of the seven thousandth year, when Hashem will reward those who study Torah, so that they should enter the world that is entirely good, which corresponds to the eighth day, a number that denotes the supernatural.

The sefer *Pituchei Chotam* (*Emor* 218) further explains this concept in reference to the pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:40), "You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a tree of splendor." It reveals that the fruit of a tree of splendor, the *etrog*, alludes to guarding one's *oht brit kodesh*. In addition, the *hadasim* resemble eyes, and the *aravot*, which are shaped like lips, allude to the *kedushah* of speech. The *lulav* corresponds to one's body. Just as one is obligated to join together the *lulav*, the *hadas* and the *aravah*, likewise he must bind all his limbs and guard them so that they should not be flawed by forbidden sights, forbidden speech, and wicked deeds. According to the sefer, the deficiency in guarding the *oht brit kodesh* is the sin which is preventing the final redemption. (See the sefer for further details.)

The sefer *Divrei Elokim Chaim* (5757-5758 *Vayechi* 28) reveals that Yaakov Avinu told his sons on his deathbed, "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days." Yaakov implied that if they would gather and purify themselves from any blemish in the *oht brit kodesh*, they would ultimately merit complete redemption. Yaakov Avinu conveyed to them that the flaw in the *oht brit kodesh* is what prevents the *geulah*. Yaakov Avinu specifically used the words "assemble yourselves," to indicate that they should gather all the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* that they shed through the flaw in the *oht brit kodesh*. In this way they would merit redemption in the End of Days.

Since Sukkot commemorates the Clouds of Glory, it signifies the flaw in the *oht brit kodesh*. Just as clouds conceal the heavens, likewise the breach in the *oht brit kodesh* conceals the glory of Heaven and repels the *Shechinah*. This is why the reparation for this flaw is through the four species, which allude to the limbs of a person's body that enable him to sin in this way, as it says, "The eye sees, the heart desires, and the deed concludes…"

Sukkot is celebrated immediately following Yom Kippur. The connection between the two festivals is that on Yom Kippur the parashah dealing with forbidden relationships is read during the Minchah services. On Yom Kippur a person is considered holy and pure while standing

before Hashem. Because of the *kedushah* of this holy day, it is possible to begin repairing the flaw of the *oht brit kodesh*. On this day, the *kelippah* is not allowed to influence a person to sin. Hashem wants His people to elevate themselves and rise to greater heights on Yom Kippur. Therefore, the *kelippah* has no hold over them. In this way, one can begin to repair any flaw caused by forbidden relationships, and ultimately achieve perfection on the festival of Sukkot, by assembling and gathering the four species together.

Regarding this, we recall Chazal's statement (*Yoma* 88a), "Great danger hovers over a person who has an issue of *keri* on Yom Kippur." This is because on Yom Kippur, the *kelippah* has no dominion over a person, stirring him to issue *zera l'vatalah*. Hashem intentionally designed this, so that on Yom Kippur a person should repair his flaw in the *oht brit kodesh* through his own efforts. By succeeding in initiating reparations on Yom Kippur, he will achieve complete perfection on Sukkot, by gathering the four species which correspond to the limbs of a person's body, as previously discussed. If on the holy day of Yom Kippur, which is designed for repairing the flaw in one's *oht brit kodesh*, a person entertains perverse thoughts, causing an issue of *keri*, it is a very bad sign, since the impure forces have no control over man on that day. Such a person must conduct careful self-examination in order to repair this issue. It is a sign from Heaven that he must do complete teshuvah regarding the *kedushah* of the *oht brit kodesh*.

My close disciple, Rabbi Chananya Shushan, showed me a pasuk read on the first day of the festival of Sukkot (*Vayikra* 23:20), which says, "The Kohen shall wave them upon the first-offering breads as a waving before Hashem – upon two sheep – they shall be holy, for Hashem and for the Kohen." The first letters of the words **אותם על לחם הבכורים** (upon the first-offering breads) are the acronyms for the four species: **אתרוג** (*etrog*), **ערבה** (*aravot*), **לולב** (*lulav*), and **הדס** (*hadasim)*, which one gathers together and waves before Hashem. Furthermore, Am Yisrael are considered Kohanim, as it says (*Shemot* 19:6),"You will be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation." When are Bnei Yisrael worthy of

being Hashem's kingdom of ministers and holy nation? When they guard themselves from lewdness.

Thus, we see the connection between waving the four species on Sukkot with *kedushah* and the complete reparation of the *oht brit kodesh*, which begins on Yom Kippur, a day on which the *kelippah* has no sway over man. Perhaps it is for this reason that one begins to build his sukkah immediately upon the conclusion of Yom Kippur. It alludes to the connection between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. On Yom Kippur one begins to repair the flaw of the *oht brit kodesh*, and on Sukkot it is completed by waving the four species, which signify the obligation to guard the limbs of one's body, so that he will not flaw his *oht brit kodesh*.

When a person sanctifies himself and builds a sukkah, which is a house for Hashem's sake, Hashem invites him to enter it with *kedushah*. By waving the four species, a person expresses his regret over the past for causing a blemish in his *oht brit kodesh* and demonstrates his desire to do complete teshuvah. Likewise, the waving of the four species indicates a commitment never to transgress in the future and to conduct himself only with *kedushah*.

In Summary

- The sefer *Pituchei Chotam* reveals that Hashem created the world in six days, because it hints to the fact that the world will exist for six thousand years, and in the seventh thousand each person will receive his reward. The festivals of Pesach and Sukkot last for seven days, indicating that the festivals possess the qualities of the seven thousandth year. Shemini Atzeret corresponds to the number eight, which is above nature. This is why it is celebrated independently.
- The *Pituchei Chotam* further explains that the four species correspond to the limbs of a person's body, which he is obligated to guard with *kedushah* so that they should not, *chas v'shalom*, be defiled.
- On Yom Kippur, during *Minchah*, the parashah teaching about the severity of forbidden relations is read. Immediately afterwards, Sukkot is

celebrated, which has the capacity to repair the sin of *tumat keri*. On Yom Kippur, the forces of evil do not have the power to influence people to sin. Therefore, a person who experiences an issue of *keri* on that day should be concerned.

- By building a sukkah, a person expresses his wish to have Hashem's *Shechinah* reside in his home and within him. This is the path toward teshuvah and atonement.

The Prohibition of Charging Interest

"Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase. I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be a G-d to you"

(*Vayikra* 25:37-38)

What is the connection between the prohibition of charging interest and the reminder that Hashem brought Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt? They do not seem to be relevant to each other. However, the fact that the Torah wrote them consecutively indicates that there is a connection between them.

A person who takes interest from his fellow demonstrates that he lacks faith. If he would have complete faith in Hashem that He provides and sustains him, he would not find it necessary to charge interest. Moreover, just as Hashem freely provided him with money, likewise he should lend money to his fellow free of interest. When a person wishes to profit from acts of kindness toward his fellow by charging him more than he originally loaned him, he portrays a lack of faith that Hashem will provide him with his livelihood from a different source.

Pesach is the symbol of Bnei Yisrael's faith in Hashem, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), "Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land." This illustrates that Bnei Yisrael went out of Egypt with complete faith that Hashem would redeem them with "a strong arm" and would save them from the hands of their enemies. Even though Hashem led them through the Wilderness, in an unsown land, they neither asked questions nor doubted His ability to provide for them. They followed Hashem with complete faith that they would eventually receive the Torah and enter the Promised Land.

The entire Exodus was founded upon the unshakable *emunah* of Am Yisrael in Hashem. It enabled them to follow Hashem in the Wilderness, despite the many dangers involved. Thus, the reason that the prohibition to charge interest is followed by the mention of the Exodus is because one who charges interest demonstrates that he lacks *emunah*.

Mentioning the Exodus imparts another important lesson to Bnei Yisrael. All the possessions that Bnei Yisrael had amassed upon their Exodus from Egypt did not belong to them, but were entrusted to them only as a loan in order to help the needy. Since this wealth was given to them as a deposit and not for their personal needs, a person may not charge interest. Since one's wealth is not his personal belonging, he may not profit from the capital at all. Similarly, each person should realize that his possessions are not his personal belongings, but they are entrusted to him during his lifetime as a deposit to be used according to Hashem's will. This is evident by the fact that a person does not take his possessions with him to the World to Come, but leaves them behind in the world below. Since his wealth is only a deposit, it is unethical to charge interest on it.

This is why Hashem used the word שאילה (borrow) when He commanded Bnei Yisrael to take the vessels of silver, etc., from the Egyptians, and not the word לקיחה (take). In this way they would realize that the wealth does not belong to them, but is only given to them on loan and should be utilized properly.

In Summary

- The Torah mentions that Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt following the commandment prohibiting interest. What is the connection between them?
- When a person lends money with interest to his fellow it demonstrates that he lacks faith, since he does not believe that Hashem will provide him with his livelihood from a different source. The Exodus was symbolic of Bnei Yisrael's *emunah* in Hashem, because they followed Him trustingly into the Wilderness, which was an unsown land. Whoever charges interest lacks this fundamental *emunah*.

Servants to Hashem

"For the Children of Israel are slaves to Me, they are My slaves, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt – I am Hashem, your G-d"

(*Vayikra* 25:55)

There are many occasions in which the Torah mentions that Bnei Yisrael are servants of Hashem. After they were enslaved by the Egyptians, Hashem redeemed them with "a strong hand and outstretched arm." He even gave them the Torah, in order that they should entirely free themselves from the enslavement of Egypt, and they should be able to serve only Hashem.

On the one hand, the Torah is a burden and subjugates a person, obligating him to sacrifice his personal ambitions and passions in order to fulfill Hashem's will. Sometimes, by following in the ways of Hashem, one may suffer a loss of money, endure embarrassment, or face other troubles. Nonetheless, a person is obligated to obey the Torah and conduct himself according to its laws. It is interesting to note that despite

the Torah's restrictions, Chazal (*Avot* 6:2) state, "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of Torah." Is the Torah a burden and confining, or is it liberating?

In the beginning of parashat *Bechukotai* it states (*Vayikra* 26:3), "If you will go in My statutes." Rashi explains that these words imply "that you should be laboring in the Torah." This indicates that the Torah requires much toil and effort. It is not sufficient for a person to just learn the Torah passively and perform its mitzvot by rote. This fact reinforces our question. If the study of Torah requires enormous effort, and keeping the mitzvot is difficult, how is it possible to refer to those involved in Torah as "free men"?

Torah and mitzvot are definitely considered obligating and restricting. Despite this, whoever observes Torah and mitzvot will experience that "only a servant of Hashem is truly free" (*Shirei Rabbi Yehudah Halevi*, *Shir Avdei Hazman*; *Sha'arei Ha'avodah L'Rabbeinu Yonah* 45). We can clarify this seeming contradiction with the following example. In the days prior to the festival of Pesach, a person is burdened with thoroughly cleaning his house, which may seem oppressive, since it requires much physical effort. However, when Pesach arrives, all the sensations of slavery evaporate as if they never existed, and one feels like a liberated man.

Similarly, in most homes, Erev Shabbat is a time of strain, when everyone is busily preparing for the approaching Shabbat. A stranger entering the house on Friday will undoubtedly notice the busy activity. He may even sense stress in the atmosphere. However, when Shabbat arrives, and the woman lights the candles as the men hurry to pray in the Beit Hakeneset, immediately everyone is infused with a feeling of tranquility and peace, as it says (*Rashi*, *Bereishit* 2:2), "When Shabbat enters, peace prevails." Regarding this, Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 3a) state, "Whoever labors to prepare on Erev Shabbat will eat on Shabbat." This implies that whoever labored while they still had the opportunity to do so on Erev Shabbat, will enjoy the luxury of tranquility and peace, which are the essence of Shabbat. He will also be able to delight in the delicacies prepared in honor of the Shabbat.

We can compare stressful times such as Erev Pesach and Erev Shabbat to the occasions when we are obligated to perform mitzvot that require much effort. Without doubt, there are times when the performance of a mitzvah demands fortitude and effort, and one must engage in battling his *Yetzer Hara*, which attempts with all its strength to sway him from Torah and mitzvot. For example, when a person succeeds in conquering his *Yetzer Hara* and rises early in the morning to pray with a minyan, the initial feeling of burden and bondage, which he felt when he had to drag himself out of bed, is quickly replaced by a pervading sensation of tranquility and satisfaction, because he succeeded in overcoming adversity and defeating his *Yetzer Hara*.

This is why Chazal state, "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of Torah." This implies being freed from the *Yetzer Hara* and escaping its clutches. When the *Yetzer Hara* is eliminated and does not disturb a person anymore, the fulfillment of mitzvot, despite all the hardships, infuses him with a feeling of satisfaction and happiness, which is true liberation. Nothing can compare to it.

We cannot ignore the fact that keeping Torah and mitzvot include an element of subservience. This is proven by the account of the Jewish slave, who worked in his master's house for six years. In the seventh year, his master was obligated to set him free, as it says (*Shemot* 21:2), "When you will buy a Hebrew servant, he shall work for six years; and in the seventh he shall go to freedom, without charge." The Torah further states (ibid. 21:5-6) that if in the seventh year the slave does not want to go free, then his master shall take him to the door or to the mezuzah on his doorpost, and shall bore through his ear with an awl, and the slave shall serve him forever, which is until *Yovel*.

Chazal (*Kiddushin* 22b) ask, "Why was it the ear that was bored through with the awl?" Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai says, "This ear that heard on Har Sinai [the commandment] 'Do not steal,' but went and stole, should be pierced." If he persists to sell himself as a slave, he deserves that his ear should be pierced through, since his ears heard "For the Children of

Israel are slaves to Me," and despite this he chose to acquire for himself another master.

Furthermore, Chazal (ibid.) explain the reason that the door or mezuzah on the doorpost was chosen from all other places in the house is because they were witnesses that Hashem skipped over the doorposts of the Jewish homes during the plague of the firstborn and declared "For the Children of Israel are slaves to Me." They are slaves to Hashem and not slaves to slaves. This is why the slave who seeks another master for himself deserves to have his ears pierced through.

From this we learn that Bnei Yisrael remain subservient only to Hashem and His Torah. If one seeks to become enslaved forever to another person, the Torah punishes him by instructing the master to bore a hole in his ear. This signifies that subservience to Hashem is not characterized by suffering and pain, as in other forms of slavery. The submission of Bnei Yisrael to Hashem is an indication of the bond and relationship that Bnei Yisrael share with Him. In fact, when a person chooses to reinforce and strengthen this relationship, he experiences true liberation.

In the Shacharit prayer of Shabbat we say, "Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion: that You called him a faithful servant." We learn from this statement that Moshe Rabbeinu experienced tremendous satisfaction in being called a servant of Hashem. He was not only an ordinary servant, but was considered a faithful servant to Hashem. Moreover, it is Hashem Who gave him this title, as it says, "You called him a faithful servant." Similarly, we find that tzaddikim and great people add the words "servant of Hashem" to their signature. This signifies that tzaddikim view it as their greatest privilege to be a servant of Hashem.

We can explain this concept on a deeper level. The servants of the king have an advantage over the rest of the people, since they are found in the palace of the king and can walk about the inner chambers. Although their task obligates them to exercise greater caution in their conduct, and if they would shirk their duty, they would pay dearly for it, they enjoy special privileges as well. There are exceptions, such as Pharaoh's

chamberlain of the bakers and the chamberlain of the cupbearers, who were sentenced to a year of imprisonment, since they did not fulfill their jobs faithfully and failed in their duty. However, if a servant faithfully performs his duty, the king favors and esteems him.

Moshe Rabbeinu merited Hashem referring to him as His servant, since he was always close to Him. He was even worthy of ascending to Heaven to speak with the *Shechinah* face to face. While all other prophets had a revelation of Hashem through a vision, Moshe Rabbeinu enjoyed a greater level of prophecy, experiencing revelations at all times of the day. Moreover, Moshe Rabbeinu had the privilege of talking to Hashem whenever he desired, without waiting for Hashem to appear to him. Moshe Rabbeinu was happy to be referred to as a servant of Hashem, since this title proved how close Hashem felt to him, just as a king feels close to his servants who are constantly in his presence and serve him throughout the day.

Furthermore, since the servants are in the presence of the king at all times, they are privy to secret information, to which the public has no access. *L'havdil*, Moshe Rabbeinu enjoyed a special relationship with Hashem and learned Torah from Him, until he understood all the secrets of the Torah. Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1) say that everything that a scholar will uncover in the future will be derived only from the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. This indicates that Moshe Rabbeinu was granted a deep understanding in all secrets of the Torah. The title "servant of Hashem" signifies that he was privy to all these secrets because of his exceptional closeness to Hashem, and thus was a great honor. We must also strive to obtain the title of being referred to as "a servant of Hashem." Despite all the obligations it entails, its privileges are incomparable.

Parashat *Yitro*, which describes *Matan Torah* and the Ten Commandments, is followed by parashat *Mishpatim*, which specifies the laws of the Jewish slave. Why does the Torah inform us of the laws of the Jewish slave specifically following the event of *Matan Torah*? The concept of a Jewish slave was not relevant until the Beit Hamikdash was built. Why

did the Torah not discuss other mitzvot, which Bnei Yisrael had to begin observing immediately, such as Shabbat or *niddah*?

This is because at *Matan Torah* Bnei Yisrael had become servants of Hashem. Therefore, they may not enslave themselves to others and seek a different master. When a person frees himself from the service of Hashem, the *Yetzer Hara* automatically overcomes him and brings him under his control. He becomes a slave to his passions and may deteriorate to the lowest level of stealing and consequently being sold as a slave. This punishment is measure for measure. Rather than fulfilling his role of a servant of Hashem, he eventually becomes subservient to a human master.

One cannot be both a servant of Hashem and a slave to his passions. One must totally separate the service of Hashem and indulgence in lust. Otherwise he may end up stealing, and eventually be sold as a slave.

Thus, being a servant of Hashem is a title conferring honor, which Moshe Rabbeinu merited. Bnei Yisrael are also worthy of this status when they choose to follow in the path of Torah and mitzvot, as it says (*Vayikra* 25:55), "For the Children of Israel are slaves to Me, they are My slaves."

In Summary

- The pasuk says, "For the Children of Israel are slaves to Me," indicating that the Torah is a burden and confining. Conversely, "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of Torah," indicating that the Torah is liberating. Which is it?
- The purpose of *Matan Torah* was to redeem Bnei Yisrael from slavery in Egypt and introduce them to Torah and mitzvot, demonstrating that "only a servant of Hashem is truly free." Precisely because of the burden of the Torah, a person experiences liberation, just as one senses tranquility on Shabbat after exerting much effort on Erev Shabbat.
- Likewise, a person who subjugates himself to Torah and mitzvot merits conquering his *Yetzer Hara*. When he frees himself from the control of

the *Yetzer Hara*, the *Yetzer Hara* becomes subservient to him and under his control.

- The fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot contains an element of servitude, as is evident from the laws pertaining to the Jewish slave. If he chooses not to go free in the seventh year, his master must bore a hole through his ear by the doorpost. This signifies that the ear that heard on Har Sinai "For the Children of Israel are slaves to Me," but became subservient to another master, deserves to be pierced through.
- In the Shacharit prayer of Shabbat we say, "Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion: that You called him a faithful servant." Moshe Rabbeinu felt deep satisfaction that Hashem referred to him as "a servant of Hashem."
- Servants are exceptionally close to the king, because they are constantly in his presence. Therefore the title "servant" that was given to Moshe indicates his close relationship with Hashem. Furthermore, just as a servant is privy to the secrets of the king, likewise, Moshe Rabbeinu was privy to all the secrets of the Torah.
- The laws of the Jewish slave immediately follow the account of *Matan Torah*, even though they would only be applicable after the building of the Beit Hamikdash, in order to teach that from the moment that they had accepted the Torah, Bnei Yisrael were obligated to become subservient only to Hashem, without seeking other masters for themselves. A person who frees himself from the service of Hashem becomes subjugated to his passions and may eventually steal and consequently be sold as a slave.

Gems on Parashat Behar

The Relevance of Shemittah to Har Sinai

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in its crop. But on the seventh year a complete rest there shall be for the land, a Shabbat for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune"

(*Vayikra* 25:1-4)

Rashi asks what is the relevance of Har Sinai to the mitzvah of *shemittah*. All the mitzvot were transmitted at Har Sinai. Why is Har Sinai mentioned specifically regarding this mitzvah?

The connection between *shemittah* and Har Sinai can be explained in the following way. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 97a) say that Mashiach will come at the conclusion of the *shemittah* year. They also say (ibid.) that the world

will exist for six thousand years, and the seven thousandth year will be a complete Shabbat, as in the World to Come. Chazal describe the World to Come as Shabbat. Consequently, the six thousandth year corresponds to Erev Shabbat. Just as it is possible to usher in Shabbat earlier, and begin observing it while it is still daytime, likewise in the six thousandth year it will also be possible to usher in the complete Shabbat earlier.

How can one begin observing Shabbat earlier and thereby speed up the *geulah*? Through the Torah. The more one strengthens himself in Torah and mitzvot, the more speedily will the final *geulah* be ushered in.

This idea clarifies the connection between *shemittah* and Har Sinai. Har Sinai alludes to the Torah, through which we will merit to usher in the year of *Shemittah*, referring to the seven thousandth year of the final *geulah*.

An essential aspect of *shemittah* is the fulfillment of "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (*Vayikra* 19:18), since one must allow poor people and other friends to help themselves to his crops. In order to merit Torah, one must also practice loving-kindness. Chazal explain that the pasuk (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:9) "Israel encamped there opposite the mountain" is written in singular form, because Bnei Yisrael were (*Shemot* 19:2) "as one man with one heart," when they encamped at Har Sinai. Only in this way were they worthy of receiving the Torah.

This indicates another connection between *shemittah* and the Torah, since both are dependent upon loving-kindness. Unconditional love toward one's fellow is the key to bringing the *geulah*. Chazal (*Shabbat* 33a) explain that the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash was blamed on the failure to keep *shemittah*. This implies that Bnei Yisrael did not unite and conduct themselves with loving-kindness, the hallmark of *shemittah*.

Furthermore, Chazal (*Yoma* 9b) say that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred, which is the opposite of

loving-kindness. By strengthening our unconditional love for each other, we will merit the complete redemption.

A Charitable People

"If your brother becomes impoverished and sells of his ancestral heritage, his redeemer who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale. If a man will have no redeemer, but his means suffice and he acquires enough for its redemption, and he shall calculate the years of his sale and he shall return the excess to the man to whom he had sold it; and he shall return to his ancestral heritage"

(*Vayikra* 25: 25-28)

The Torah forbids a person to sell his ancestral heritage unnecessarily (*Rabbeinu Bachya*, *Vayikra* 25:25). Nonetheless, if a person is in a difficult financial predicament, he is allowed to sell his property. However, at the first opportunity, a family member should redeem the field and return it to its original owner.

The Torah further adds that if a person does not have any relatives who could redeem his estate, it would ultimately be returned to him in the year of *Yovel*, belonging to him once more. This is incredible. Why would a person want to buy a field knowing that all his toil and labor may be for nothing? Either the field will be redeemed by a relative, or will ultimately be returned to its original owner in the year of *Yovel*, without him gaining any compensation.

This may be understood in light of the fact that Am Yisrael are a compassionate people. The Torah wants to train a person to be alert to the suffering of his fellow and practice charity, even if he incurs a loss as a result. Since Bnei Yisrael are proficient in practicing loving-kindness, there will certainly be someone who would agree to buy his friend's field, despite having to return it at a later date.

Bechukotai

Humble Har Sinai

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai saying"

(*Vayikra* 25:1)

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*ibid.* 26:3)

The connection between parshiyot *Behar* and *Bechukotai* is that the purpose of receiving the Torah on Har Sinai was that Am Yisrael would "go in My statutes." Rashi explains that the words "go in My statutes" obligates "that you shall labor in the Torah." It is not sufficient to simply observe the mitzvot, but one must toil in understanding the complexities of the Torah. Not every person merits toiling in the study of Torah. It is only the person who "kills" himself to achieve this goal, which implies that he submits himself entirely to the study of Torah. Thus, only a person who possesses the trait of humility and submission can truly labor in learning Torah.

Many people spend their lives pursuing wealth, to the extent that they become subservient to money. Even though a person knows that after 120 years he will have to depart from this world and leave behind all his gold,

silver, and the other possessions that he amassed during his lifetime, he still cannot control his fervor to acquire more wealth, becoming enslaved by his passion. If a person negates his personal needs in his eagerness for money and is willing to forgo sleep and food in order to earn a few more pennies, how much more so should one negate his personal desires in order to acquire Torah, which ultimately escorts him to the World of Truth, advocating on his behalf.

The *Navi* says (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), "והלך לפניך צדקך – Your righteous deed will precede you." The word צדק (righteous) always refers to Torah, which is called צדק (*Chulin* 88a). This implies that the Torah will go in front of the person, leading his way, until he arrives safely at his final destination, enjoying the splendor of the *Shechinah*, bedecked with a crown on his head. Since the Torah is one's true goal in life, and it will ultimately serve to protect him when standing before the Heavenly Court, one should dedicate himself entirely to the diligent study of Torah. We must not cease its study in lieu of the passing vanities of this world, which have no purpose or substance.

In order to transmit this lesson to Am Yisrael, Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai, despite its small size in comparison to the other mountains. This taught Bnei Yisrael that, in order to absorb the lessons of the Torah, they must labor to study it with total submission and humility (*Sotah* 5a). Only when a person negates his personal needs in order to acquire Torah, existing on bare necessities, symbolized by the bare desert that Bnei Yisrael were in, can he hope to achieve lofty accomplishments in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. Thus, the connection between parshiyot *Behar* and *Bechukotai* can be summed up in the following way: In order to achieve the goal of laboring in Torah, one must first dedicate himself entirely to studying Torah in total submission, which is depicted by Har Sinai, since it was the lowest mountain.

We can further understand this issue by expounding on the question of the Ohr Hachaim, zy"a, (*Shemot* 19:2). In parashat *Yitro* it states (*Shemot* 19:1-2), "In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they **arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai.** They

journeyed from Rephidim and **arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai** and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain." Why does the Torah precede the account of Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai before mentioning that they left Rephidim? First Bnei Yisrael left Rephidim, and only afterwards arrived at Har Sinai. In addition, why does the Torah repeat that they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai twice?

The Ohr Hachaim also asks why Hashem told Bnei Yisrael the following (*Shemot* 19:4-5), "You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me. And now, if you hearken well to Me, and you will keep My covenant…" It seems that it would have been sufficient to begin with the words "And now, if you hearken well to Me," etc. Why was it necessary to mention the miracles of the Exodus? Am Yisrael were familiar with the miracles, having personally witnessed them.

The Ohr Hachaim answers in the following way. It is clear that light has an advantage over darkness. Nonetheless, the benefit of the light is recognized precisely because of the darkness. In the light of day, it is difficult to perceive the superior quality of the light. However, when one is surrounded by darkness, he can appreciate the advantage of light.

Similarly, when Bnei Yisrael were in Rephidim, they did not realize that they were not unified. Therefore, they became lax in their Torah study, resulting in the attack of Amalek. However, when they arrived at Har Sinai and stood in unity as "one man with one heart," willing to accept the Torah, they understood the overriding importance of being unified, which is essential in receiving the Torah, and the cause for Am Yisrael's continuous existence. Thus, only when they stood at the base of Har Sinai, did it dawn upon them that they had been lacking unity in Rephidim. Consequently, the Torah precedes the account of their arrival to Har Sinai to their departure from Rephidim, since their arrival at Har Sinai heightened their perception of what had overcome them in Rephidim.

The Torah repeats their arrival at Har Sinai, since the first time it is mentioned expresses their actual arrival at the place, and the second time refers to the fact that they came to the realization of the overriding importance of unity, which is the foundation for the Torah. When unity is lacking, people can deteriorate, as Bnei Yisrael did in Rephidim.

I would like to add to this explanation what we mentioned in the beginning. The Torah cannot be acquired unless one submits himself totally to learning it with diligence and dedication. Since Bnei Yisrael were lacking submission, they became lax in their study, resulting in the attack of Amalek. Amalek attacked them with blatant audacity and arrogance. They fought Bnei Yisrael until they succeeded in blemishing the Name of י-ה, which has the *gematria* of גאוה (glory). It is important to know that all honor belongs only to Hashem, as it says (*Tehillim* 93:1), "Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur."

After Bnei Yisrael left Egypt with wondrous miracles, the glory of Hashem filled the entire world. All the nations feared Hashem and Bnei Yisrael, who merited being recipients of the miracles. Since they became lax in the study of Torah, not submitting themselves to its lessons, Amalek rose against them and were the first ones to cool off their intense *emunah* (*Sefat Emet*, *Likutim*, *Mishpatim*). Consequently, all the nations dared to rise against Bnei Yisrael and did not fear battling them (*Tanchuma*, *Ki Teitzei* 9).

The Torah is referred to as fire, as it says (*Devarim* 33:2), "From His right hand He presented a fire of law to them." When Bnei Yisrael labor in the study of Torah, they release the fire of Torah and *emunah* throughout the world, whereby everyone is warmed by its rays. All the nations are sustained in the merit of the Torah which Am Yisrael studies (*Yevamot* 63a). When the fiery light of the Torah spreads over the entire world, the glory of Hashem is magnified, and everyone fears Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. However, when they cool off from their diligent study, their fiery *emunah* cools off also. In addition, the Name of Hashem י-ה is blemished, corresponding to the גאוה (glory) of

Hashem. Consequently, the existence of the entire world is greatly endangered, *rachmana litzlan*.

Thus, the Torah precedes the account of Bnei Yisrael's arrival to Har Sinai to their departure from Rephidim, since only after Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai and observed the humbleness of the mountain toward Hashem, did they realize what true humility is. Since Har Sinai viewed itself as insignificant, it was worthy of having Hashem's *Shechinah* descend upon it. The mountain became sanctified to such an extent that no human being was allowed to approach it besides for Moshe Rabbeinu, who sanctified himself to the level of an angel when he ascended to Heaven, remaining there for forty days and nights without eating or drinking.

When Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai and observed its humility, they realized in retrospect that Amalek had attacked them because they had become lax in Torah. Why had they become lax? Because they had not sufficiently humbled themselves before Hashem and His Torah. The Egyptian kingdom had been destroyed because of them, thus they considered themselves mighty and strong, worthy of the admiration of the nations. As a result of these thoughts, which demonstrated a lack of *yirat Shamayim*, they could not labor in Torah adequately. This is because the Torah exists only in one who submits himself entirely to it.

Thus, it was only after Am Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai and contemplated the humility of the mountain, that they understood that in order to truly toil in Torah one must totally submit himself to it in humility. This lesson is taught by the fact that the Torah precedes the nation's arrival at Har Sinai to their departure from Rephidim.

When Am Yisrael observed Har Sinai, they arrived at the conclusion that if Har Sinai, which was inanimate, feared Hashem and was humbled before Him, how much more so should they, who had witnessed Hashem's many miracles and had been redeemed from Egyptian slavery with "a strong hand and outstretched arm," humble themselves before Hashem and His Torah.

Along these lines, we can answer the second question of the Ohr Hachaim: Since Bnei Yisrael had witnessed what Hashem did for them in Egypt, why was it necessary for the Torah to mention it again in parashat *Yitro*? The fact that Am Yisrael deteriorated in their diligent study of Torah, and were consequently lacking in submission before Hashem, signified that they were not enthusiastic enough about the wondrous miracles that Hashem had performed for them in Egypt. Had they been properly awed by the miracles of Hashem, they would not have begun to feel haughty, but would have become entirely subservient to Hashem.

Thus, Hashem mentioned (*Shemot* 19:4), "You have seen what I did to Egypt," in order to inspire them anew to be awed by the miracles performed there, so that it would increase their dedication to learning Torah, and they would become totally subservient to Hashem. After Am Yisrael understood the consequences of being lax in Avodat Hashem, they would begin to behold the miracles with renewed awe. This inspiration would arouse them to fear Hashem and cause them to learn Torah with renewed dedication through absolute submission.

In Summary

- Parashat *Behar* is next to parashat *Bechukotai* to emphasize that the entire purpose of receiving the Torah on Har Sinai is in order that Am Yisrael should "go in My statutes." This implies that they should labor in the study of Torah. The Torah was given on Har Sinai, which was the lowest and most humble of all mountains, in order to teach us that Torah is acquired only by those who submit themselves to it.
- The Ohr Hachaim asks why the pasuk stating that Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai precedes the account of their departure from Rephidim. First they departed from Rephidim and only thereafter arrived at Har Sinai. In addition, he questions why the Torah repeats the fact that they arrived at Har Sinai in the pasuk. Furthermore, why does the pasuk mention "You have seen what I did to Egypt"? What is the purpose of reminding Bnei Yisrael of the miracles?
- The Ohr Hachaim explains that one appreciates light when one is faced

with darkness. When Am Yisrael stood at the foot of Har Sinai in unity, they began to realize the overriding importance of unity. Consequently, they became aware of their previous lack of unity when they had camped in Rephidim, resulting in the attack of Amalek. Only after arriving at Har Sinai, did they realize what they had been lacking in Rephidim. Therefore, the Torah precedes the account of their arrival to Har Sinai to their departure from Rephidim. The Torah then repeats the account of their arrival to Har Sinai. The first time refers to their arrival at their physical destination, and the second refers to arriving at the realization of what had happened to them.

- We learn from this that the Torah is acquired through humility and submission. Since Am Yisrael were lacking humility, they became lax in Torah, and Amalek attacked them. Only after they arrived at Har Sinai and observed its humbleness, did they realize the virtue of this trait and became aware of the reason for Amalek's attack in Rephidim. The Torah mentions the miracles of the Exodus again to teach us that since Am Yisrael were lacking in humility, they had obviously not been adequately inspired by the miracles performed for them. By mentioning the miracles again, it would arouse them to serve Hashem with renewed awe, humbleness, and submission.

Going in the Right Path

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Why does the Torah write "If you will **go** in My statutes"? It would seem more appropriate to write, "If you will **hearken** to My statutes." Since the Torah specifically chose this wording, there must be a lesson to be learned.

This can be elucidated by examining the words of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 119:59), "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies." He expressed that despite deciding in his mind to visit a certain place, in the end, his feet took control and led him automatically to the Beit Hamidrash. This statement requires clarification. We know that the brain is located in one's head, and it is the source of intelligence. One's body follows the rational conclusions decided by the brain. Therefore, when the brain instructs the feet to go to a certain destination, the feet obey the command. One's limbs do not act independently of his brain.

According to this, how is it possible to understand the words of David Hamelech? He indicated that despite deciding in his head to go to a certain place, his feet contradicted his thoughts, and consequently he ended up going to the Beit Hamidrash. It seems that this is contrary to one's natural behavior.

Although the body receives messages from the brain, it is not necessarily considered entirely separate from it. Actually, the feet are directly connected to the head. Once, when I was a young boy learning in the Yeshiva of Sunderland, England, I went to the *mikveh* on Friday to immerse myself in honor of Shabbat. The rungs leading down to the *mikveh* were rusty and broken. Upon descending into the *mikveh*, I slipped and hurt my leg. The wound opened and began to bleed heavily. I had to be taken to the hospital to stop the bleeding. Although the foot is far from the head, when the leg bleeds heavily, the entire body is endangered, and even the brain may cease to function.

We see that the leg is directly connected to the head and brain, despite its distance from them. This teaches us the importance of the feet. Even though they generally receive instructions from the brain and act accordingly, one can sanctify himself to the extent that his legs also become elevated. Since they are directly connected to the head, which is the source of intelligence, they acquire independent thought, which at times contradicts the mind. Occasionally, people relate that their feet were rooted to the ground, despite their brain ordering them to continue

going. Similarly, there are times when one's heart persuades him to go to a forbidden location, but his feet do not allow him to go there.

Although it may seem to us that it is our brain alone that instructs man where to go and how to behave, it is not so. The feet also have a certain "mind of their own." The more a person elevates himself and becomes sanctified through Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, the more his feet rise in rank and acquire the ability to decide their actions on their own, independently of the mind. This is to the benefit of man. While his thoughts may lean toward committing a crime, his feet can draw him to the proper path and thereby save him from sin.

This is the meaning of David Hamelech's statement (*Tehillim* 119:59), "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies." David Hamelech sanctified himself and became elevated, to the extent that his feet acquired a mind of their own, aiding him in his Avodat Hashem. They led him to the Beit Hamidrash to learn Torah rather than turning toward passing material pursuits.

Perhaps this is the reason that the Torah specifically uses the phrase to "go in My statutes." It implies that one should become sanctified in Avodat Hashem to the extent that his feet also become sanctified and lead him in the path of the Torah. It is an encouraging thought that not only one's head and mind instruct him to learn Torah, but even his legs lead him directly to the Beit Hamidrash, so that he should not waste his time in forbidden places instead of learning Torah.

The fact that David Hamelech says "I considered my ways" implies that he contemplated going to certain places outside of the Beit Hamidrash. Even David Hamelech, who was king over all of Am Yisrael and sang Hashem's praises, possessed a *Yetzer Hara* that attempted to prevent him from going to the Beit Hamidrash. David Hamelech is described as "ruddy," which indicates that he was inherently hot-blooded, passionate, and easily angered. Despite his difficult character traits, which could have easily deterred his progress in Avodat Hashem, he did not allow his *Yetzer Hara* to control him. Through self-improvement he mastered his

inclinations, to the extent that they were not able to influence him, and even his feet overcame the *Yetzer Hara*.

Chazal (*Sukkah* 52a) say that the greater the person, the greater his *Yetzer Hara*. The reason for this is because when the *Yetzer Hara* perceives a person's desire to cleave to Hashem, it immediately attacks with full force, attempting to sway the tzaddik from the proper path and prevent him from connecting to Hashem. The *Yetzer Hara* is aware that it cannot approach a tzaddik by telling him to transgress intentionally, because the tzaddik will not listen. Therefore, he approaches a person cunningly. For example, the *Yetzer Hara* tells him that he must rest a bit from his intense schedule in learning Torah. He advises him to go on vacation so that he should be able to learn with renewed energy, because if he would continue with his diligent schedule without a break, he would get "burnt out."

Certainly, every person steeped in the study of Torah needs to refresh himself at times. However, one must carefully analyze the voice advocating for vacation within him. Is it truly necessary to take a vacation, or is it perhaps the tactic of the *Yetzer Hara*, attempting to stop him from learning diligently?

David Hamelech expressed his desire to cleave to Hashem all his life. He would arise at midnight to sing Hashem's praises (*Tehillim* 119:62). Therefore, Hashem provided him with added protection from the *Yetzer Hara*, so that he would not be able to persuade David to sin, by elevating the function of his feet, to the extent that they were capable of acting in contradiction to his brain's command. They led him directly to the Beit Hamidrash instead of visiting other places, which would have distracted him from learning Torah.

It is important to note that although the feet are not accorded prominence in comparison to other limbs, since one who touches his foot must wash his hands before engaging in a matter of *kedushah*, they serve a very significant function. This is manifested by the fact that they walk on the ground, causing a person to be in direct contact with solid reality.

This helps one fight his *Yetzer Hara*, who attempts to dull a person's senses by distracting him from truth. The *Yetzer Hara* generates an illusion of fantasy, which contradicts one's true existence.

Along these lines, we can understand new dimensions about the ladder that Yaakov Avinu envisioned in his dream. The foot of the ladder rested on the ground, and its top reached heavenward (*Bereishit* 28:12). This signifies that in order to reach the summit in life, one must first be grounded and realistic. He must avoid tempting illusions, which are ploys of the *Yetzer Hara*, causing a person to imagine things that contradict the truth. The *Yetzer Hara* cunningly convinces a person that if he will commit a certain sin, he will be happier and better off. In this way he draws him into corruption. The way to overcome the *Yetzer Hara* is to avoid being lured by false illusions, which divert a person from reality. When a person stands on a ladder, which is based on solid ground, he will be able to continue ascending its rungs, step after step, until he reaches a high spiritual level, as it says about the ladder in Yaakov's dream, "Its top reached heavenward."

Furthermore, Hashem wanted to hint to Yaakov and his descendants that in order to advance in Avodat Hashem, one must begin at the beginning, from the first step. It is not possible to jump to the top in one leap. One must ascend the ladder of Avodat Hashem gradually and calmly, step after step, rung after rung. Only after one has a secure grasp on the first rung, can he proceed to climb to the next one. This implies that in order to achieve the culmination of "its top reached heavenward," one must first have his feet set on solid ground. Only afterwards can he progress, scaling the heights of Torah and *yirah*.

When a person trains himself to fulfill mitzvot, his hands, feet, mouth, and entire body become accustomed to mitzvot, and they seek to continue performing them. David Hamelech's feet would lead him to the Beit Hamidrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35a) because they were already used to fulfilling mitzvot and experiencing gratification as a result. Consequently, they sought more mitzvot, which would provide them with additional spiritual bliss. Conversely, it says (*Bereishit* 29a), "So Yaakov lifted his

feet, and went." Since his feet did not want to leave the holy site, Yaakov had to lift his feet against their will.

The Torah specifically states, "If you will **go** in My statutes" to teach that one should be so used to using his limbs for performing mitzvot that his feet should automatically lead him to fulfill mitzvot.

In Summary

- Why does the Torah specifically use the phrase "If you will **go** in My statutes." This can be understood according to David Hamelech's statement: "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies." This implies that his feet overrode his brain's message. Although his head instructed him to go to other places, his feet led him to the Beit Hamidrash.
- This seems perplexing, since we generally assume that the brain dictates the body's behavior, and not that the body acts independently. However, although the feet are far from the head, they are connected to it. When one's foot is badly wounded, his head may suffer as a result. This connection is also true in a spiritual sense, since sometimes a person rises to spiritual heights, to the extent that his feet become sanctified and acquire an independent mind of their own, enabling him to override wayward intentions by automatically leading him to Avodat Hashem.
- This is the reason the Torah specifically uses the phrase "If you will **go** in My statutes." This implies that when one will achieve significant accomplishments in Torah, his legs will automatically lead him to labor in Torah. From the statement of David Hamelech, "I considered my ways," we can infer that despite his loftiness, he considered going to places outside of the Beit Hamidrash. This teaches us how powerful the *Yetzer Hara* is. It attempts to ensnare each person, great and lowly, but especially targets those who are great.
- One's feet are located on the ground, which signifies being in touch with solid reality. This is why they are capable of refuting the false illusions of the *Yetzer Hara*.

- Hashem caused Yaakov to envision in his dreams a ladder that was set in the ground, whose top reached heavenward. This indicates that in order to reach the summit, one must be firmly grounded and not be led astray by the false illusions of the *Yetzer Hara*. Furthermore, the way to reach the top is by ascending step by step. By steadily climbing upward, one can ultimately achieve great spiritual heights.
- The Torah says, "If you will **go** in My statutes" to indicate that if a person accustoms himself to fulfilling mitzvot, eventually his feet will automatically take him to perform many more.

Reviewing Torah

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi explains the words "If you will go in My statutes" to mean that one must labor in Torah. This teaches us that it is not enough for a person to learn Torah superficially, but he must toil and labor in its study his whole life, as it says (*Yehoshua* 1:8), "You should contemplate it day and night." The Torah further states, "Then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit," which implies that additional toil and labor in Torah results in abundance of blessings in the world. The Torah is the foundation of the world. When Bnei Yisrael toil in Torah, they open the gates of abundance and blessing to the world, ensuring its continued existence.

Yet, if Hashem promised such great rewards for engaging in the diligent study of Torah, why are people lax in their commitment? Certainly, if someone were to promise us that investing in a certain endeavor would

result in enormous profits, we would not spare any efforts in order to earn great wealth. If this is clear concerning material matters, why do we tend to become relaxed in our pursuit of learning Torah?

The *Yetzer Hara* encourages a person to pursue physical pleasures so that he should invest all his energies in passing vanities. However, when it comes to the study of Torah, the *Yetzer Hara* attempts to dissuade him from learning and weakens his resolve. Since the *Yetzer Hara* is aware that the entire existence of man is dependent on Torah, his source of life, he attempts to detach him from it, so that he should seek illusory objectives. One is commanded to engage in Torah around the clock, each according to his ability. He may not shirk his duty, freeing himself from toiling in Torah. Therefore, this sort of labor requires significant inner resolve and constant reinforcement, so that one should not become lax in his studies.

Generally, a person can take a short vacation from his occupation in order to refresh himself and gain renewed strength. This is not so regarding the study of Torah, as it says (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Devarim* 873), "If you will neglect me one day, or two days, I will leave you." This implies that when a person takes a break from learning Torah for one day, that day stretches into two days and three days, continuing infinitely. This indicates that there is no vacation from Avodat Hashem. We learn this from the account of Yaakov Avinu. He only sought to dwell in tranquility, and even though he did not actually begin to relax, the ordeal of Yosef sprung upon him (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:3).

We can explain this point in a different manner. The *Yetzer Hara* generally convinces a person that the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot were only relevant to past generations, since we currently live in modern times. Furthermore, we have to adopt the customs of the nations and copy their lifestyle, because adhering to the laws of the Torah may trigger anti-Semitism and arouse the wrath of the nations toward us. In fact, the opposite is true. It is specifically the adherence to traditional customs, the study of Torah, and fulfillment of mitzvot that protect Am Yisrael from the nations. This is alluded to in the Torah (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20): When the voice of Yaakov is strong (in its authentic sound of

learning Torah), the hands of Eisav have no power. However, when the voice of Yaakov is altered, hearkening to the voice of the nations, the hands of Eisav immediately gain strength and strike at Am Yisrael.

Bnei Yisrael merited being redeemed from slavery in Egypt and rising out of their depraved state, steeped in the forty-ninth level of *tumah* (*Zohar Chadash*, *Parashat Yitro*), because they did not change their names, style of dress, and language (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:25; *Maharal*, *Netzach Yisrael* 25). Chazal (*Maharal*, *Gevurot Hashem* 43) say that if Am Yisrael would have imitated the lifestyle of the nations, worn their style of clothes, spoken their language, and adopted their names, they certainly would not have been worthy of arousing the Attribute of Mercy, meriting redemption. Only because Am Yisrael continued the tradition of their forefathers and were careful to guard their unique identity by maintaining these three values, were they deemed worthy of miraculous salvation. Thus, they went from darkness to light, traveling through the Wilderness in a miraculous way, receiving the Torah, and ultimately inheriting the Land of Israel.

Many times people come to me crying tearfully because their children have turned their backs on their heritage and married non-Jews. When I hear their pain, I immediately turn to them and ask, "Did you ever make an effort to guard your tradition, developing their Jewish identity at home? Did you express to your children that the Torah is important to you? Were you careful in observing Shabbat, eating kosher, and observing the laws of family purity, etc.?" In most cases, these people admit that their children did not absorb Jewish values at home. Certainly, they did not witness their parents honoring Torah. When I hear their response, I cannot help but blame them for the fate of their children. How do they expect their children to retain their Jewish identity and marry a Jewish spouse, when they never saw their parents pursuing Torah and mitzvot?

The world at large is extremely alluring and tempts one to indulge in immorality. Only in the merit of Torah can a person overcome the challenges. When parents neglect to provide their children with a pure Jewish education, why should they cry afterwards that their children left

the fold? After all, they themselves paved the way for their desertion, since they did not instruct them about the laws of the Torah. Every child has a sixth sense to perceive what their parents truly believe and honor. If parents simply order their children to comply with the laws, but they themselves do not follow them, obviously they will not succeed in their education. In the long run, the children will cease to observe the laws. Thus, it is important to serve as a role model, because it is the catalyst for successful teaching. If parents want their children to honor the Torah and follow in its ways, they must express their appreciation for mitzvot. Feeling reverence in one's heart alone is not enough to instill his values into the hearts of his family members.

Those who bemoan their situation after it is too late, when the light in their home is dimmed forever, should examine if they ever attempted to kindle the light of Torah in the first place. One cannot keep a flame burning if he never lit it. Only after he lit it, can he continue to strengthen its flame, increasing its light and igniting the flame in his child's heart. This should be done when he is young and open to hearing. However, when the child grows into manhood, he acquires a mind of his own, and he becomes set in his ways. Then, it is much more difficult to effect a change, as it says (*Avot* 4:20), "One who studies Torah as a child, to what can he be likened? – to ink written on fresh paper," as opposed to later on, when he can be compared "to ink written on smudged paper."

We can compare this to a contractor preparing to build a building. In order for the building to stand securely, he must first have plans drawn up by an architect and proceed building according to it. He must pay careful attention to the electrical system, water pipes, plumbing, etc., in order that the building should be functional. Clearly, the constructor must plan the installation of these systems before beginning to build, since it is impossible to install them after the building is complete. Similarly, we must consider the spiritual light of our children in their very early stages of growth. After their personality is set, and they become independent, it is not possible to change their pattern of behavior and demand that they alter their habits, which they were not trained to do in their youth.

Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness says that one should not forget the Torah that he studied, and one who does forget it endangers his life (*Avot* 3:8). This implies that a person is obligated to labor in the study of Torah and constantly review what he learned, in order that the words should penetrate his mind, remaining permanently etched in his heart. To illustrate this point, let us consider if we would forget where we placed the keys to a safe filled with our valuables. Would we carelessly leave our check book or credit card on the table, without fearing that someone may take it? Clearly, a person carefully supervises his valuable items, and occasionally checks to see that they are safe. Just as this is evident regarding material possessions, so too must it be clear to us regarding the Torah. A person is not allowed to forget his studies, but should constantly strive to retain his knowledge by reviewing its lessons, as Chazal (*Tosefta, Ohalot* 16:4) state, "One who learns [Torah] but does not review it is compared to one who plants but does not harvest."

Although the Torah is "the elixir of life" (*Kiddushin* 30b), we tend to diminish its importance and disregard it. This is because the *Yetzer Hara* fights to distract us from the true path. If we would contemplate the true value of the Torah, which is preferable over all other merchandise, we would exercise greater caution in guarding it. A person would not allow himself to forget the location of the key to his safe. How much more so should this be true of Torah, which escorts a person even after he dies and advocates on his behalf.

We are taught (*Niddah* 30b) that when an unborn child is in his mother's womb, there is a candle burning, and an angel hovering over him while they study Torah extensively. Upon his birth, the angel strikes the infant's mouth, and all the Torah that he taught is forgotten by the child. This is perplexing. If there is a purpose in the Torah taught to him by the angel in his mother's womb, then why does he forget it? And if there is no purpose to it, then why does he learn it in the first place?

We can explain this in the following way. If the angel would not have taught Torah to the infant in his mother's womb, the child would not be capable of understanding Torah later on and, in addition, originating his

own novel thoughts, because of the complexity and depth of the Torah. Only because the Torah was once taught to him by the angel is he able to comprehend the concepts of the Torah after he is born.

Notwithstanding, Hashem wants one to forget the Torah learned while yet unborn, because the world below is the world of toiling. It is not possible to acquire spiritual gains easily. If a person desires to rise in his level of Torah knowledge, he must labor and exert himself to succeed. If we would already know the Torah entirely, we would not have a task to complete in this world. Since we are obligated to repeatedly review whatever we learned in order to retain our knowledge of Torah, it compels us to constantly labor and toil in the study of Torah (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1:32).

As we mentioned, Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness says that a person who learns Torah but forgets it endangers his life. Our entire mission in this world is to peel away the *kelippah* enveloping us and recall all the Torah taught to us while we were in our mother's womb. When a person does not fulfill his task and seeks to have an easy life without labor and exertion, he is endangering his very existence.

There is a story about a teacher who would deliver a daily Torah discourse to a group of students. One time, when the teacher was preparing his dissertation in advance, he could not clearly comprehend the words of the *Ba'alei Tosafot*. The more he tried to analyze the concept, the more confused he became. He felt as if his mind was blocked. After forty days, when he saw that despite all his efforts he did not succeed, he prayed to Hashem to enlighten him. At night, the *Ba'alei Tosafot* appeared to him in a dream and clearly explained to him the entire issue. When he woke up, he remembered his dream. His joy knew no bounds on realizing that he finally understood the Gemara entirely and he could transmit it properly to his students. In the morning, the teacher rose early and hurried to the Beit Hamidrash to deliver his lecture. To his great surprise, his students succeeded in grasping quickly and easily the subject that he had agonized over for forty days.

On the way home, he began to doubt if he was qualified to teach his students. After all, he had required forty days of toil and effort in order to grasp the issue, and in the end he was granted a revelation from Heaven to master it. Conversely, his students had understood the subject immediately, without investing much concentration or effort. That night, the *Ba'alei Tosafot* appeared to the teacher for the second time and comforted him, saying that he had in fact understood the subject easily when he originally began to prepare his discourse, but since the Satan could not tolerate his success, he blocked his mind and caused him to forget what he had mastered. Only after forty days, when Hashem saw that he had made such a huge effort to comprehend the words of the Torah, the influence of the Satan was removed, and he was able to recall his original understanding of the topic. The *Ba'alei Tosafot* added that his students' comprehension was dependent on their teacher's efforts in understanding the subject. Because he had labored to understand the issue for forty days, his students were able to grasp the issue quickly and easily.

Thus, in order that Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness's admonition should not materialize, we must invest much labor in the study of Torah. Those who sow with tears will reap rewards with joy. Even though at times the path to understanding Torah is long and complicated, one should not fall into despair, but do whatever he possibly can in order to merit understanding Torah clearly. Ultimately, whoever wishes to be purified is assisted from Heaven.

In Summary

- The Torah says, "If you will go in my statutes," and afterwards, "then I will provide your rains in their time." This indicates that if Am Yisrael will labor in Torah, they will merit an abundance of blessing. If laboring in the study of Torah results in such abundance, why do we neglect it? There is a powerful *Yetzer Hara* attempting to sway one from his efforts. This is because the *Yetzer Hara* knows that the entire world is sustained

through the study of Torah. Furthermore, there is no such thing as taking a break or vacation from Torah. Avodat Hashem requires great effort.

- There are those who argue that the adherence to mitzvot were only relevant to past generations. However, today there is no obligation to follow its laws, since they arouse the hatred of the nations toward us. In fact, the opposite is true. When our "voice" does not reflect the "voice of Yaakov," the hands of Eisav immediately gain control.
- Rabbi Meir Ba'al Haness states that whoever forgets the Torah that he studied is liable for death. The way to retain one's knowledge of Torah is to constantly review it. One is careful in guarding his material possessions; how much more so should he fear for his spiritual acquisitions.
- When an unborn child is in his mother's womb, an angel hovers over him and teaches him Torah. Afterwards, it strikes his mouth so that all his Torah should be forgotten. If this knowledge is important, why cause the infant to forget it? Conversely, if there is no purpose to this knowledge, why does the angel teach it to him in the first place? This is because if the angel would not teach it to the unborn child, after he is born he would never possess the ability to comprehend Torah. Notwithstanding, the angel causes him to forget his original learning in the womb, in order to teach us that the Torah requires labor and effort to master it.

Delving in Torah

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi (ibid.) explains that the words "If you will go in My statutes" imply that one must labor in Torah.

Just as it is clear to us that in order to succeed in business and to achieve financial success, one must labor, investing much effort and even forgoing food and sleep, so too regarding Torah. In order to understand Torah properly, one must invest much effort.

At times it seems that a person's own efforts bring him success in his endeavors. Because of his diligence and acumen, he gains profitable deals, which bring him wealth and honor. In truth, it is not his endeavors, nor his acumen that cause him to be wealthy and prominent. It is only Hashem Who grants him blessing and success. Wisdom is not dependent on man alone.

This is evident from the fact that Bnei Yisrael became the Chosen Nation specifically when they were enslaved in Egypt. This contradicts the prevalent view that great minds originate in the universities. The very existence of Am Yisrael refutes this. They were chosen to be Hashem's nation against all odds, and specifically because of their enslavement. We would imagine that Hashem would choose for Himself an honorable, prominent nation that reigns over many countries. However, this was not so. The wealth and status of Bnei Yisrael were not the deciding factors for Hashem, since these things do not matter to Him. He sought only a nation who would be willing to subjugate themselves to Him and accept upon themselves the Torah and mitzvot.

If Hashem knew that the nations would ultimately refuse to accept the Torah, why did He offer it to them in the first place? Hashem is omniscient and knew in advance that this would happen. Moreover, why did he negotiate with them, providing them with an example of a mitzvah which they would be obligated to observe?

This is because in the future, when the nations would see the enormous reward bestowed upon Bnei Yisrael for their faithfulness in following the ways of the Torah, they would immediately complain that they had not merited receiving the Torah. Then, Hashem would be able to prove to them that their complaint was not valid, since He had first approached them offering the Torah even before turning to Bnei Yisrael. They had

refused to accept it without even tasting its sublime essence (*Avodah Zarah* 2b).

Once I met a wealthy couple who were far removed from the ways of the Torah. They would brazenly mock the Torah, *rachmana litzlan*. Even I felt uneasy repeating Torah thoughts in their presence, because of their scorn for Torah and its scholars. After a period of time, I heard that this couple, who were so far from the ways of Torah and mitzvot, had made a considerable change in their life and had begun to draw closer to their heritage. When I questioned how it was possible for people who were so far removed to suddenly change their entire outlook, making vast changes in their lives, I was told that it was because they had finally experienced the sweetness of Torah. Once they got a taste of its pleasantness, they could not stop themselves from tasting some more, until they began to take concrete steps and fully accepted upon themselves the yoke of Torah and mitzvot.

This is the realization of David Hamelech's statement (*Tehillim* 34:9), "טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' – Contemplate and see that Hashem is good." The word טעמו literally means "taste." This implies that in order to recognize Hashem's pleasantness, one must first taste a sample of the sublime sweetness of Torah. After one senses and recognizes its pleasant flavor, to which nothing can compare, his path to return is already paved. A person who is not willing to taste the essence of Torah can be compared to one who is served a delectable cake, but refuses to eat it, arguing that he does not like it. His friends will counter, "Silly! First take a bite; afterwards you will be able to determine whether you like it or not. After you taste its enjoyable flavor, you will not be able to stop eating it."

Stubborn people who are not willing to "taste" and realize how good the Torah is can be compared to the nations of the world, who asked Hashem, "What is written in it" when they were offered the Torah, without first experiencing its delights. When they will see the enormous reward bestowed to Bnei Yisrael in the future, they will realize how foolish they were to have refused tasting a sample of the Torah, which would have enabled them to recognize its enchanting qualities.

Hashem gave His people the Torah many centuries ago. But, in truth, each day we continue receiving the Torah anew, as it says (*Pesikta Zutrata*, *Va'etchanan* 11a), "Each day they shall seem to you as if they were new." This implies that a person is obligated to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah and mitzvot anew each day, in order that the Torah should not become archaic in his eyes and lose its value, *chas v'shalom*. One cannot compare the excitement of receiving a new gift, with its original wrapping, to receiving a used item that already passed through several hands.

It says in Avot (5:22), "Ben Bag Bag says, 'Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it for everything is in it.'" The commentaries explain that these words imply that the Torah is deeper than the ocean. If one delves in it, plumbing its depths, he will discover new treasures never found before. Even though the Torah was given thousands of years ago, there are still many new novel insights being discovered all the time. Furthermore, the Torah encompasses all wisdom and knowledge in every subject, including science, medicine, astrology, zoology, meteorology, etc. Researchers publicize in blaring headlines about new discoveries, which only confirm what was already revealed to us by the sages of the Talmud in the pages of the Gemara.

According to the Arizal (*Likutim*, *Bereishit* 1), we can explain the words of Ben Bag Bag in a different way. Hashem created the world during the six days of Creation in a perfectly organized fashion, whereby all systems function in harmony according to the cycles orchestrated by Him. After Adam sinned, this harmony was disrupted, and the different forces existing in the world were thrown into chaos. Originally, there was a complete division between the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* and the *nitzotzot* of *tumah*. Each one had its sphere and separate jurisdiction. However, after the sin, the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* became mixed with the *nitzotzot* of *tumah*, disrupting the harmonious balance of the world established at Creation.

Our task in this world is to redeem the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* from the *tumah*, and thus create a complete separation between *tumah* and

kedushah, as it was originally during the six days of Creation. The more a person delves into the Torah, the more he separates the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* from the *nitzotzot* of *tumah*. This is the reason that Bnei Yisrael ended up in Egypt, being enslaved in the most depraved country. They were sent to redeem the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* that had mingled with the *nitzotzot* of *tumah*, as a result of Adam's sin, which had settled in the most *tamei* land of its times (*Sha'ar Hapesukim*, *Shemot*). After Bnei Yisrael completed repairing the damage, by remaining distinct through their Jewish names, style of dress, and language (*Shir Hashirim* 4:25; *Maharal*, *Netzach Yisrael*, *Perek* 25), they succeeded in redeeming the good *nitzotzot* and elevating them from the forty-ninth level of *tumah* to the forty-ninth level of *taharah*.

The task of separating between the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* and the *nitzotzot* of *tumah* is not finished. In each generation, we are obligated to delve into the words of the Torah, thereby restoring the world to its original pristine state. I believe that this is the reason that Bnei Yisrael are scattered today in exile all over the world. There is almost no place in the world which is entirely devoid of Jews. This gives them the opportunity to collect the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* that were scattered all over the world after the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash.

The *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* are found everywhere in the world; in the depths of the ocean, as well as on land. They can be redeemed in different ways, for example, by eating fish for the sake of Heaven and making a blessing over it. Likewise, the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* scattered among the oil countries are redeemed when products are manufactured from fuel and are then utilized for mitzvot. For example, when a person drinks water from a plastic cup produced from petroleum and recites the blessing, "*shehakol nihiyeh bidvaro*," the *nitzotzot* within the petroleum, originating from the Gulf area are redeemed. Similarly, we can suggest that trees are perfected when paper is produced from them, which is used for writing novel Torah thoughts, and so on.

This explains the meaning of Ben Bag Bag's statement. "Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it for everything is in it." Since the

nitzotzot of *kedushah* are found all over the world, one must delve into the words of the Torah so that its lessons will redeem and sanctify the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* intermingled in the *nitzotzot* of *tumah*.

Sometimes the path to embracing Torah and mitzvot may seem daunting. However, we are encouraged by the words of David Hamelech, who said, "טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' – Contemplate and see that Hashem is good."

In Summary

- In order to succeed in the study of Torah, one has to labor in it, just as one labors to succeed in material pursuits that require effort. Sometimes a person may feel that his success is dependent upon his efforts. In truth, this is not so. For example, Am Yisrael became the Chosen Nation specifically when they were enslaved. This teaches that the status of a person is not dependent on him, but only upon the will of the Master of the world.
- It says, "Contemplate and see that Hashem is good." However, in order to recognize Hashem's goodness, one must first experience it by "tasting" Torah. Those who refuse to accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah can be compared to the nations of the world, who refused the Torah, not wishing even to "taste" it.
- In Avot it says, "Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it [the Torah] for everything is in it." This implies that the Torah is deeper than the ocean. The more one delves in it, the more he will discover new depths. The Arizal explains that when Adam sinned, the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* became intermingled with the *nitzotzot* of *tumah*. By delving into the Torah, one is able to redeem the *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* from the *tumah*. In this way he perfects the world, bringing it under the kingship of **ש-די**, as it was before Adam sinned.

Going in the Ways of Hashem

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

The issue of "going" is frequently mentioned in the Torah. Here it says, "If you will go in my statutes," and the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 58:8) says, "Your righteous deed will go before you." There are also many other pesukim which mention the issue of going. Similarly, the Shelah Hakadosh says (*Parashat Noach*, *Torah Ohr* 3) that a person "goes," whereas the angels "stand." I saw in the sefer *Michtav m'Eliyahu* (I, 286; III, 102) that tzaddikim "go" both in this world and in the World to Come. This is because when they leave the world, they do not stop studying Torah, but continue "going" through it and learning it in the World to Come also. Conversely, the moment that the angels conclude their mission, they are burnt (*Chagigah* 14a), and in this way their purpose is fulfilled in the world.

After undergoing an operation, two doctors came to see me and offered to help me get up from my bed. They explained that prolonged lying is not healthy for the body. The feet may lose their balance if they are not used for an extended period of time. Since I knew that every achievement in life is acquired through toil and labor, I refused their offer to assist me, and expressed my desire to stand up and walk by myself, slowly.

If we think about it, everything that we accomplish in this world is accompanied by "going." In order to drink or eat, one must get up and go to the kitchen, and in order to pay bills, one must go to the bank. There are many other examples pointing to the fact that one is required to be in constant motion. From the moment that a baby is born, everyone anxiously watches over him to see how he will develop. The moment that he succeeds in standing on his own two feet and takes his first steps, everyone cheers him.

This is true also in matters of *kedushah*, and applies to those who study Torah and fulfill its mitzvot. A person must make use of his two feet in order to go to the Beit Hamidrash and to fulfill mitzvot that require walking and going. Chazal (*Sotah* 22a) teach us that one receives reward for each step that he takes in order to fulfill a mitzvah. If a person exerts himself in order to perform a mitzvah and has to walk a long distance on its account, he will receive a double reward. He will be rewarded both for the mitzvah itself and for the walking that was required in order to accomplish it. For example, if a person lives far from the Beit Hakeneset and has to walk a long distance in order to pray there, besides for the reward that he will receive for praying with a minyan, he will also receive reward for the steps taken in order to fulfill the mitzvah.

Hashem told Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 13:17), "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth… for to you will I give it." This indicates that as a reward for the steps that Avraham would take in order to publicize Hashem in the world, bringing people to accept His Kingship, he would receive Eretz Yisrael as an inheritance for himself and his offspring, until the end of time.

L'havdil, we have an example of this from Nevuchadnezzar as well. He merited ruling the entire world as a reward for taking three steps in honor of Hashem. When Nevuchadnezzar noticed that the letter, which the King of Bavel was sending to Chizkiyahu Hamelech, first addressed Chizkiyahu and only afterwards mentioned Hashem, he took three steps toward the king of Bavel to correct the error and address Hashem first (*Sanhedrin* 96a). Similarly, Eglon, the king of Moav, stood up from his seat the moment that he heard the *Navi* declare that he had a message to deliver to him from Hashem (*Shoftim* 3:20). He was rewarded by having Ruth descend from him. She became the mother of all future kings stemming from David Hamelech until Melech Hamashiach (*Tanchuma*, *Vayechi* 4). Thus, we see how each step taken for Hashem's sake is highly regarded.

A person who labors in Torah is considered by Hashem as if he "walked" through it. The Torah is more expansive and deeper than the ocean. The more a person delves in it, the more he uncovers new

information. The Torah informs us (*Yeshayahu* 58:8), "Your righteous deed will go before you," implying that after a person dies, the Torah, which is referred to as "righteous" will walk before him, advocating for him, measure for measure. Just as he labored to study and "walk" through the Torah, likewise the Torah will walk before him, illuminating his path.

Conversely, when Bnei Yisrael halted their journey in the desert, the Torah specifies that they "sat" in Shittim (*Bamidbar* 25:1). This implies that Am Yisrael had ceased to "walk" through the Torah. This is why the challenge of *Ba'al Peor* immediately sprung upon them, and they ultimately succumbed to sin (*Sanhedrin* 106a).

Yirmeyahu says in *Megillat Eichah* (3:40), "Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem." The *Navi* is conveying that in order to fulfill Hashem's will, one must examine the right path to follow and go in its ways. Consequently, he will return to Hashem in complete teshuvah. When Yerushalayim was destroyed, Bnei Yisrael approached the Sages and asked them to clarify the reason for the destruction. The Sages did not know it, until Hashem revealed it to them, saying (*Yirmeyahu* 9:11-12) "For what reason did the land perish?… Because of their forsaking My Torah that I put before them." This indicates that by choosing to go after their hearts' desires, Bnei Yisrael strayed from the right path, which ultimately led to their abandonment of the Torah.

After Am Yisrael were aware of their sin, which had resulted in the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, they turned to Hashem and said (*Eichah* 5:21), "Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old." Bnei Yisrael expressed their desire to return to Him and renew once more their relationship as it had been in "the days of old," which Hashem lovingly recalls in the pasuk (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2), "I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land." When Am Yisrael were travelling in the Wilderness, they put all their trust in Hashem that He would provide for them in the desert and usher them into Eretz Yisrael. Since Hashem does not withhold reward for any deed, He recalls forever this extraordinary journey, laden with *mesirut nefesh*, in which Am Yisrael

followed Hashem faithfully. Am Yisrael strive to repeat this commendable conduct. Consequently, they turn to Hashem and express their desire to once again go after Hashem faithfully, with courage and self-sacrifice, just as they had done in the Wilderness.

In Summary

- We find that there is an important dimension to walking, since most mitzvot are accomplished through motion. There is reward granted for each step taken to perform a mitzvah and, *l'havdil*, even for the steps taken by Nevuchadnezzar and Eglon. Furthermore, tzaddikim are referred to as those who "go," as opposed to angels who "stand." This is because tzaddikim do not cease learning Torah after departing from this world, but continue studying it in the World to Come.
- Hashem told Avraham, "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth!" By walking through the land and enlightening people of Hashem's Kingship, he would merit offspring who would inherit Eretz Yisrael.
- A person who labors in Torah and "walks" through its vast expanses will discover novel insights. In the end, he will merit that the Torah will "walk" before him and advocate for him after his death.
- When Bnei Yisrael halted their journey and "sat" in Shittim, the challenge of *Ba'al Peor* sprang upon them, which ultimately led them to sin with the women of Midian.
- The *Navi* quotes Am Yisrael's expression of their desire to do teshuvah with the words, "Let us search and examine our ways." Further on they say, "Renew our days as of old," referring to the days lovingly recalled by Hashem: "Your following Me into the Wilderness."

Meriting Miracles

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Many commentaries discuss the reason why Hashem commanded the performance of mitzvot that fall into the category of *chukim*, which are laws whose reason we cannot understand. While there are mitzvot in the Torah whose reasons are known to us, such as the prohibition to murder, to steal, to commit adultery, etc., there are also commandments which one cannot explain rationally, but must nevertheless fulfill, just because Hashem commanded us to perform them. Included in this category are mitzvot such as the prohibition of eating milk products together with meat, wearing clothing of *sha'atnez*, and the mitzvah of *parah adumah*, which purifies the *tamei* and makes *tamei* those who are *tahor*.

Why does Hashem require us to fulfill mitzvot whose reasoning is not known to us? Included in such mitzvot is the mitzvah of laboring in the study of Torah. Why is it not enough for a person to simply learn the laws that are relevant for his daily function? Why does he have to study laws that do not apply to him personally, such as the laws of *korbanot*, which are not even performed in our days?

Many times people approach me and ask various questions concerning the mitzvot, such as, "Why do we have to buy the four species for Sukkot?" And also, "Why do we need to use specifically the four species of a *lulav*, *etrog*, *aravot*, and *hadasim* as opposed to cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, and onions?" I do not always have a clear answer to every question, but there is one thing I am certain about. If Hashem commands us to perform a mitzvah, then we must fulfill it without any misgivings or doubts, even though we cannot possibly understand its reasoning.

It is important to clarify an important principle, as Chazal (*Sotah* 8b) state, "The way a person responds toward situations and people is how

Hashem acts toward him." This signifies that ultimately a person himself decides in which way Hashem will deal with him. He determines if Hashem will act toward him with the Attribute of Justice or the Attribute of Mercy. It depends on his conduct.

Hashem relates to a person measure for measure. When He sees that the person is meticulous in fulfilling mitzvot, even when he does not understand their reasons, transcending his nature, Hashem behaves toward him in a similar manner, saving him in extraordinary ways, even if under normal circumstances he should have been harmed.

Often a person is saved from a danger by a miracle. One may miss a train by a few seconds and afterwards find out that the train derailed and many passengers were hurt. Similarly, one may have intended to invest his money in a lucrative investment, but before he succeeded in closing the deal, suddenly heard that those very stocks crashed. If he would have hurried to conclude the deal, he would have incurred great financial losses and remained penniless. Those who do not believe in Hashem's Divine intervention will argue that everything is coincidental. It is the fate of a person to miss a train that derailed or delay investing in stocks that eventually crash. However, we believe that Hashem's constant intervention directs our lives, to the extent that a person cannot lift his finger unless it was so decreed in Heaven (*Chulin* 7b). Consequently, there is no incident that occurs accidentally, since everything is ordained by Heaven.

A person deserves having Hashem deal with him in a manner that defies nature when he makes supernatural efforts to perform mitzvot whose reason is not clear to him. This is because "the way a person responds toward situations/people is how Hashem acts toward him." When Hashem perceives that a person is careful to go in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot, fulfilling them scrupulously, without demanding explanations, measure for measure, Hashem will save him from all trouble without logical explanation, in a supernatural way.

On one of my flights from one country to another, a highly dangerous problem was discovered in the engine of the plane after landing. The crew could not understand how the plane had succeeded in arriving safely. Non-believers attributed it to their good luck. In truth, it was not a matter of luck, but direct Divine intervention that Hashem was granting to the passengers on the flight, in order to arouse them to realize that everything is ordained by Him. If one goes in the ways of Hashem, and hearkens to His mitzvot even without understanding their logic, Hashem deals with him in a similar way and coordinates extraordinary miracles. If not for Hashem's infinite Mercy, who knows how things would have turned out?

When Hashem wants to punish someone, He will arrange everything so that he will receive what he deserves. When America invaded Iraq and began searching for its cruel dictator, Sadaam Hussein, *yimach shemo*, they justified their invasion by claiming that they had evidence proving that Iraq was developing chemical weapons. Consequently, they had to topple his government quickly, before he could implement his scheme of massive destruction. After America invaded Iraq together with the Allied forces, they did not find any chemical weapons that had been described by their Intelligence Agency. Notwithstanding, through the kindness of Hashem, the tyrannical dictator was caught alive and brought to trial. After the court procedures, which were publicized world-wide, he received his rightful punishment and was hanged.

One may view these events as entirely natural. However, I wholeheartedly believe that since Hashem wanted to punish the oppressor, He fooled the Intelligence Agency, causing them to believe that Iraq had developed chemical warfare for mass destruction, in order that America would quickly attack them. After all, if the dictator knew that he had no chemical weapons in his possession, why did he stop the UN from searching his plants? As a result of his refusal to allow them to verify that there were no chemical weapons, the Allies ultimately attacked and defeated him. It is clear that this was ordained by Heaven, and Hashem had orchestrated that Sadaam Hussein should stubbornly refuse

investigation so that he should ultimately receive his due punishment. If he had not stubbornly refused the UN permission to search his country, he would not have been killed.

Chazal (*Yevamot* 63a) say that the world is only blessed in the merit of Am Yisrael. Consequently, everything that occurs in the world at large is directly related to Am Yisrael. Thus, we may assume that in the merit of learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvot, which fall into the category of *chukim*, whose reason we cannot understand, Hashem orchestrated the downfall of this cruel oppressor in a supernatural way. This should help us see Hashem's Presence in our lives. We should be aware that keeping Torah and mitzvot make Am Yisrael worthy of salvation, even when, under normal circumstances, things could be very different. This is manifested by the example of America invading Iraq for no justifiable reason, but only because they had imagined that it was necessary.

To answer those who wonder why we are obligated to pray to Hashem three times a day, and not only once a day, or why we have to hear the reading of the Torah every Shabbat even though we already know the parshiyot by heart, etc., we can only respond by explaining that the rule is not to ask for explanations, but to fulfill the mitzvot faithfully because Hashem has commanded us to do so.

In Summary

- Why does Hashem command us to fulfill *chukim*, which are mitzvot whose reason we cannot understand, such as the command to learn Torah and subjects that are not relevant to us presently, such as the subject of *korbanot*.
- It says, "The way a person responds toward situations and people is how Hashem acts toward him," whether it is by compassion or strict justice. When a person transcends his nature and performs mitzvot meticulously, even if the reason for them defies him, measure for measure, Hashem will save him in a supernatural manner that defies nature.

- The world is blessed only on account of Am Yisrael. Consequently, all events occurring in the world are directly related to Am Yisrael. America's invasion of Iraq was based on intelligence reports that were unfounded. Clearly, this was orchestrated by Hashem in order that the cruel oppressor, Sadaam Hussein, should receive his rightful punishment. We firmly believe that the merit of Am Yisrael's Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot, even though they are beyond logic, caused the downfall of the oppressive ruler in an inexplicable manner.
- Regarding the fulfillment of Hashem's mitzvot, one must follow the letter of the law without question. One should perform mitzvot only because Hashem commanded him to do so. We hope that Hashem will act toward us measure for measure, bringing salvation that is beyond comprehension.

Laboring in Torah

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi explains that the command to "go in My statutes" obligates one to labor in the study of Torah. This implies that the study of Torah requires toil in order to understand it. Just as a person invests much effort in earning money, and even forgoes sleep, despite its hardship, in order to rise early to go to work, so too, a person should labor to study Torah in order to derive satisfaction from it. To the degree that he experiences gratification, he will delight in the World to Come.

The Torah commands a person to exert effort in its study. This is because when a person invests efforts in something, it becomes more precious to him. Similarly, laboring in Torah makes a person value it

more. Although in the end a person takes only his Torah with him to the Heavenly Courts, and it advocates for him, tipping judgment in his favor, people tend to attribute more importance to their money and possessions, which ultimately remain behind. After a person dies, his *neshamah* ascends to Heaven, his body is buried in the ground, and his possessions remain behind, unable to assist him.

The study of Torah and one's effort to learn it fortify his *emunah* in Hashem and train him to acquire good character traits. For example, the Torah commands a person to honor his parents and appreciate them. Although this mitzvah may at times be difficult, especially when parents age and are in need of constant care by their children, a person is obligated to invest efforts into performing this significant mitzvah.

We can explain the reason for this mitzvah in the following way. The Torah commands one to honor Hashem and hearken to His commands. However, this mandate is difficult to carry out, since Hashem is not corporeal. Since Hashem is not visible, we must envision His great and awesome Presence in order to honor Him. Hashem made it easier for us to honor Him by commanding us to invest efforts in honoring our parents. Through laboring to care for parents, who can be tangibly perceived in front of one's eyes, he can train himself to honor Hashem, Who fashioned him, his parents, his grandparents, and so on, despite not seeing Him. The more one invests in honoring his parents, the more he will acquire the ability to honor Hashem and fulfill His will.

I once heard the following account about a convert, whose father was a Moslem and mother a Catholic. Despite his background, he embraced Judaism with intensity. Today he serves as an important Rabbi. His parents hung a picture of him in their dining room, portraying him wrapped with a *tallit* and tefillin. When their son asked them why they chose to display him specifically in a way that contradicts their religion, they explained to him that it is precisely his Judaism that endears him to them. Ever since he practiced its laws, he exhibited greater interest in honoring his parents. Whereas their other children abandoned them, only he remained dedicated to their care.

Through the mitzvah of honoring one's parents, he can improve the way he honors Hashem. By honoring those who are visible, he can train himself to honor Hashem, Who is hidden. Thus, the Torah and mitzvot bring a person to recognize his Creator. The more a person invests in the study of Torah, the closer he comes to Hashem and recognizes His Presence.

Generally, a person is valued according to his wealth, status, and standard of living. When one enters an expansive mansion with many rooms, he realizes immediately that the owner is very rich. On the contrary, when one enters a shabby, rickety hut, he reaches the conclusion that the owner is a penniless pauper. Just as a house reflects its inhabitants, and style of clothes reflect the one wearing them, so too, the Torah reflects Hashem. When one delves into its words, he discovers its vast treasures and depth, as it says (*Avot* 5:22), "Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it, for everything is in it." Since the Torah is vaster than the ocean and rich in treasures, it testifies about its Author, Who is Supreme. For this reason Hashem commands His people to labor in Torah, since when one delves in it, he discovers its wealth of treasures. Consequently, his appreciation for Hashem, Who granted us the Torah, is heightened.

There is another reason why Hashem commands one to labor in the study of Torah and not suffice in reviewing it superficially. The Torah refines a person and helps him overcome his animalistic tendencies. When a person is immersed in Torah, he casts aside vanity and sheds the bestial traits inherent in man. The Torah commands a person to perform mitzvot which are considered ethical behavior, such as not to murder and not to steal. Even if he would not have been commanded to keep them, he would have arrived at the conclusion by himself that it is not proper to behave in this manner. Notwithstanding, the Torah also commands a person to perform mitzvot whose reason he cannot understand, but which train him to acquire positive character traits and refinement. Even though one does not understand their reason, it is important to follow

them. Since Hashem commands him to do the mitzvah, they cause him to become purified, justifying his humanness.

An animal acts upon its instincts and natural tendencies. When it is hungry, it does not hesitate to devour weaker species, or steal food from others. In contrast, the Torah teaches a person self control and sterling character traits. The more scrupulous one is in performing mitzvot, the more elevated he becomes, rising to a higher level of humanness. The Torah does not breed superficial manners alone, but causes one's refined conduct to become an integral part of him. One who studies Torah must delve into it, making an effort to incorporate it into his being, until it becomes part and parcel of him.

There is a well-known story of a cat which was trained to walk on two feet and serve customers in a restaurant. Everything went smoothly, until the cat spotted a mouse. At that moment, it flung the tray of food on the floor and scurried on all fours to catch its prey. In order that we should not resemble a trained cat, which guards his manners only when it suits him, we must toil in the study of Torah. In this way, we will attain the qualities reflecting a true Torah scholar, whose exemplary manner accompanies him in every situation.

In Summary

- The Torah commands us to toil in it, since people generally value that which they worked hard to achieve. Those things which are easily acquired are also easily lost. In addition, laboring in Torah trains a person to acquire virtuous character traits.
- One explanation for the mitzvah to honor one's parents is because by honoring those who are visible to him, he will come to honor Hashem, Who is hidden. Just as the mitzvah of honoring parents requires much effort, so too, the study of Torah requires toil and labor.
- Just as a home reflects those living in it, so too, the Torah, with all its wealth of knowledge, testifies to the infinite greatness of Hashem, Who fashioned it. In order to draw upon the wisdom of the Torah, Hashem

commands one to labor in its study, since it says, "Delve in it [the Torah] and continue to delve in it for everything is in it."

- Furthermore, laboring in Torah refines a person's inherent bestial features, especially when he overcomes his passions and fulfills the *chukim* of the Torah, which are mitzvot whose reason one cannot understand. By performing them just because Hashem commands him to do so, they ultimately purify him.
- A person should strive to make the Torah an essential part of him, which is possible through laboring in the study of Torah.

Setting Fixed Times for Torah Study

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

The Rema says (*Yoreh De'ah* 246:27), "Upon concluding a tractate, it is a mitzvah to prepare a festive meal." The Shach states (ibid. *Sa'if Katan* 27), in the name of the Maharshal, that even one who did not learn the tractate should conclude with him. This is because when one joins in a *siyum*, even if he did not learn that tractate, it is considered as if he also concluded its study.

Why are we obligated to join in a festive meal at the conclusion of a tractate and at the conclusion of the *shas*? The reason is because by joining the celebration of his friend, he will be impressed at how his fellow diligently learned page by page until he succeeded in completing the entire tractate. This is especially true regarding a *siyum* of *shas*. One senses the gratification of those who succeeded in following a set schedule of the Daf Hayomi learning cycle for seven years, ultimately

completing the entire *shas*. One joining in the celebration feels a stab in his heart, experiencing constructive jealousy, which propels him to fix set times for Torah. When Hashem sees the participant's readiness to study Torah diligently, Hashem helps him achieve his endeavors and considers it as if he already concluded the entire *shas*.

However, this is true only the first time that a person finds himself in this situation. If he does not get inspired to set fixed times in learning Torah after the event, and continues to neglect his studies, even if he will join the celebration at the conclusion of the next seven year cycle and long to be part of those learning diligently, Hashem will not consider it as if he had concluded the *shas* himself. This is because he was already granted an opportunity, but did not utilize it. Only if his lack of study was not his fault, then Hashem, Who scrutinizes one's heart and soul, will absolve him from his neglect and consider it once again as if he had concluded *shas*.

Setting fixed times for learning Torah has the potential to elevate one greatly. The following story illustrates this point. One of my students, Rabbi Gavriel Elbaz, is today the manager of the Torah Institutions in Lyon. Only a few years ago, he became inspired to learn Torah. From that time until today, he does not budge from the Beit Hamidrash during the set times that he fixed for himself to learn Torah. Moreover, as a result of his good example, many new participants joined in the learning session.

The story took place on Motza'ei Shabbat, when I was scheduled to fly to Brazil to participate in a wedding. The only train from Lyon to Paris was due to depart ten minutes after the conclusion of Shabbat. I arranged to catch the train from Lyon to Paris, and afterwards transfer to a train going to the airport to make the flight to Brazil. Immediately at the conclusion of Shabbat, I hurried to the train station, escorted by Rabbi Elbaz and his brother. When I reached the station, I realized that by mistake I had taken my thirteen year old son's hat instead of my own. The hat was too small for me, and it would have been a *chillul Hashem* for a Rabbi to appear in it. I sorrowfully informed Rav Elbaz that obviously Heaven had ordained that I do not reach my destination. It is important

to note that my trip to Brazil was in order to participate in a wedding of a couple who would only be wed according to Jewish law if I was there to supervise the *chuppah*. By missing the train and consequently the flight to Brazil, the wedding would be conducted contrary to the Torah way.

Rav Elbaz's brother said to me, "The Rabbi teaches us all the time about placing one's trust in Hashem. Also now, we must believe that Hashem can arrange to bring your hat to you so that you can catch the train on time." I argued that there was no time. In one minute the train was scheduled to depart, and the TGV train system was famous for its punctuality. How could I possibly get my hat on time? Rabbi Elbaz suggested that I call home and ask someone to bring the hat to the train station. I complied, even though it seemed a waste of time, since it was just a minute before departure.

The train had already entered the station, and we stood looking out for my family members bringing the hat. Rabbi Elbaz was calm and serene. To our absolute amazement, the train was delayed for a quarter of an hour, giving me ample time to get my hat. I received my hat and hopped on to the train as the doors were closing. Rabbi Elbaz and his brother taught me a lesson in faith. Until today, I do not know what caused the most punctual train in France to delay a quarter of an hour. The absolute faith of my friend impressed me. I realized that his worthiness stemmed from his fixed schedule in learning Torah. Whoever sets fixed times to learn Torah, acquires *emunah* and absolute trust in Hashem. Consequently, his prayers are immediately accepted in Heaven.

Even Torah scholars and those studying in yeshiva and kollel must set fixed times for learning Torah. The regular sessions of the kollel and yeshiva are insufficient, since there is monetary compensation for this form of learning. Each person must find free time and dedicate it to learning Torah for the sake of Heaven, without receiving any compensation.

The son-in-law of my esteemed teacher, the *gaon*, Rabbi Binyamin Kaufman, shlita, Rosh Kollel of Manchester, told me that in order to speak

to his father-in-law, he must call him only between seven-thirty and eight o'clock at night. Until seven-thirty he is in kollel, and at eight o'clock he returns to the Beit Hamidrash to learn until twelve o'clock at night. His learning sessions during the morning and afternoon do not qualify as fixed times for the study of Torah, since he receives a stipend for them. Therefore, he troubles himself, even at the age of eighty, to learn for an additional few hours at night, in order to set fixed times for learning Torah completely for the sake of Heaven.

The second question one is asked in Heaven after he dies is if he set fixed times for learning Torah (*Shabbat* 31a). Fortunate is he who can answer in the affirmative. Woe to the one who will not be able to answer positively. Most people who succeeded in concluding the seven year cycle of learning the entire *shas* did so by setting fixed times to learn Torah, often either early in the morning, or late at night, after an exhausting day of work. They had continued studying with self-sacrifice, going diligently to the Beit Hamidrash to learn the Daf Hayomi. Fortunate are they, and fortunate is their portion. By persisting in their fixed schedule, they fulfilled the mandate, "If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them."

In Summary

- It is obligatory to prepare a festive meal at the conclusion of learning a tractate or the entire *shas*. One should participate in the celebration even if he did not study the tractate, and it will be considered in Heaven as if he, too, concluded learning it.
- The reason for this is because one who participates in a *siyum* is impressed by the diligence of his fellow in concluding the tractate and experiences constructive jealousy, propelling him to learn diligently.
- Setting fixed times strengthens one's faith and trust in Hashem.
- The incident with my hat serves as a lesson in *emunah*. Whoever sets fixed times to learn Torah acquires *emunah* in Hashem.

♦ Those learning in kollel should set fixed times for the study of Torah beyond the sessions of the kollel, for which they receive a stipend.

Measure for Measure

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Hashem promised Bnei Yisrael that if they would go in the ways of the Torah, and keep its mitzvot and *chukim*, even without understanding their reason, He would grant them an abundance of wealth and success. Hashem assured them that they would receive the blessings even without having to go out to war in order to gain spoils. Hashem would shower them with goodness from Above.

This is far more preferable than becoming wealthy through the spoils of war, which has two main disadvantages. First, even though one acquires his enemy's possessions through war, he is likely overcome by grief over the loss of his close friends, who died in combat, marring the enjoyment of his newfound wealth. He cannot experience true satisfaction, because of the heavy losses. Second, war causes much destruction. Often, all the riches gained in war must be spent to repair this devastation, and the warriors do not gain any benefit. Conversely, those who labor in Torah, going in the ways of Hashem and observing His mitzvot and *chukim*, are assured that Hashem will shower them with Heavenly treasures, which they will be able to truly enjoy.

A *chok* is a mitzvah whose reason is hidden from us. We are obligated to observe it only because Hashem commanded us to do so (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Bamidbar* 759). For example, the prohibition to eat pork is a *chok*. The commentaries state that pork is very tasty. Despite this, we abstain from eating it, since Hashem prohibited it. Similarly, the *tumah* of a woman when she is in a state of *niddah* is also considered a *chok*. We cannot understand why a woman becomes pure only through ritual immersion in a kosher *mikveh*. Even if she were to shower herself with all the water in the world, she would still not alter her state of *tumah*. When Hashem perceives that His people are faithful to Him and observe His *chukim*, despite all the hardships involved, even without understanding their reason, measure for measure He showers them with an abundance of blessings and wealth. They are confounded, not understanding how all the blessings materialized. This is as the *Navi* describes (*Malachi* 3:10), "And [I will] pour out upon you blessing without end," until your mouths will be spent saying *Enough*! (*Shabbat* 32:2).

We find examples of Hashem's benevolence in sefer *Shoftim* (*Perek* 7-8) discussing how Gideon served as the army commander over only 300 soldiers. He succeeded in battling against Zevach and Tzalmuna, the mighty kings of Midian. Also Barak ben Avinoam and Devorah (*Shoftim* 4) fought against Sisera, who had an army of 40,000 times 100,000 soldiers (*Midrash Abbah Gurion* 3; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shoftim* 43).

Chazal relate that Sisera was so powerful and strong that when he would go swimming in the ocean, fish would get caught in the hairs of his beard (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shoftim* 43). Nevertheless, the small army of Barak and Devorah succeeded in conquering the mighty Sisera and his army. This was because the blessings of Hashem escorted them and granted them Divine assistance, beyond human comprehension.

Furthermore, when Bnei Yisrael accepted upon themselves Hashem's Kingship and left Egypt, following Hashem into the Wilderness, in an unsown land, they merited many extraordinary miracles. Hashem split the sea for them, brought down manna from Heaven, provided them with fowl, quenched their thirst with the Well of Miriam, and erected a pillar

of clouds and a pillar of fire to guide them along their way, lighting their path and protecting them from all harm. Above all, Hashem surrounded them with seven Clouds of Glory.

These miracles performed for Bnei Yisrael are incomprehensible. Hashem poured His benevolence upon His people, since they expressed their desire to accept the Torah and observe its *chukim*, even those that are beyond comprehension. This demonstrates that Hashem deals with Bnei Yisrael measure for measure. When they observe the *chukim*, even without understanding their reason, Hashem showers them with abundant blessings beyond human comprehension.

In Summary

- Hashem promised Bnei Yisrael that if they go in His ways and labor in the study of Torah, He will shower them with an abundance of wealth, without their having to go out to battle. The joy of victory in battle is often marred by the sorrow of losing friends in combat. Furthermore, many times, the money acquired from the spoils has to be spent on rebuilding the ruins resulting from the devastation of war. This is not so for those who go in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot. Hashem grants them abundance in absolute bliss.
- We are obligated to fulfill the *chukim* of the Torah even if we cannot understand their reason, just because Hashem commanded us to do so. Hashem deals with His people measure for measure. When Bnei Yisrael observe the *chukim* even without understanding their reason, Hashem showers them with an abundance of wealth and blessing, leaving them amazed at their extraordinary good fortune. This transpired when Bnei Yisrael followed Hashem into the Wilderness without question. Measure for measure, Hashem treated them with infinite kindness, beyond human comprehension.

The Benefits of Laboring in Torah

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi explains (ibid. 26:3) that the words "If you will go in My statutes" indicate that one is obligated to labor in the study of Torah. It is not enough for one to study Torah and fulfill its mitzvot, but he must labor and toil in it. The more effort he invests in the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvot, the greater his reward will be in the World to Come.

Hashem promises Bnei Yisrael that if they labor in Torah, He will reward them, as it says, "I will provide your rains in their time." This indicates that the rain would fall in the exact time and measure to benefit the people so that it should be a blessing and not a curse. Just as rain can serve as a blessing, giving life to all vegetation, it can also destroy crops and cause enormous damage to the wheat when it descends in abundance.

What determines whether the rain will serve as a blessing or curse? It is the timing, quantity, and force with which the rain descends. This corresponds to the pasuk: "I will provide your rains in their time." It is important for rain to fall in the right season so that it should serve as a blessing and not destroy the crops. Similarly it says (*Kohelet* 3:1), "Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under the heaven." When Bnei Yisrael labor in Torah and mitzvot, they are answered that the rains will serve as a blessing, bringing wealth and satisfaction to all the people.

Why does Hashem want His people to labor in the study of Torah? Why is it not enough for a person to learn Torah in tranquility, without exerting

effort? The reason is because only through laboring and toiling can one acquire spiritual acquisitions. One's labor and diligence in learning serve to bring him close to Hashem and arouse within him love and affinity for Torah. Conversely, if a person does not invest his time in learning Torah diligently, but observes mitzvot without thinking, undoubtedly he will not become attached to Hashem. When a person's heart is not linked to Hashem and His Torah, it is likely to become attached to materialism.

The *Yetzer Hara* clearly knows this and invests all his efforts to prevent a person from laboring in Torah. He does not dare convince a person to cease learning Torah entirely, because he knows that he will not listen to him. Therefore, he cunningly persuades him to relax his efforts, arguing, "Why do you need to labor so much in order to understand this complicated subject in Gemara? It is enough that you observe the mitzvot written in the Torah; you will earn enough of a reward from Heaven on their account." If a person is not adequately attached to Torah, he may become seduced by the *Yetzer Hara* and begin to deteriorate quickly. Who knows if in the end he will continue to observe even the basic laws of the Torah?

There are many people who invest all their time and energies in their business. They are willing to get up in the morning, even before sunrise, to conclude a successful deal and increase their wealth. On the other hand, when it comes to laboring in Torah, fatigue overcomes them, and they feel that they have no strength left to join a Torah lecture. Perhaps this is the reason that the Torah specifically writes "If you will go in My statutes," which indicates that just as one goes to work each day with vigor, investing effort and energy, so too, should he pursue Torah and mitzvot and labor in its study. In this way he will merit abundance of blessings from heaven.

It is told about the Gaon of Vilna that he would sleep only two hours over a twenty-four hour period. In the remaining twenty-two hours, he would immerse himself entirely in Torah, laboring in its study with great effort. Even when he slept for two hours he would doze lightly on the *stender*, so that immediately upon awakening he should be able to resume

his full concentration in learning. One day the Gaon of Vilna fell into a deep slumber, and upon awakening, he calculated that he had slept for eleven minutes more than his usual two hours. For many years he was extremely upset about this misfortune. He was tormented in regret, crying inconsolably over the eleven minutes which were wasted in sleep instead of being utilized in the study of Torah.

Upon hearing such extraordinary stories, we gain perspective on the enormous efforts that Torah scholars invest in learning Torah. The Torah encourages a person to reflect upon the deeds of our tzaddikim, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 30:20), "Your eyes will behold your Teacher." One should observe the deeds of tzaddikim in order to imitate their exalted manner of behavior.

There are several other reasons why Hashem wants Am Yisrael to labor in the study of Torah. One is so that a person should accord honor and significance to spiritual achievements. Just as a person invests efforts in material matters, so too, he should invest in spiritual pursuits, which provide eternal acquisitions. The goal toward which a person invests most of his efforts and energies testifies to the significance he accords it, since a person only invests in that which is closest to his heart.

Another reason for laboring in Torah is in order to minimize the powerful influence of the Satan, who seeks to harm people. How can we fight against the Satan? By laboring in the study of Torah, as it says (*Kiddushin* 30b), "I created the *Yetzer Hara*; I created the Torah as an antidote."

Also, Hashem wants His people to labor in the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot in order to increase their merit. Hashem deals with His people measure for measure. To the degree that one labors in the study of Torah, Hashem protects him in a supernatural way, as it says (*Devarim* 11:12), "A land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end." The continuation of the pesukim inform us of the abundant blessings that Hashem will shower upon those who labor in the study of

Torah, as it says (*Vayikra* 26:5), "You will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land. I will provide peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you."

This signifies that dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is not to be taken lightly. It requires the fulfillment of several basic conditions, including a commitment to labor in the study of Torah. When Bnei Yisrael will truly labor in Torah, making a sincere effort to draw closer to Hashem, He will speedily redeem them, bring Mashiach, and ultimately resurrect the dead.

In Summary

- The words "If you will go in My statutes" indicate that one must labor in the study of Torah. As a reward, Hashem promises, "I will provide your rains in their time." There is rainfall that serves as a blessing; conversely, it can also be a curse. It is dependent upon the time and season that the rain descends. Hashem promises His people that if they labor in His Torah, He will provide rains in their time, which will serve as a blessing.
- Why does Hashem want His people to labor in the study of Torah? Why is it not enough to observe the mitzvot in tranquility? The reason is because laboring in Torah links a person to Hashem instead of becoming attached to physical pursuits. When a person is connected to Hashem, he seeks to perform mitzvot with dedication. Moreover, when the Satan sees that a person is not attached to Hashem, he persuades him to sin and to pursue materialism by distracting him from Torah. Ultimately he will deteriorate drastically. Furthermore, laboring in the study of Torah increases one's merits, and accords him protection, as is described in the continuation of the pesukim.
- Dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is not to be taken lightly. It requires the fulfillment of several basic conditions, including a commitment to labor in the study of Torah. When Bnei Yisrael will truly labor in the Torah, Hashem will redeem them speedily with the everlasting redemption.

Rewarding Those Dedicated to Hashem

"You will pursue you enemies; and they will fall before you by the sword. Five from among you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred from among you will pursue ten thousand; and your enemies will fall before you by the sword"

(*Vayikra* 26:7-8)

Moshe Rabbeinu informs Bnei Yisrael that if they will go in the ways of the Torah and mitzvot and labor in the study of Torah, Hashem will shower them with an abundance of blessings from Above. Among the blessings that the Torah specifies is that He will provide rain in its time, bringing bounty to the world. Furthermore, Hashem promises Bnei Yisrael that they will enjoy peace and not be threatened by enemies. There will be supernatural protection, whereby five people will succeed in pursuing a hundred enemies, and one hundred will pursue ten thousand.

I heard the following story from one of our great Torah leaders. Once there was a king who heard that it says in the Torah that a handful of Jews will succeed in chasing thousands of enemies. This filled the king with rage. He turned to the Jews and told them that they had only one month in order to prove the legitimacy of these words. If they would not succeed in proving it, he would issue a decree to annihilate them. When the Jews heard the king's edict, they were terrified. They turned to their leader in tears, begging him to pray for them and annul the devastating decree.

The cries of the Jews moved the Heavens, and Eliyahu Hanavi appeared to their leader. He advised him to choose a small group of people who would go out to battle. The Rabbi heeded his words, and in the designated time the small group went out to fight the enemy. In a most miraculous way, despite the small number of Jews in comparison to their enemies, they succeeded in destroying their persecutors. Eventually, a memorial

was erected in the memory of the thousands of Arabs who died on that day.

This teaches us that when Bnei Yisrael cleave to Hashem's Torah and labor in its study, fulfilling its mitzvot with devotion, the blessings of Hashem are realized, and they have no need to fear their enemies. Rav Shach, zt"l, would always say that the blessings that Eretz Yisrael enjoys is only in the merit of the Torah that the young students learn in yeshivot. We actually see proof of this. Every time the government begins to discuss drafting the yeshiva students into the army, a devastating war erupts in Eretz Yisrael. We see many times how Hashem, so to speak, closes His eyes and suffers those who desecrate Shabbat or disregard the laws of kosher food. However, if Torah learning, which is the foundation of Judaism, is threatened, Hashem does not ignore it and immediately arouses people by bringing a frightening threat upon them.

If one but opens his eyes, he can perceive that in any community in which Torah is being studied, both spiritual and material blessings materialize. I remember when I first got married and moved to Lyon, there were only a few Batei Kenesiot there, which were half empty even on Shabbat. The availability of kosher food was sorely lacking. To the same degree that the spiritual status of the city was deficient, so was its economic state. After I opened a yeshiva and kollel in Lyon, with the help of Hashem, many other Torah centers developed as a result. At the same time the economical situation of the city improved. One cannot compare its state today to the shape it was in twenty or thirty years ago, before the sound of Torah permeated its atmosphere. I saw that Rav Shach wrote that when Rabbi Aharon Kotler, zt"l, arrived in Lakewood and established a yeshiva there, the city immediately began to prosper. The sound of Torah had a direct effect on the progressive development of the area.

When Hashem appeared to Avraham Avinu and commanded him about the mitzvah of *brit milah*, it says (*Bereishit* 17:26) that Avraham was circumcised "on that very day." This indicates that Avraham did not fear those who derided him. He joyfully performed Hashem's mitzvah in public, without fearing his opponents. Avraham Avinu taught us an

important lesson. When a person fulfills the will of Hashem, he should do so with pride and not fear those that mock him. Avraham was referred to as *Avraham Ha'Ivri*, since his belief in one G-d set him alone against all the people in the world. No one recognized Hashem besides for Avraham. Avraham reasoned that if Hashem had delivered the five kings into his hands in battle even before he had performed *brit milah*, which serves to sanctify a person greatly, how many more blessings would he be granted after he fulfilled the mitzvah.

As we mentioned, the words "If you will go in my statutes" obligate one to toil in Torah. Avraham Avinu always invested much effort and labor in his service of Hashem. Hashem tested Avraham with ten trials (*Avot* 5:3), and despite this, Avraham never questioned Hashem's ways (*Tanchuma*, *Vayeira* 23), but was prepared to fulfill Hashem's will perfectly with absolute dedication. The Torah describes how Hashem commanded Avraham to bring his only son, Yitzchak, as an offering for Hashem. Although Hashem had promised Avraham (*Bereishit* 21:12) that "through Yitzchak will offspring be considered yours," Avraham happily fulfilled Hashem's command. He even rose early in the morning, saddling his donkey by himself. He did not command one of his servants to do it, as a man of his stature normally would, in his eagerness to perform Hashem's will (*Bereishit Rabbah* 55:8).

Furthermore, Avraham would build an altar at every opportunity to thank Hashem for all that He did, whether it was good or otherwise. He taught us that a person must always be prepared to sacrifice himself in order to fulfill Hashem's will. He should not request explanations or consider his friends' opinions. His only objective should be to fulfill Hashem's command, and he should act upon this goal. When Hashem perceives that a person is faithful to Him and strives to fulfill His will, even at the expense of suffering disgrace or hardship, He will grant him an abundance of blessings and benevolence, as described in parashat *Bechukotai*.

In Summary

- Hashem promises His people that if they will labor in His Torah, He will grant them an abundance of blessings. The rains will fall in their proper time, and Bnei Yisrael will win their battles in a supernatural way.
- Avraham Avinu taught us that a Jew must perform Hashem's commands with great pride. When he was commanded to perform *brit milah*, he was happy to fulfill it, reasoning that if before doing the *brit milah*, Hashem had delivered the five kings into his hands, how much more blessings would he merit after fulfilling the mitzvah.
- Avraham always invested much effort and labor in his service of Hashem. Although Hashem tested Avraham Avinu with difficult trials, he never raised any questions in argument, but fulfilled Hashem's will happily.

Gems on Parashat Bechukotai

The Reward for Observing Hashem's Laws

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi explains that the words "If you will go in My statutes" obligate one to labor in the study of Torah. It is not enough for a person to simply learn the laws of the Torah relevant to his daily life, but there is a clear directive in the Torah to labor in its study, even if what he learns does not apply to him practically, but he learns it only for the sake of learning Torah. It would seem to us that a person should only be obligated to learn the laws that apply to his daily life. In fact, this is not so. However, the mitzvah of learning Torah falls into the category of a *chok*, whose reason a person cannot understand.

Moreover, there are additional *chukim* in the Torah that we cannot understand at all, such as the prohibition to wear *sha'atnez*, eat meat and milk together, the prohibitions applying to a woman who is a *niddah*, or the mitzvah of *parah adumah*. We are obligated to perform the *chukim*, whose reasons were not revealed to us, with the same dedication as we invest in fulfilling mitzvot whose reasons we understand, and which are logical, such as the prohibition to murder, steal, and commit adultery.

Performing *chukim* requires more self-sacrifice, since a person has to force himself to fulfill them against his reason. Conversely, the mitzvot which are rational are easier to accomplish, since they sit well with a person.

Why does Hashem command us to learn Torah day and night, as it says, "You should contemplate it day and night"? Why are we obligated to study Torah endlessly, and even delve in subjects for which there is no practical application? We understand the importance of being commanded to study and toil in the laws that apply to our daily lives. However, it is very hard to comprehend why Hashem commands His people to learn Torah for the sake of learning, when there is no practical application involved.

We can explain this in the following way. Many times we experience incidents that defy reason. Those who lack faith term such events as "luck." They insist that a person's good luck caused him to be saved from an accident, or win the lottery. In contrast, those whose faith is ingrained in them know that there is no such thing as "luck." The word **מקרה** (coincidence) is a combination of the words **רק מה'** (only from Hashem). This signifies that everything that occurs to a person comes from Hashem. If he experiences good fortune, it indicates that Hashem intentionally orchestrated events for his benefit.

We may suggest that when one observes Hashem's mitzvot, performing them with self-sacrifice, even when their reasons are not obvious to him, Hashem deals with him measure for measure. Hashem makes his luck shine upon him and protects his life, even in situations which according to nature are dangerous or negative, such as being killed in a car accident, being fired from his job, or suffering financial loss. Since he follows Hashem wholeheartedly, Hashem deals with him leniently and gives him good fortune, even when according to nature things should not turn out well.

Only when one labors in the study of Torah is one accorded special protection and good fortune, above the bounds of logic. Laboring in the

study of Torah is a *chok* issued by Hashem (*Zohar* II, 124a). Therefore, when a person toils in Torah, he connects to the Names of Hashem, which protect him and attach him directly to Him. This is the reason that he is worthy of special protection.

A Servant of the Torah Is a Free Man

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi says (ibid.) that this pasuk implies that one must labor in Torah.

On the one hand, the Torah obligates one to labor in it, investing all his efforts in studying Torah. On the other hand, Chazal (*Avot* 6:2) teach, "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of Torah." How can one who slaves in the study of Torah be considered an absolutely free man?

First we must clarify the reason for Hashem orchestrating Bnei Yisrael's exile to Egypt, and having Pharaoh enslave them in a torturous manner. Pharaoh bathed in the blood of the Jewish children, whom he slaughtered (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:34) and subjugated the people to backbreaking labor. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah and His supreme authority. This is why He first sent them to Egypt to be enslaved there. In this way they would experience what it was like to be a slave, who has no personal ambitions (*Ibn Ezra*, *Shemot* 2:3). Ultimately, when they would be redeemed from Egypt, they would perceive that subjugating themselves to Torah is true freedom. They would realize that enslavement to materialism and physical acquisitions

may at first seem attractive, but, in the end, results in aggravation. Conversely, subjugation to Torah may at first be difficult, but in the end it is infinite bliss.

Thus, the command to labor in the study of Torah frees a person from becoming a victim to materialism and physical passions, as Chazal declare, "The truly free man is the one who engages in the study of Torah."

Absorbing Torah

"If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them"

(*Vayikra* 26:3)

Rashi says (ibid.) that this pasuk implies that one must labor in Torah.

The *Ba'alei Mussar* teach that by laboring in Torah, one's body becomes heated with exertion. In this way, the Torah becomes absorbed within his system, as David Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 40:9), "Your Torah is in my innards."

The Torah is not like foods one eats that enter his intestines, since, in the end, food is excreted from the body in the form of waste. Torah enters one's guts, but does not exit. David Hamelech declared that in his system there was only Torah, without any refuse.

Unfortunately, we witness people who derive personal benefit from Torah, such as those who gain status because of their knowledge. They turn Torah into a "spade to dig with." They are punished severely, since they turn the Torah within their innards to refuse, *rachmana litzlan*.

The generation of the Wilderness did not have to get rid of any waste in their body. Chazal say, "The Torah was only given to those that consumed the manna." This signifies that just as the Torah is Heavenly, so too, was the food that descended from Heaven. Just as the manna was absorbed within their innards, so too, the Torah is incorporated deeply within one's essence.

A Parent's Responsibility

"Then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers, for the treachery with which they betrayed Me, and also for having behaved toward Me with casualness"

(*Vayikra* 26:40)

The Ohr Hachaim (ibid.) asks a question about this pasuk. Why during the procedure of offering a sacrifice does a person have to confess the sins of his fathers, in addition to his own sins? What relevance do his father's sins have to him, obligating him to confess them? The Ohr Hachaim provides insights into this matter.

I would like to suggest that the conduct of children is dependent upon their parents. It is the parents' duty to invest all their efforts in the pure education of their children. If one's child becomes corrupt, or transgresses a specific sin, it indicates that the parents neglected his education. Since they were not dedicated enough concerning this specific mitzvah, or perhaps did not serve as proper role models of dedication to the performance of mitzvot, the child ultimately transgressed.

Thus, children are obligated to confess the sins of their fathers, because their fathers' sins caused them to eventually sin as well, ultimately obligating them to offer a sacrifice to atone for their

transgression. When a child does wrong, it indicates that his parents were not adequately concerned with his education. If the parents would have been dedicated to educating their child properly, instilling within him proper values, chances are that he would not have transgressed.

When I was a young yeshiva student, I shared a room with another boy who smoked. Following his bad example, I began to smoke as well. After a while, this boy stopped smoking, but I continued my harmful habit for many long years. Without doubt, my smoking habits, and all the harm associated with it, can be attributed to his example.

Generally, when a son veers off the right path, and distances himself from the ways of his forefathers, it causes much distress to his ancestors. They look down from Above, observing their descendant's corrupt behavior. However, when a child severs himself from his father's heritage, he is not considered their progeny anymore. He is denied any connection to his past.

I remember during one of my visits to Los Angeles, a man came to see me, dressed in sporty attire and with overgrown hair. He asked me if I recognized him. I responded in the negative. He told me that since he was the grandson of a certain important Rabbi, I should have known who he was. I explained to the young man, whose looks contradicted the image of a traditional Jew, that although I knew who his esteemed grandfather was, it did not automatically mean that I would recognize him as his grandson. Since his appearance was not reminiscent at all of his grandfather's traditions, he could not claim to be his descendant. This is because when one casts away the heritage of his righteous forefathers, he cannot claim to be his offspring. Since his lifestyle opposes the ways of the Torah, he is not granted the right to continue being connected to the exalted figures of the past.

Glossary

Acharonim – the later commentators
Ahavat Hashem – love of Hashem
Akeidah – the Binding on the Altar of Yitzchak
Aleph – the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet
Aliyah l'regel – the mitzvah to ascend to Jerusalem during the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot
Am Segulah – The Chosen Nation
Arayot – forbidden relationships
Aron – the Ark of the Covenant
Aveirah – sin
Avodah zarah – idol worship
Avodat Hashem – service of Hashem
Avrech, Avrechim (pl) – young Torah scholar
Assarah harugei malchut – the ten martyred leaders

Ba'al teshuvah, ba'alei teshuvah (pl) – (lit. master of return) one who has returned to Jewish observance
Ba'alei Mussar – Masters of ethics
Bein Hazmanim – vacation break following a semester in Yeshiva
Beit Hakeneset, Batei Kenesiot (pl) – house of prayer, synagogue
Beit Hamidrash, Batei Midrashot (pl) – house of study
Beit Hamikdash – the Holy Temple

Ben, bnei (pl) – son
Berachah, berachot (pl) – blessing
Bircat Hagomel – a blessing recited after experiencing miraculous salvation
Bitul Torah – time wasted from Torah study
Bnei Yisrael – the Children of Israel
Brit – covenant, pact
Brit milah – circumcision

Chachamim – (lit. wise people) – Sages, teachers
Chag, chagim (pl) – Jewish holidays
Chalila – G-d forbid
Chametz – leavened bread, which is forbidden to be eaten on Pesach
Chanukat Hamishkan – the dedication of the Mishkan
Chas v'shalom – May G-d have mercy
Chatan – groom
Chazal – our Sages, may their memory be for blessing
Chillul Hashem – desecration of Hashem's Name
Chinuch – education
Chok, chukim (pl) – commandment that cannot be explained according to human reasoning
Chumash – the Five Books of Moses
Chuppah – wedding canopy

Daf Hayomi – page of Gemara learnt daily
Divrei Torah – words of Torah
Duda'im – flowers that have powers of fertility

Echad – One
Emunah – belief, faith
Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel

Erev – the Eve of (Shabbat)
Etrog – citrus fruit used in the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot

Gaon – brilliant Sage
Gan Eden – Garden of Eden, Paradise
Gehinnom – Purgatory
Gematria – numerical value
Genizah – written material containing words of Torah and *kedushah* that must be buried according to halachah upon being discarded
Ger, geirim (pl) – proselyte
Gezeirot hashmad – times of forced conversion
Gog u'Magog – the final battle preceding the coming of Mashiach

Hadasim – myrtle branches used for the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot
Har Sinai – Mount Sinai
Hirhur ra – dwelling on forbidden concepts
Hod – the attribute of glory

Kabbalah – hidden facets of the Torah
Kallah – bride
Kedushah – holiness
Kelippah, kelippot (pl) – force of impurity
Keri – seminal emission
Ketoret – incense offering
Ketubah – marriage contract
Kiddush Hashem – sanctification of Hashem's Name
Kodesh Hakodashim – the Inner Sanctum of the Beit Hamikdash
Kohen – priest
Kohen Gadol – high priest

Korat ruach – pleasure
Korban, korbanot (pl) – offering, sacrifice
Korban chatat – sin-offering
Korban olah – *olah*-offering, burned entirely on the Altar
Korban todah – thanksgiving offering
Kosher – food permitted by Jewish law
Kotel Hama'aravi – The Western Wall
Kriyat Shema – the recital of the Shema

Lechem Hapanim – show bread
Leket – gleanings: one or two stalks that fall away at the time of reaping and must be left for the poor
L'havdil – to separate from the holy from the mundane
Lashon Hara – evil speech, slander
Lulav – palm branch used in the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot

Ma'aseh merkavah – the Heavenly Chariot
Ma'aser – a tenth of one's earnings, which must be distributed to the poor as charity
Mabul – The Great Deluge
Machshavah ra'ah – impure thoughts
Masechet – tractate
Mashiach – the Messiah
Matan Torah – the Giving of the Torah
Matzah – unleavened bread
Mekubal, mekubalim (pl) – Kabbalist, one who delves into the hidden aspects of the Torah
Mekadesh – consecrate
Menorah – the Candelabra in the Beit Hamikdash
Meshulachim – charity collectors

Mesirut nefesh – self-sacrifice
Met Mitzvah – a corpse of a forsaken Jew requiring burial
Metzorah – one afflicted by *tzara'at*
Mezakeh harabim – bringing merit to the masses
Mezuzah – parchment containing Torah verses, commanded to be affixed to every doorpost
Michnasaim – Breeches worn by the Kohen
Middah – character trait
Midrash – homiletical teachings of the Sages
Mikveh, mikvaot (pl) – body of water for ritual immersion and purification
Milah – circumcision
Miluim – inauguration (of the Mishkan)
Minyan – quorum
Mishkan – the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and in Shiloh
Mishlo'ach manot – food gifts given on Purim
Mishnah – Teachings of the Tanna'im, part of the Oral Torah
Mitzvah, mitzvot (pl) – good deed, commandment
Mizbeach – the Altar
Mizrach – East; the designated spot where important people sit
Mussar – Jewish ethics

Nasi – prince, leader of the Jewish people
Navi – prophet
Ne'ilah – the final prayer on Yom Kippur signifying the closing of the gates
Neshamah, neshamot (pl) – soul
Neshamah yeteirah – the additional neshamah which joins a person on Shabbat
Netzach – the attribute of eternity
Niddah – a woman who became impure due to her menstrual cycle
Nitzotz, nitzotzot (pl) – sparks

Ohel Mo'ed – the Tent of Meeting
Oht brit kodesh – the sign of the circumcision
Olah – burnt-offering
Olam Haba – the World to Come
Oleh l'regel – ascending to Jerusalem during the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot
Onein – a person in the preliminary stages of mourning, whose dead has not yet been buried
Orlah – foreskin

Parah adumah – the red heifer
Parashah, parshiyot (pl) – chapter
Pasuk, pesukim (pl) – verse
Pirkei Avot (or Avot) – Ethics of the Fathers
Pe'ah – the corner of a field which must be left for the poor
Pe'ot – side-locks
Petichah – the honor of opening the Aron Hakodesh where the Sefer Torah is kept

Rachmana litzlan – May G-d's mercy be upon them
Rasha resha'im (pl) – wicked person
Rishonim – the earlier commentators
Ruach Hakodesh – Divine inspiration

Sefer, sefarim (pl) – book
Sefarim hakedoshim – holy books of Torah thought
Sefer Torah, Sifrei Torah (pl) –Torah scroll
Sefirah – behavior by which we perceive Hashem

Sefirat Haomer – the mitzvah to count the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuot
Segulah – a specific act performed to gain merit
Seudat hodayah – a festive meal of thanksgiving upon being saved from danger
Shas – the thirty-six volumes of the Talmud
Sha'atnez – mixture of wool and linen that is forbidden to be worn
Shichechah – a bundle of stalks of grain forgotten in the field at the time of the harvest, which must be left for the poor
Shechinah – Divine Presence
Shem Hameforash – the full Name of Hashem
Shemoneh Esrei – prayer containing eighteen blessings, recited three times a day
Shemittah – the commandment to leave the land fallow for seven years, only applicable in Eretz Yisrael
Shevet, Shevatim (pl) – tribe
Shidduch – marriage proposal, marriage partner
Shirah – song of praise
Shirat Hayam – the song of praise sang by the Jews after the splitting of the sea
Shiur – Torah lecture
Shochet – One who is Rabbinically ordained to slaughter animals or birds
Siyata di'Shemaya – help from Heaven
Siyum – completion of a tractate (and celebration thereof)
Stender – reading stand

Tahor – pure
Tallit – prayer shawl
Tamei – defiled, impure
Tamei met – impurity through contact with a dead corpse

Tanna, Tannai'm (pl) – Sages of the Mishnah
Techiyat hameitim – resurrection of the dead
Tefillah, tefillot (pl) – prayer
Tefillin – phylacteries
Teshuvah – repentance
Tevilah – immersion as a purification procedure
Tumah – impurity
Tumat keri – the impurity conferred by the issuing of semen
Tzaddik, tzaddikim (pl) – righteous person
Tzara'at – a disease (commonly translated as leprosy) that is a manifestation of a spiritual impurity, often caused by speaking *lashon hara*
Tzedakah – charity
Tzelem Elokim – image of Hashem
Tzitzit – four-cornered garment with fringes, worn by men and boys

Viduy – confession

Yam Suf – the Sea of Reeds
Yamim Nora'im – High Holidays
Yayin nesech – wine handled by a non-Jew
Yetzer Hara – evil inclination
Yirat Shamayim – fear of Heaven
Yovel – the fiftieth year, after seven Shemittah cycles

Zikuy harabim – bringing merit to the masses
Zt''l, ztk"l – May the memory of the tzaddik be for a blessing
Zy"a – May the merits of the tzaddik protect us