Excerpt from the book

PACHAD DAVID

PART TWO

Vayikra • Bamidbar • Devarim

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Vayikra

All That Hashem Does Is for The Jewish People

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read, "*He called to Moses, and the L-RD spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting*" (*Leviticus 1:1*). What does "*He called*" mean? Rashi states that it is an expression of affection. From where did the Divine word to Moses originate? From the Tent of Meeting, meaning that it came from the Holy of Holies, arrived in the Tent of Meeting, and stopped. What was Moses told? Rashi cites the Sages in stating that Hashem told him, "*Go and say captivating words to them [the Children of Israel]: 'It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me.'*" Rashi goes on to say that during the 38 years in which the Children of Israel were in the desert, they were placed under a ban and Hashem's word did not come to Moses. These things are difficult to understand, for why did the Divine word to Moses have to emanate from the Holy of Holies? Could Hashem not have made it arrive directly into Moses' tent, without having to go through the Holy of Holies?

Furthermore, in the Torah commentaries of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (*the Satmar Rebbe*), Rashi's aforementioned statements are examined in detail: The Gemara explains that Moses' words to the Children of Israel captivated their hearts in order to lead them to repentance. Yet here it seems that Moses emboldened them when he said, "*It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me.*" Finally, the Yalkut Shimoni views this expression in a different light: Is it possible that Hashem spoke to Moses for his own personal needs? He spoke to him for the needs of Israel, not for his own needs. Another explanation: Is it possible that Hashem only spoke to him for the needs of the people? He spoke to him for his own personal needs. We need to understand what is meant by Moses' own needs and the needs of the people.

Moses was a man of G-d. He taught us that the Torah can only be acquired by one who humbles himself for it, as the Sages have said in Taanith 7a. This is the meaning of the small aleph in the word vayikra (*Leviticus 1:1*). It teaches humility and self-effacement, telling us that it is only when a person makes himself small and effaces himself before others that the Torah will be infused in him. Who was greater than Moses, who was completely humble and self-effacing, as it is written: "*The man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any man on the face of the earth*" (*Numbers 12:3*)? This is also stated at the beginning of this week's parsha: "*When a man among you brings an offering*" (*Leviticus 1:2*), meaning that he considers himself as an offering and submits himself like an animal that stretches out its neck to be slaughtered. The goal of his Torah learning should be to acquire wisdom and know the Creator's will, not to acquire wisdom for himself. His study of Torah must be characterized by humility.

Due to the humility of His servant Moses, Hashem showed him affection by declaring that all He would tell him was uniquely for the sake of His people Israel.

True, from Moses' point of view this would seem that Hashem was speaking to him because of the Children of Israel's importance. Yet Hashem was really speaking to him due to his own importance.

In order for this to happen, Hashem's word to Moses had to pass through the Tent of Meeting. It was the place of the Children of Israel, for the Sanctuary and the Tent of Meeting allude to the Jewish people. Hence Hashem's word was considered to have passed through there. Moses thought that Hashem's word came to him for the sake and greatness of the Children of Israel, even if it actually came because Moses considered himself to be a beginner in Hashem's Torah. In fact Moses elevated himself to such a degree that Hashem spoke to him so he could teach the Torah to them.

Moses felt that the Divine word was for the Children of Israel, and that Hashem only spoke to him when they were worthy of it. Hence Hashem advised him, "*Go and say captivating words to them.*" That is: Tell them that they must always be engaged in prayer and repentance, so that by this merit and for their sake My word will continue to come to you. In fact during the 38 years that they were distant from Hashem, His word did not come to Moses. It was only when they were worthy that Hashem spoke to him. Thus everything was for the sake of the Children of Israel.

Hence these were the persuasive words used by Moses. The faithful shepherd beseeched them, "*It was only for your sake that Hashem spoke with me; it was not on my account. Therefore continue to follow the path of Hashem and be ready to serve Him. By this merit Hashem will speak to me regarding your needs.*" This is because everything Hashem does is for Israel, that they may elevate themselves on the royal path.

By expanding upon this idea, we may also explain what the Tent of Meeting represents. Heavenly assistance and the perception of Hashem's reality are only possible when a person strives to learn Torah, meaning that he does not move from the tent and never ceases to put an effort into learning Torah and performing mitzvot, as it is written: "*When a man dies in a tent*" (*Numbers 19:14*). That is, if he "*kills*" himself in the tent of Torah learning, a sense of the Creator's reality will come upon him, for He protects His faithful ones in such a way that the Torah will accompany them wherever they go. For a person who lives in the tent of Torah his entire life, the blessing of Hashem will accompany him in all places, his prayers will be accepted, and he will be answered when he calls on Hashem. This is what constitutes, "*He called to Moses… from the Tent of Meeting.*" It means that if the Tent of Meeting is with him in all his journeys and undertakings, the Holy One, blessed be He, will hear his call and answer him. He will protect him from all harm.

My fellow Jews, a feeling of joy and closeness to the Creator should infuse us when we reflect upon these things. In fact everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, does is for us! Conversely, we should realize that we are responsible for making an opening for the Torah, an opening for holiness and good deeds. How can we do this?

It is true that the evil inclination stands at the door and constantly tries to make us transgress and not overcome our trials. Yet this Shabbat is Shabbat Zachor, the time when we were commanded to wipe out the memory of Amalek, thereby enabling us to conquer the evil inclination. Therefore let us wipe out Amalek from within ourselves, and in this way we will grow closer to Hashem with even greater strength.

The Diligent Study of Torah Procures Atonement

It is written, "*When a man offers among you an offering to the L-RD, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, and of the flock*" (*Leviticus 1:2*). We need to understand why the verse states, "*When a man offers among you.*" It would seem that the reverse should have been written, namely: "*When a man among you offers*." We can refer to what Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra says on this issue.

We also need to explain a statement that appears in the Midrash: "*Why do young children begin studying with the book of Leviticus? It is because all the sacrifices appear in it, and because up to that point they are pure and do not know the taste of sin. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, said that they begin with the study of the sacrifices: Let those who are pure come and study the sacrifices that are pure. I will account it to them as if they had offered sacrifices before Me. Although the Temple was destroyed and there are no longer sacrifices, without young children to read the order of the sacrifices, the world could not endure*" (*Tanhuma 96:14*).

This is very surprising! It follows that it is precisely when young children study the order of the sacrifices that Scripture considers them to have actually brought a sacrifice. This is difficult to reconcile with the following Gemara: "*Abraham said to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Master of the universe…this is very well for the time when the Temple will be standing, but in the time when there will be no Temple, what will befall them?' He replied to him, 'I have already fixed for them the order of the sacrifices. Whenever they will read the section dealing with them, I will reckon it as if they were bringing Me an offering, and I will forgive all their iniquities'*" (*Megillah 31b*). Another Gemara follows along the same line: "*Whoever studies Torah is as if he were offering a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sin-offering, and a guilt-offering. … Whoever studies the laws of the sin-offering is as if he were offering a sin-offering, and whoever studies the laws of the guilt-offering is as if he were offering a guilt-offering*" (*Menachot 110a*). It follows that it is not only the Torah study of young children that is so important as to be regarded as offering sacrifices. Even the Torah study of adults, when they study the order of the sacrifices, is regarded as if they had offered sacrifices. We may explain this according to a statement of our Sages: "*One should never abstain from the Beth Midrash and from Torah, even in the hour of death, for it is said, 'This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent' [Numbers 19:14]: Even at the hour of death, one should be engaged in Torah. Resh Lakish said: The words of the Torah can endure only with one who kills himself for it*" (*Shabbat 83b*). The Maharal in his Chiddushei Aggadot asks how the Torah, being spiritual, can sustain man, who is material. These two things

are opposites! Hence it is not fitting for a person's Torah understanding to endure unless he kills himself for the Torah and annuls his own body and physicality for it. As such his body will no longer be considered as an obstacle to Torah, and in such a person the Torah – which is spiritual – can endure. This is not the case for someone who attributes intrinsic importance to the body.

It seems difficult to understand how a person can annul his own body and physicality while studying Torah. After all, he is a physical being. How can matter ignore matter? The answer is that when a person devotes himself to the diligent study of Torah, he annuls his body and leaves room for the words of the Torah to enter his heart. What kind of devotion are we speaking of? As our Sages have said, "*With all your soul [Deuteronomy 6:5] – even if He takes your soul*" (*Berachot 54a*). This means that when a person is studying Torah, he must have the impression that all his work is finished. Even if he is busy all day long with his affairs and his work, he must set aside some time to study Torah, a time during which he will pay attention to nothing else. He must especially not bring his mundane concerns with him into the Beit Midrash.

We can now understand the words of the Midrash that we started with. Let us first cite a statement made by the Ramban: "*Since man's deeds are accomplished through thought, speech, and deed, G-d therefore commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it in contrast to the deed. He should confess his sin verbally in contrast to his speech, and he should burn the innards and kidneys in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in a human being. He should burn the legs, since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which do all his work. He should sprinkle the blood upon the altar, which is analogous to the blood of his body. … A person must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life*" (*Ramban on Leviticus 1:9*).

The comparison of Torah study to a sacrifice resides in the fact that sacrifices only procure atonement when accompanied by devotion. The same applies for the study of Torah, which replaces sacrifices: It can only procure atonement when accompanied by devotion. Hence the Sages said that the world cannot endure if young children do not study the laws of sacrifices, thereby teaching us that a person cannot procure atonement through the study of Torah unless he studies it like a child, who has no business worries on his mind. When a child is engaged in something, he is not distracted for even an instant. The Sages did not mean that only the Torah study of young children atones for sin, since the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the order of the sacrifices from the time of Abraham for each Jew. The Sages mention young children only to teach us that a person must resemble a child when learning Torah. Hence it is written, "*When a man offers among you*" (*Leviticus 1:2*), thereby teaching us that even when there is no Temple, a person has the ability to be forgiven. How? By devoting himself to Hashem, by giving

his soul to what Hashem desires when he studies Torah, just as he devotes himself to what he desires and to earning a living. In that case, it is as if he has offered himself as a sacrifice to Hashem for his entire life. Concerning such a person, the Sages have said: "*Even in the hour of death, one should be engaged in Torah,*" for by studying the Torah with devotion, it is as if he has died for the Torah during his entire life. As our Sages have said, "*With all your soul [Deuteronomy 6:5] – even if He takes your soul,*" and we also read: "*Because for Your sake we are killed all day long*" (*Psalms 44:23*).

Let Those Who are Pure Come and Study that Which is Pure

It is written, "*He called to Moses, and the L-RD spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, 'When a man offers among you an offering to the L-RD, from the cattle or from the flock shall you bring your offering'*" (*Leviticus 1:1-2*).

Our Sages say in the Midrash, "*Why do young children begin studying with the book of Leviticus? It is because all the offerings appear in it, and because up to that point they are pure and do not know the taste of sin. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, said that they begin with the study of the offerings: Let those who are pure come and study the offerings that are pure. I will account it to them as if they had brought offerings before Me*" (*Tanhuma, Tzav 14*). Although the Temple was destroyed and offerings are no longer brought today, if young boys do not read about them, the world cannot endure.

From here we learn that laws of capital importance in the Torah depend upon the offerings, and it is through them that Jews have endured in exile. In fact even when there is no Temple and no offerings are brought before G-d, by the fact that Jews study the laws of the offerings, G-d regards it as if they had brought these offerings, and He redeems them.

Thus our Sages have said, "*Whoever studies the laws of the sin-offering is as if he were offering a sin-offering, and whoever studies the laws of the guilt-offering is as if he were offering a guilt-offering*" (*Menachot 110a*). This is why our forefathers established the rule that young boys should begin their study of Torah by the offerings. This is meant to accustom them to the subject of the offerings from their youth, in order for them to realize that when a person has sinned in our time – when we cannot bring an offering because there is no Torah – Scripture considers him to have brought an offering if he studies Torah.

Hence this week's parsha begins with the term *vayikra* ("and He called"). We may break this term into vai and kra, vai having the same numerical value, including the word itself, as *tov* ("good"). Now there is nothing good other than the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written: "*Taste and see that the L-RD is tov [good]*" (*Psalms 34:9*), and there is nothing good other than the Torah (*Berachot 5a*). The term kra has the same numerical value, including the word itself, as *karev* ("to approach"), teaching us that studying Torah enables a person to draw closer to his Creator.

The study of Torah is alluded to in the term vai, telling us that even if a person finds studying Torah difficult (*vai*), he must still study it, even in poverty or hardship, and even if he is old or sick. As the Rambam states, "*Every Jew has the duty to study Torah, be he rich or poor, in good health or sick, young or so old that he no longer has any strength, and even if he is so poor that he is forced to beg. Even if he has a wife and children, he must set aside time to study Torah day and night, as it is written: 'You shall mediate on it day and night' [Joshua 1:8]*" (*Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:8*).

His Blood Deserves to be Spilled

Given that the Torah is eternal, we must say that this call by G-d to Moses in the Sanctuary is repeated every single day to every Jew. This is done in order to push them to study Torah, even if they find it very difficult. When a person devotes himself to hard-earned study, he is promised that he will draw closer to his Creator.

Furthermore, when a person studies Torah with devotion, Scripture considers him to have brought an offering to Hashem. When a man brought an offering in the Sanctuary, his entire body was sanctified; it was as if he himself were being offered before G-d. As the Ramban writes, when a person brings an offering, he "*must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the main limbs of the offering should be in place of the main limbs of his body*" (*Ramban on Leviticus 1:9*).

Hence it is written, "*When a man offers among you*" (*Leviticus 1:2*), for a man must offer himself before Hashem. How does he do this? It is by giving his life for the words of Torah, and by studying it even in hardship. Whoever does not completely devote himself to Torah and mitzvot, then even if he possesses some Torah, it has no real value because he has failed to give his life for it.

The Entire World for Him

Thus we read in the Gemara, "*Rabbi Papa said to Abaye: 'How is it that miracles were performed for former generations, yet miracles are not performed for us? It cannot be because of their [superiority in] study, for in the days of Rav Yehudah all of their studies was confined to Order Nezikin, and we study all six orders, and when Rav Yehudah came [to the law] in Uktzin: "If a woman presses vegetables in a pot*" (or, according to others, *"olives pressed with their leaves are clean"*), he used to say: "*I see all the difficulties of Rav and Shemuel here.*" Yet we have 13 versions of Uktzin. However when Rav Yehudah drew off one shoe, rain used to come, whereas we torment ourselves and cry loudly, and no notice is taken of us!' He replied: 'The former generations were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of the Name; we do not sacrifice our lives for the sanctity of the Name.' There was the case of Rav Adda bar Ahava, who saw a heathen woman wearing an [immodest] red head-dress in the street. Thinking that she was a Jewish woman, he arose and tore it from her. It turned out that she was a heathen woman, and they fined him 400 zuz" (*Berachot 20a*).

The world endures because Jews study Torah with devotion in times of tremendous difficulty. This is why Scripture begins the book of Leviticus, which deals entirely with the offerings – which are pure and through which the world endures – by the term *vayikra* ("and He called"). This is to tell us that when a man puts an effort into studying Torah, he becomes worthy that the entire world should have been created for him, and his Torah will endure. Thus it is taught, "*Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it*" (*Berachot 63b*), as they were for Hillel the Elder and Rav Adda bar Ahava. However if we fail to study Torah, it would be better had we not been born.

Fixing Times for Learning Torah with Integrity

On the verse, "*When a man [adam] among you brings an offering*" (*Vayikra 1:2*), our Sages in the Midrash teach: "*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'Let your offering be like the offering of Adam, who because he owned all things, offered nothing acquired by robbery or violence. Likewise you too must not offer anything acquired by robbery or violence'*" (*Vayikra Rabba 2:7*).

In reality, we may ask why anyone could possibly think that a person seeking forgiveness for his sins with an offering would go and steal an animal to make that offering. After all, he is only bringing it as an atonement for his sins, so how can it be done by means of robbery?

We may explain this by first recalling what our Sages have said in the Gemara: "*When man is led forth in judgment, he is asked, 'Did you deal honestly, did you fix times for learning…?'*" (*Shabbat 31a*). The Ba'alei HaTosafot object to this, noting that elsewhere it is written: "*The beginning of man's judgment deals with words of Torah*" (*Kiddushin 40b*). Thus how can both statements be true at the same time? Their answer is that the first question a person is asked pertains to his honesty in business, but when he is held to account, he is first reprimanded for not having fixed times for learning.

Honestly Adhering to Times for Learning

We may explain this according to the Sages' teaching that when a person fixes times for learning Torah, studying every day for an hour or two and going to the Beit HaMidrash to listen to a class that starts at a certain time, but he fails to arrive on time, sometimes being a little lazy and arriving late by 10 or 15 minutes, he may not think that it is serious. However he must realize that it is very serious. In fact a person who normally acts like this is considered to have stolen G-d's time! In reality, he has set aside this time for Hashem, so how can he use it for his own affairs?

The two questions that man is asked on the day of judgment are really one. He is asked if he fixed times for learning with honesty, without having stolen any of that time, and in reality the judgment of man only regards words of Torah. If he says "*Yes, I have fixed times for learning,*" he will be asked: "*Did you honestly respect those times, or did you steal a little time from them for your own affairs?*"

This is why the verse uses the term adam, for the Sages have said: "*You are called adam, but non-Jews are not called adam*" (*Bava Metzia 114b*). In fact the nations of the world did not receive the Torah, and therefore they do not merit being called adam. The Torah says to the Children of Israel, "*How did you manage to be called adam? By bringing 'an offering that comes from you' – meaning by fixing times for learning Torah and by giving Me your time, without taking any of it for yourselves – for if you do that, you are profiting from robbery.*"

The Torah says, "*How can you be called adam? By learning Torah through difficulty, by having the intention of constantly offering yourselves to Me. However if you serve Me by means of robbery, meaning that you have not fixed times for learning Torah with perfection, and you have not fulfilled this mitzvah with integrity, then you are not worthy of being called adam.*"

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of Israel: "*If you have not fixed times for learning Torah in a perfectly honest way, if you do not fulfill this mitzvah to perfection, then you are not worthy of being called adam. However if you fulfill all the mitzvot with uprightness and integrity, you will merit being called adam.*" As kabbalists have noted, the term adam has a numerical value of 45, equal to that of the Tetragrammaton [when "*filled*" with three alephs, two vavs, and one daleth]. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, has given each Jew a Divine spark, something that has not been given to non-Jews. This is why the Children of Israel are called adam, for they possess a Divine spark and the Tetragrammaton in engraved in them. However non-Jews – who do not possess a Divine spark, and in whom the Tetragrammaton is not engraved – are not called adam.

He Who Makes an Effort Will Eat

This explanation allows us to understand something else. Non-Jews do not fulfill mitzvot with complete devotion. The Gemara teaches that in the future, "*The nations will plead, 'Offer us the Torah anew and we shall obey it.' But the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them, 'You foolish ones among the peoples, he who makes an effort on the eve of Shabbat will eat on Shabbat. But he who did not make an effort on the eve of Shabbat, what will he eat on Shabbat? Nevertheless, I have an easy mitzvah that is called sukkah. Go and carry it out.' ... Each of them will then go and make a sukkah on the top of his roof. But the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause the sun to blaze over them as during the summer solstice, and each of them will tear down his sukkah and leave*" (*Avodah Zarah 3a*).

We therefore see that non-Jews, since they do not possess a Divine spark, immediately grow weary when a mitzvah is difficult to fulfill, and they forsake it. However the Jewish people are not like this: Even when mitzvot are difficult for them, they fulfill them to perfection and with pure intentions.

Hashem Reveals Himself to Moshe Due to His Humility

It is written, "*He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying…*" (*Vayikra 1:1*). Rashi explains that here, the term "*called*" expresses G-d's love for Moshe. Likewise, the expression "*from the Tent of Meeting*" signifies that a voice emerged from the Holy of Holies and passed through the Tent of Meeting, then stopped. As for the term "*saying,*" Rashi explains: "*Go and tell them sobering words: 'It is for your sake that He speaks to me,' for we find that all 38 years that Israel was in the desert, as people who are excommunicated, from [the time] of the spies onward, the prophetic word had not come to Moshe.*"

This raises a few questions. At first glance, why did the voice pass through the Tent of Meeting to reach Moshe, rather than going directly to his tent? Likewise, why is the letter aleph in the term vayikra written smaller than the other letters?

Furthermore, according to the commentary of the Satmar Rebbe (*Rav Yoel*) on Rashi, the goal of sobering words is generally to bring the Children of Israel to repentance and push them to better themselves. Yet here, it seems that he encouraged them by saying: "*It is for your sake that He speaks to me.*"

Rav Yoel also points out that this entire explanation is brought in Yalkut Shimoni (*Vayikra*), and he expresses his astonishment by saying: "*A surprising discussion arises from what Yalkut Shimoni adds. One would think that G-d spoke to Moshe for his own benefit. However the term 'saying' [lemor] teaches us that He spoke to him not for his own personal benefit, but for Israel's. One would think that He spoke to him only for the people, but the term lemor indicates that G-d addressed Moshe for his own benefit as well.*" What benefit is there in knowing whether G-d spoke to Moshe for his own personal sake, or only for the sake of Israel?

Before forwarding our explanation, let us first present some introductory points: Moshe Rabbeinu's greatness was well-known. He was the father of the prophets, a man of G-d who transmitted and taught us Torah, which can only be acquired by one who submits to it. Furthermore, everyone has the duty to resemble a person who corresponds to the verse, "*When a man among you offers*" (*Vayikra 1:2*), meaning one who views himself as an offering, who annuls himself and submits like an animal stretching out its neck for the slaughter.

This is the direction in which the diligent study of Torah should lead: To make a person wise and enable him to understand the Creator's will without, G-d forbid, drawing any personal glorification from Torah (*Pirkei Avoth 4:5*), and to demonstrate humility and submission. Moshe Rabbeinu infused this characteristic in us by reflecting on Torah and considering himself as nothing, for he was extremely humble, as it is written: "*Now the man Moshe was extremely humble*" (*Bamidbar 12:3*).

We learn this from the fact that in the term vayikra (*Vayikra 1:1*), the letter aleph is written smaller than the other letters. Just as young children begin their study of Chumash with Vayikra, likewise Moshe Rabbeinu considered himself as a novice in

learning. In fact he had so much love for words of Torah that a small letter – the aleph, the point at which children begin to learn – was important to him. Such is the meaning of the term vayikra: *yekaro aleph* ("the aleph is important to him"). It is also why children begin with Parsha Vayikra, so that words of Torah become important to them, as they were to Moshe, the teacher of the Children of Israel.

This view was pushed to such a point that before Moshe's death, in transmitting his teachings to the Children of Israel, he told Hashem: "*You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness*" (*Devarim 3:24*). In other words, at the age of 120, after have been "*close*" to G-d for 40 years, and having seen what no other human being had seen (for Moshe ascended to the heavens, without eating or drinking, and did nothing but learn Torah), Moshe felt that despite all this, he had barely begun to understand G-d's words. Such was the great humility of Moshe Rabbeinu, comparable to the small aleph.

In looking at this more deeply, we understand that the structure of the letter aleph alludes to G-d's Name. In fact it is made up of two yuds, one above and one below, with a vav in the middle. Together this comes to 26 (twice ten plus six), equal to the numerical value of G-d's Name. This equivalence alludes to Moshe Rabbeinu, who by humbling himself – by feeling unworthy of receiving the word of G-d, Whose voice fills the entire world in all its splendor – and by making himself small, Moshe revealed and sanctified the Name of G-d in all its splendor. It was precisely for this reason that G-d revealed Himself to Moshe.

If everything that we have said is correct, it provides a simple explanation to our initial questions. In fact, "*Man is led in the path that he desires to take*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 20:12*). Thus in seeing the humility of His servant Moshe, G-d in His love allowed him to think that He had revealed Himself to him for the sake of the people. However from G-d's point of view, it was for his own sake that He spoke to Moshe, who was equivalent to all the Jewish people. Moshe believed that G-d was speaking to him due to the importance of the Children of Israel, yet in reality it was due to his own importance.

We can now understand why the Divine voice had to pass through the Tent of Meeting. In fact it was the domain of the Jewish people. Thus the transmission of the Divine word through this place was interpreted as being due to the greatness of the Children of Israel, as well as being destined for them. Moshe therefore interpreted for Israel even the words that were personally addressed to him. Since he felt like a novice in the learning of Torah, he was elevated to the level of one to whom G-d's word is personally addressed, in order that he could in turn teach Torah to the Jewish people.

Since Moshe knew that G-d's word was addressed to him for the sake of the Children of Israel, he realized that when Israel was worthy, G-d's word would come to him.

This is why G-d advised Moshe: "*Go and tell them sobering words*" – convince them to always be infused with prayer and repentance so that, through their merit and for their needs, "*G-d's word to you will continue to come to me.*"

Thus when the Children of Israel wandered in the desert for 38 years because the spies had disparaged the land of Israel, G-d fulfilled the will of those who feared Him by not addressing them. Such was Moshe's desire: That He should only speak to him when the Children of Israel were worthy of it, even if Moshe himself was worthy of receiving G-d's word. G-d kept His faithful servant in mind, acting according to the words of Moshe, who in his modesty did not speak to G-d for his own sake, but only for the sake of the Children of Israel.

According to this explanation, the expression "*sobering words*" is appropriate, for Moshe Rabbeinu, the faithful shepherd, beseeched the Children of Israel: "*It is only for your sake the G-d speaks to me, not for my own needs. Therefore continue to follow G-d's path, be righteous, and submit to Him. By this merit, G-d will speak to me for your sake.*" As such, the questions raised by the Rebbe of Satmar are fully explained.

Humility Can Lead Man to the Greatest Heights

It is written, "*Vayikra [And He called] to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...*" (*Vayikra 1:1*).

Rashi states that the term vayikra is an expression of love, and the phrase "*from the Tent of Meeting*" means that a voice emerged from the Holy of Holies and passed through the Tent of Meeting and stopped. The word "*saying*" means: "*Go and tell them sobering words: 'It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me.'*" Rashi adds that during the 38 years that Israel was in the desert, placed under a ban, the prophetic word did not come uniquely to Moshe.

This raises several questions. First, why does the letter aleph in the term vayikra appear smaller than the other letters? Next, why does the voice stop at the Tent of Meeting and speak there, without proceeding to Moshe's tent? Finally, in regards to Rashi's comment, "*Go and tell them sobering words: 'It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me,'*" Rav Yoel of Satmar states that sobering words are made to win over the hearts of the Jewish people so they may return to the right path, as the Sages have said (*Taanith 16a*). Yet here, Moshe was actually complimenting them when he said: "*It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me.*" What was sobering about this?

He also cites the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra 431*), according to which Hashem should have spoken with Moshe for his own sake. Yet in that case, why did Moshe say that Hashem spoke with him for Israel's sake? It was in order to teach us that it was not for his own needs. Another explanation: Is it possible that Hashem only spoke to Moshe for the needs of the community? After all, the verse states that Hashem spoke "*with him,*" indicating that He also spoke with him for his own needs. This passage from the Midrash requires an explanation.

Moshe was the father of the prophets, a man of G-d. He had attained levels that no other human being had ever attained. Hashem knew him face to face, as it is written:

"*He is trusted in My entire house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles; at the image of Hashem does he gaze*" (*Bamidbar 12:7-8*). Moshe ascended to the heavens, ate the bread of the mighty, and seized the Throne of Glory. Nevertheless, he was small in his own eyes and considered himself as nothing, to the point that he said of himself and his brother: "*What are we?*" (*Shemot 16:7*). Furthermore, the Torah says of him: "*Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth*" (*Bamidbar 12:3*). It was this tremendous degree of humility that the small aleph alludes to.

Now Moshe, who left us with such a heritage, revealed the secret that the Torah is like water, for just as water travels from higher to lower ground, likewise the Torah can only be acquired by one who humbles himself for it. A person must consider himself as an offering, for just as an offering had its neck stretched out to be slaughtered, a person must completely annul himself before the Torah. As such, his Torah will consist of doing his Creator's will, not to glorify himself. This is also alluded to in the small aleph, which signifies obedience and humility.

The small aleph also alludes to children, who love and cherish this letter because it is the first one which they learn. This idea is alluded to in the term vayikra, which may be read as *yikru aleph* ("the aleph is dear to them"). Of them it is said, "*Let the pure come and engage in the study of the pure*" (*Vayikra Rabba 7:3*), for children begin the study of Torah with Sefer Vayikra. Moshe rejoiced in all the words of Torah, like someone who finds a great treasure, just as children who rejoice in the letter aleph.

We may also say something else according to the teachings found in the works of the Arizal. The shape of the letter aleph (which is formed by one vav and two yuds, the combined numerical value of which is 26) alludes to the Name of Hashem [the Tetragrammaton], whose numerical value is 26. The small aleph directs us to the words of the Sages, for whom pride is so reprehensible that the Holy One, blessed be He, says of the arrogant: "*I and he cannot both dwell in the world*" (*Sotah 5a*). As for one who is small in his own eyes, G-d says: "*I am with the contrite and humble of spirit*" (*Isaiah 57:15*). This is why Moshe, who was the humblest of all men on the earth, was worthy of revelations and insights beyond those of any other human being.

The Sages have said, "*Man is led along the path which he desires to take*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 20:12*). Thus when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw Moshe's humility, He demonstrated affection for him by allowing him to believe that everything revealed to him was only for the sake of Israel. Thus for the Holy One, blessed be He, these revelations were for Moshe, while for Moshe these revelations were for the Jewish people. In reality, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moshe because of his own importance.

This allows us to understand the specifics of the verse that we cited at the start. G-d's word addressed itself to Moshe in the Tent of Meeting, which was the domain of the Children of Israel, the place that testifies to the Jewish people that the Shechinah rests upon them. As we have said, the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to carry out

the will of His servant, and therefore He showed Moshe that He was only speaking to him for the sake of Israel. That is why He spoke to him there, in the Tent of Meeting. We can also answer the question that we raised earlier, namely how these could be sobering words. We can now fully understand this: Moshe was asking the Children of Israel to constantly be engaged in teshuvah, to study Torah, and to perform good deeds, for it was only for their sake that Hashem addressed him. After all, throughout the 38 years in which they journeyed in the desert, G-d only addressed Moshe for the needs of the Jewish people. Moshe himself was worthy of revelations, but since G-d does the will of those who fear Him, He only revealed Himself to Moshe when it was necessary for the Jewish people. This is certainly a sobering thought, one that allows us to understand the words of the Satmar Rebbe, may his merit protect us, in an amazing way.

Another interesting idea came to me, one in line with the above explanation that Hashem's Name is alluded to in the letter aleph, and which connects to the end of Parsha Pekudei. There we read, "*For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Sanctuary by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all the House of Israel throughout their journeys*" (*Shemot 40:38*). This may allude to the fact that when someone enjoys obvious success in life, he should not grow proud of it. Rather, he should examine his deeds, just as he would on a cloudy day, when it is possible to make mistakes. As such, he will avoid falling into error. If he experiences hardship and feels confused, as if wandering around in the fog, he should remember that Hashem is a devouring fire, a powerful and awesome G-d, Who ensures the coming of day. All Jews should remind themselves of this during their journeys, meaning every situation in which they may find themselves. By acting in this way, the vav in vayikra hints to a person that man was created on the *vav* (sixth) day, and that he is *yakar* (dear) in the eyes of the aleph, meaning in the eyes of Hashem.

Learning Devotion from the Offerings

It is written, "*Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, 'When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem: From animals, from the cattle or from the flock, you shall bring your offering'*" (*Vayikra 1:2*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moshe in the Tent of Meeting and told him to teach the Children of Israel about the offerings. Hence the verse reads, "*When a man among you brings,*" which seems to indicate that a person should bring himself as an offering to Hashem. We may explain that just as an animal is slaughtered and brought as an offering – which for the animal is an elevation before Hashem – likewise a person should prepare himself to be an offering before Hashem. In reflecting upon this, we see that things are not as simple as they appear, for the animal is led to the slaughter and offered on the altar against its will, meaning contrary to its natural tendencies. Such is not the case for man, however, for he possesses strength and desires, so much so that he cannot be forced to offer himself for Hashem his G-d. Under such

conditions, how can a person come to the point of wanting to offer his life to G-d? The Ramban explains that the goal of the offerings is for a person to see what is done to the animal and realize that such things should have been done to himself. However since the Holy One, blessed be He, is merciful, He commanded man to bring an offering in his stead, serving as an atonement for him. Thus when a person sees how the animal is slaughtered and its blood is spilled, he will immediately harbor thoughts of regret and repentance, and he will seek out ways to appease his Creator so that what happened to the animal doesn't happen to him.

From the time that the Temple was destroyed and the offerings interrupted, we have a two-fold duty to renounce our will before Hashem's will, since we no longer have offerings to atone for our sins. We must especially accustom ourselves to fulfilling mitzvot by reflecting upon G-d's will, but not habitually through routine action. We must learn a lesson from the story of Pinchas, who took a spear in his hand and killed Zimri the son of Salu and Cozbi the daughter of Tzur at the same time, without taking into account the risk to himself by doing so. At the time, Pinchas only desired to fulfill the word of Hashem and erase the shame that had been committed in Israel. He disregarded this danger to himself, and was completely prepared to give his life in order to sanctify G-d's Name in public. Heaven acknowledged the sincerity of his intentions, and he succeeded in killing both Zimri and Cozbi at the same time without incurring any harm to himself. The Sages add that Pinchas was a kohen, meaning that he was forbidden to render himself unclean by contact with a corpse. He therefore merited a great miracle, for Zimri and the non-Jewish Cozbi, who was with him, did not die as long as the spear remained in Pinchas' hand. They only died when he released it. This teaches us a great deal about how a person is helped from above when he seeks to purify himself. When the Holy One, blessed be He, sees that a person wants to offer himself to Him, He gives him a special blessing in order that he may continue along this path.

Nothing is Promised

We know that little children begin their education with Parsha Vayikra, which deals with the offerings (*Tanchuma 96:14*). We need to understand why this is so. In fact the details regarding the offerings are numerous and complex, and we may think that it would be wiser to begin teaching children parshiot that deal with the creation of the world and the stories of the Patriarchs, and only then to deal with the offerings. The explanation for why we don't do this is that among young children, there is a degree of purity that disappears with age, purity that, for example, will prompt a child to sacrifice everything for a piece of candy. Hence the Sages wanted to put this innocence to use, in order to educate children about devotion to Hashem. For just as they are ready to sacrifice everything for some candy, likewise they will be ready to give their lives for the sanctification of G-d's Name, and there is nothing that pushes a person towards self-annulment more than the offerings. When a child understands that a person deserves what happens to the sacrificed animal, he will immediately accustom himself to doing

Hashem's will with complete devotion in order not to experience what happened to the animal.

Every man in existence was created with a specific purpose, and when he descends into this world, he must fulfill his purpose and attain the necessary degree of perfection.

This is difficult to understand, however, for how can a person know the purpose for which he was created? The world is filled with countless obstacles and difficulties, so what can a person do to determine which ones address themselves specifically to him in the fulfillment of his task? We may say that he should invest all his strength and energy in precisely those areas where he experiences difficulty in serving Hashem. For example, if someone finds it difficult to wake up early in the morning to pray with a minyan, it is possible that Heaven has placed this obstacle before him because his purpose is to strengthen himself in prayer. When he manages to control his emotions and prays with the community, he thus fulfills his purpose. A person who reflects on things will realize that life is filled with trials and misfortunes. No one is promised that everything will happen for the best for him and his family, and nobody knows when tragedy can strike, G-d forbid. Hence everyone must work to identify his weaknesses in serving G-d and strengthen himself in those areas with complete devotion. When the Holy One, blessed be He, sees that a person is making an effort to carry out His will and fulfill his purpose in this world, He will grant him special protection.

Tzav

Negligence in Torah Study is a Very Grave Sin

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read, "*Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt-offering. The burnt-offering shall be upon the hearth, upon the altar, all night'*" (*Leviticus 6:2*). Here Rashi cites the Sages in stating, "*The term tzav [command] always denotes urging for the present and also for future generations. Rabbi Simeon taught: 'Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved'*" (*see Torat Kohanim 6:1*).

The financial loss involved here is clear: A burnt-offering is entirely devoted to Hashem, and the owners derive absolutely nothing from it. Therefore they lose money by bringing their offering, which is precisely why they need to be encouraged to bring it. When we reflect upon this, however, we realize that encouragement is needed whenever a financial loss is involved. Who doesn't know how greatly people have to be encouraged today to study Torah and observe mitzvot, be they mitzvot between man and G-d or man and man? Why is this so? It is because a financial loss is involved in these mitzvot. In fact if a person loses his time, be it for a moment, this already constitutes a considerable loss. Concerning the subject of lost time, the Sages have said that it relates to the idea, "*A twisted thing cannot be made straight*" (*Ecclesiastes 1:15*). It is a loss that cannot be rectified, for a lost moment can never be retrieved. A moment that is squandered pursuing the pleasures of life can never be recovered, and it constitutes an irreversible loss. From here we learn just how serious a loss of time is, be it for a single moment. Hence the Sages have said, "*If you leave me for one day, I will leave you for two.*" Since we have reached this point, it is fitting to expand a little on the subject.

It is written, "*For it is time to act for the L-RD; they have voided Your Torah*" (*Psalms 119:126*). Everyone should set themselves a fixed time to study Torah, a time that is off-limits to all other activities. We have no right to transgress this resolution even to the slightest degree. Unfortunately, it is precisely during such a time, one set aside for the study of Torah, that the evil inclination will try to weaken a person in his learning. Because it tries to make people violate the Torah, it is precisely during this time that a person must strengthen himself as much as possible, for this is when his inclination tries to weaken him and make him falter.

We see this in the verse, "*The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau*" (*Genesis 27:22*). This means that the evil inclination will actually leave a person alone, but only if he doesn't study Torah. As soon as he begins to study it – as soon as he wants to hear the voice of Jacob – the hands of Esau will come and try to make him falter. Because the evil inclination tries to make him violate the Torah, a person must strengthen himself to the utmost in this area, and he must diligently study during the time he has fixed for himself.

In light of this explanation, we may understand a story that the Sages relate to us in the Gemara: "*Rabbi Yossi the Galilean was once on a journey when he met Beruriah [the wife of Rabbi Meir]. He asked her, 'By what road do we go to Lod?' She replied, 'Foolish Galilean, did the Sages not say: "Engage not in much talk with women*" [*Perkei Avoth 1:5*]? You should have asked, "*Which [way] to Lod*" ' " (*Eruvin 53b*). This is difficult to understand, for didn't Rabbi Yossi know that it was forbidden to speak excessively with women, such that a woman had to teach him this? Furthermore, is it really forbidden to ask a woman what road one should take in order to reach a certain destination? We may explain this by the verse, "*You shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road*" (*Deuteronomy 6:7*), which tells us that we should be studying Torah without interruption even while on a journey. Thus Rabbi Yossi the Galilean was certainly studying Torah on his journey, which is precisely why the question is raised: Why did he interrupt his study to ask a woman a question? Furthermore, why did he use so many words in asking his question?

This was the criticism that Beruriah made to him, namely: If you are studying Torah on your journey, why are you speaking more than you should with a woman? You should have asked as briefly as possible. Furthermore, you are transgressing the prohibition against speaking at length with a woman. This is why she reprimanded him, saying that each moment he interrupted his Torah study was inexcusable. He also put himself in danger by speaking excessively with a woman.

From here we see the power of the evil inclination. When a person, be it the greatest of his generation, permits himself to interrupt his Torah study in order to earn a living – even to know what road he is on so as not to get lost – the evil inclination will try to make him waste the time he has set aside for learning. This happens without a person realizing it, for he will think that he has simply asked a question. He has no idea that it is the Satan's doing.

This is what the Sages said concerning the verse, "*The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.*" When the voice of Jacob echoes in synagogues and houses of study, Esau's hands are powerless (*Bereshith Rabba 65:20*). In other words, it is only when we hear the sounds of Torah that Esau becomes powerless. Yet if the sounds of Torah are not heard in yeshivot, then the hands of Esau will dominate the Jewish people, seeking to wipe them out from under the heavens. It is for this reason that the Gentile descendants of Amalek continually try to wipe out the Jewish people when they abandon Torah, which is what happened during the time of Haman.

From here we see just how grave the sin of neglecting Torah study is. When that happens, a person attracts the forces of evil to himself and his troubles increase. This is the loss we have spoken of, and it is here that he must be encouraged. He must strengthen himself as much as possible in Torah study; he cannot neglect it. At the same time, he must study in purity. This idea is alluded to this week in

Shabbat Parah, which deals with the purity of the Children of Israel. In fact we must study Torah in purity and not waste the time that has been set aside for this purpose. By doing so, we will experience an abundance of blessing and success in this world and in the World to Come.

This is the Law of the Burnt Offering – Constant Elevation

It is written, "*Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt-offering. The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar, all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning on it'* " (*Leviticus 6:2*). Rashi cites the Midrash (*Torat Kohanim, Tzav 6:1*) in stating, "*Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved.*" The commentators (*see Siftei Chachamim*) explain that the priests derive no benefit from the burnt-offering, which is dedicated entirely to Hashem. Under such circumstances, the Torah was concerned that the priests would become weary of offering sacrifices, which is why it warned them using the word *tzav* ("command"), a term of encouragement, enjoining them not to show any slack in this regard. This is surprising. Did the priests perform their service in the Temple only to receive a reward, such that Scripture had to encourage them in cases where they would not derive any benefit from a sacrifice? We also need to understand why Scripture mentions the law of the burnt-offering, from which the priests derived no benefit, before the sin-offering, which the priests did benefit from. Normally, when a king of flesh and blood orders his servants to do something, he begins with easier tasks and then proceeds to more difficult ones, so that they have no difficulties obeying his orders. Therefore why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not do the same with the priests? Why did He instead begin with the difficult part, the burnt-offering that they did not benefit from, and only then mention the sacrifices that they would benefit from?

We may explain this according to the words of the Ramban, who wrote about why Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to offer sacrifices to Him: "*A person must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life*" (*Ramban on Leviticus 1:9*). Today, since the Temple and the altar no longer stand because of our many sins, what can procure atonement for man, a life for his life? The answer is that when a person sanctifies his senses – his deeds, words, and thoughts – Scripture considers him to have brought a burnt-offering in the Temple and considers his blood to have been sprinkled upon the altar. In fact when the Temple stood, that was the goal of the sacrifices: To elevate a person's senses in order to sanctify them, for in this way his sin would be forgiven.

Given that every person who elevates himself in the service of G-d must sanctity himself and his entire body for Hashem, including his notions and thoughts, the Torah says with regards to the burnt-offering: "*When a man among you offers an offering*

to the L-RD, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, and of the flock" (*Leviticus 1:2*). What is the meaning of the expression, "*When a man among you offers an offering*"? This teaches us that even when there is no Temple, a person can be forgiven for his sins in the same way as the burnt-offering atoned for sin in the Temple. How? Since a person is offering himself entirely to Hashem, he can elevate himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven, and his sins will be forgiven. Since the Torah states, "*When a man among you offers*" concerning the burnt-offering, and since the burnt-offering atones for the thoughts of the heart (*Yerushalmi, Yoma 8:7*), it follows that the burnt-offering only procures atonement when it is accompanied by repentance over the thoughts of the heart.

Not only that, but a person must even sanctify "*the cattle*" – meaning the animalistic side of his soul – to Hashem, as it is written: "*Sanctify yourself in what is permitted*" (*Yebamot 20a*), something that goes beyond the strict requirements of the law. By acting in this way, a person can devote himself entirely to Hashem; his sins will then be forgiven, and he will no longer commit them. This is because a person only falls into sin if he contemplates it beforehand, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said: "*A man should not indulge in [perverse] thoughts by day, which might lead him to uncleanness by night*" (*Ketubot 46a*). We also read, "*Unchaste imagination is more harmful than sin itself*" (*Yoma 29a*). Thus when a person sanctifies his thoughts, he becomes like a burnt-offering and will not fall into sin.

This explains why the Torah mentions the law of the burnt-offering first. It is because one is only saved from sin by sacrificing and devoting himself entirely to Hashem, to the point that he does not turn away from Him in his thoughts. The burnt-offering is therefore more important than the other offerings, because it enables a person to be completely devoted to Hashem. His physical life is also elevated when he sanctifies himself in what is permitted, over and above the requirements of the law per se, and he raises himself to a considerable extent. If he reaches the level of a burnt-offering, he will no longer sin and will not need a sin-offering.

How does a person know if he has managed to sanctify himself and become a burnt-offering that is entirely devoted to Hashem? It is by the fact that he is constantly putting an effort into elevating himself in the service of G-d, without being content on what he did yesterday, but by adding to his service more and more. This is what the Torah alludes to by saying, "*This is the law of the burnt-offering. The burnt-offering...*" meaning that the whole nature of the sacrifice is a burnt-offering, which is a burnt-offering for Hashem. If a person does not sense a spiritual elevation within himself, and if he does not take the attitude: "*Perhaps I failed to serve Hashem properly yesterday, and today I will add to my service*" – but instead thinks, "*Why do I need to sanctify myself more than necessary? There's no end to this! I pray, I study, and I pay attention to not sinning, which is enough!*" – such a person should realize that he has not yet reached the level of a burnt-offering for Hashem. He should know that he has not sacrificed his animalistic side for Heaven. If he had become spiritual, it certainly

would not have prevented him from elevating himself in the service of Hashem in areas that go beyond the requirements of the law. Furthermore, by the fact that he neglects the service of Hashem and does not renew it each day, his service will harden and become mere habit, and he will never elevate himself in the fear of Heaven. In fact it is impossible to arrive at an elevated level all at once. Baby steps are required, which is why it is written: "*This is the law of the olah [burnt-offering]*" – one step after another (*aliyah*) is needed, until one reaches the highest levels.

The Sages have questioned the meaning of the verse, "*Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him*" (*Malachi 3:18*). They said, "*One who serves Him and one who does not serve Him both refer to those who are perfectly righteous. However one who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times*" (*Chagigah 9b*). One who studies 100 times is only studying to remember what he learned, whereas one who studies it more does so out of a love for Heaven and *amal* (toiling) in the study of Torah. Now something is only called amal when it is difficult for a person to do, which is why such a person is described as one who fears Hashem. The term mikem (*"among you"*) has a numerical value of 101 (including one for the term itself), telling us that a person can reach the level of being a burnt-offering for Hashem when he studies the Torah through amal. If he does this, he is promised that he will be able to transform the material and animalistic side of his soul into something spiritual. They will ascend before Hashem like a sacrifice, for the Torah is a remedy against the evil inclination (*Kiddushin 30b*). Even when the altar has been destroyed and there are no longer priests to offer sacrifices, a pleasant fragrance will ascend before Hashem, the fragrance of a person who sanctified his body and all his senses in order to serve the Creator. The Holy One, blessed be He, will be filled with compassion for him, and He will forgive all his sins.

The Burnt Offering – Constant Elevation

It is written, "*Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt-offering: The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar, all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning on it'*" (*Vayikra 6:2*). Rashi cites the Midrash (*Torat Kohanim, Tzav 6:1*) in stating, "*Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved.*" The commentators (*see Siftei Chachamim*) explain that the kohanim derived no benefit from the burnt-offering, which was dedicated entirely to Hashem. Under such circumstances, the Torah was concerned that the kohanim would become weary of offering sacrifices, which is why it warned them by using the word *tzav* ("command"), a term of encouragement, enjoining them not to show any slack in this regard. This is surprising. Did the kohanim perform their service in the Temple only to receive a reward, such that Scripture had to encourage them in cases where they would not derive any benefit from a sacrifice? We also need to understand why Scripture mentions the law of the burnt-offering, from which the kohanim derived no

benefit, before the sin-offering, which the kohanim did benefit from. Normally, when a king of flesh and blood orders his servants to do something, he begins with easier tasks and then proceeds to more difficult ones, so that they have no difficulties obeying his orders. Therefore why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not do the same with the kohanim? Why did He instead begin with the difficult part, the burnt-offering that they did not benefit from, and only then mention the sacrifices that they would benefit from?

We may explain this according to the words of the Ramban, who wrote about why Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to offer sacrifices to Him: "*A person must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life*" (*Ramban on Vayikra 1:9*). Today, since the Temple and the altar no longer stand because of our many sins, what can procure atonement for man, a life for his life? The answer is that when a person sanctifies his senses – his deeds, words, and thoughts – Scripture considers him to have brought a burnt-offering in the Temple and considers his blood to have been sprinkled upon the altar. In fact when the Temple stood, that was the goal of the sacrifices: To elevate a person's senses in order to sanctify them, for that is how sin is forgiven.

Given that every person who elevates himself in the service of G-d must sanctity himself and his entire body for Hashem, including his thoughts and secrets, the Torah says with regards to the burnt-offering: "*When a man among you offers an offering to Hashem, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, and of the flock*" (*Vayikra 1:2*). What is the meaning of the expression, "*When a man among you offers an offering*"? This teaches us that even when there is no Temple, a person can be forgiven for his sins in the same way as the burnt-offering atoned for sin in the Temple. How? Since a person is offering himself entirely to Hashem, he can elevate himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven, and his sins will be forgiven. Since the Torah states, "*When a man among you offers*" concerning the burnt-offering, and since the burnt-offering atones for the thoughts of the heart (*Yerushalmi, Yoma 8:7*), it follows that a burnt-offering only procures atonement when it is accompanied by repentance.

Not only that, but a person must even sanctify "*the cattle*" – meaning the animalistic side of his soul – to Hashem, as it is written: "*Sanctify yourself in what is permitted*" (*Yebamot 20a*), something that goes beyond the strict requirements of the law. By acting in this way, a person can devote himself entirely to Hashem; his sins will then be forgiven, and he will no longer commit them. This is because a person only falls into sin if he contemplates it beforehand, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said: "*A man should not indulge in [perverse] thoughts by day, which might lead him to uncleanness by night*" (*Ketubot 46a*). We also read, "*Unchaste imagination is more harmful than sin itself*" (*Yoma 29a*). Thus when a person sanctifies his thoughts, he becomes like a burnt-offering and will not fall into sin.

This explains why the Torah mentions the burnt-offering first. It is because one is only saved from sin by sacrificing and devoting himself entirely to Hashem, to the point that he does not turn away from Him in his thoughts. The burnt-offering is therefore more important than the other offerings, because it enables a person to be completely devoted to Hashem. His physical life is also elevated when he sanctifies himself in what is permitted, over and above the requirements of the law per se, and he raises himself to a considerable extent. If he reaches the level of a burnt-offering, he will no longer sin and will not need a sin-offering.

How does a person know if he has managed to sanctify himself and become a burnt-offering that is entirely devoted to Hashem? It is by the fact that he is constantly putting an effort into elevating himself in the service of G-d, without being content on what he did yesterday, but by constantly adding to his service. This is what the Torah alludes to by saying, "*This is the law of the burnt-offering [olah]: The burnt-offering [olah],*" meaning that the whole nature of the offering is an elevation (*oleh*), an elevation towards Hashem. If a person does not sense a spiritual elevation within himself – and if rather than asking himself if he has truly served Hashem correctly yesterday and if he should add to his service of today, he instead thinks: "*Why do I need to sanctify myself more than necessary? There's no end to this! I pray, I study, and I pay attention to not sinning, which is enough!*" – such a person should realize that he has not yet reached the level of a burnt-offering for Hashem. He should know that he has not sacrificed his animalistic side for Heaven. If he had become spiritual, it certainly would not have prevented him from elevating himself in the service of Hashem in areas that go beyond the requirements of the law. Furthermore, by the fact that he neglects the service of Hashem and does not renew it each day, his service will become mere habit and he will never elevate himself in the fear of Heaven. In fact it is impossible to arrive at an elevated level all at once. Baby steps are required, which is why it is written: "*This is the law of the burnt-offering [olah]: The burnt offering [olah]*" – one step (*aliyah*) after another is needed, until one reaches the highest levels.

The Sages have pondered the meaning of the verse, "*Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him*" (*Malachi 3:18*). They say, "*One who serves Him and one who does not serve Him both refer to those who are perfectly righteous. However one who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times*" (*Chagigah 9b*). One who studies 100 times is only studying to remember what he learned, whereas one who studies it more does so out of a love for Heaven, and he toils in the study of Torah. Such a person is called a servant of G-d. The term *mikem* ("among you") has a numerical value (including the term itself) of 101, telling us that a person can reach the level of being a burnt-offering for Hashem when he toils in the study of Torah. If he does this, he is promised that he will be able to transform the material and animalistic side of his soul into something spiritual. They will ascend before Hashem like a sacrifice, for the Torah is a remedy against the evil inclination (*Kiddushin 30b*).

Even when the altar has been destroyed and there are no longer kohanim to offer sacrifices, a pleasant fragrance will ascend before Hashem, the fragrance of a person who sanctified his body and all his senses in order to serve the Creator. The Holy One, blessed be He, will be filled with compassion for him, and He will forgive all his sins.

The Law of the Burnt-Offering in the Service of G-d

It is written, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Command Aaron and his sons, saying: "This is the law of the burnt-offering: The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar, all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it*" ' " (*Vayikra 6:2*).

It is difficult to understand why the term *leimor* (saying) is used twice, since the verse could have said: "*Hashem spoke to Moshe: 'Command Aaron and his sons, saying: "This is the law of the burnt offering….*"

Rashi cites the Midrash in stating, "*Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved.*" The commentators have explained that because the kohanim derived no benefit from the burnt-offerings, since they were entirely burned upon the altar for G-d, the Torah said: Perhaps the kohanim will not hasten to bring the offerings. Hence it warned them with the term *tzav* ("command"), which is meant to spur them on, teaching them that they must not demonstrate any slack in this regard.

This is surprising! Did the kohanim perform all their work in the Temple only for financial gain, such that they had to be encouraged in situations where they would not derive any benefit from an offering?

We also need to understand why the verse mentions the burnt-offering, from which the kohanim derived no benefit, before the sin-offering, from which the kohanim did benefit. When a king of flesh and blood gives orders to his servants, he usually begins with easier tasks and proceeds to more difficult ones, so as to make it easier for his servants to fulfill his orders. That said, why did Hashem not do the same for the kohanim, but instead began with the difficult part – the burnt-offering from which they did not benefit – and only then did He mention the easier offerings, from which they would benefit?

Sanctify Yourself in What is Permitted

We may explain this according to the words of the Ramban, who discusses why Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to bring Him offerings: "*A person must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life*" (*Ramban on Vayikra 1:9*). Now because of our many sins, the Temple and the altar have been destroyed, so what can procure atonement for man in place of his life? The answer is that when a person sanctifies his senses for Hashem, his thoughts and deeds, Scripture considers him to

have brought a burnt-offering in the Temple and sprinkled its blood upon the altar. Such was the goal of the offerings when the Temple stood: To elevate and sanctify the senses, for that is what atones for sin.

The proof is that every person who elevates himself in the service of G-d must offer and sanctify his entire being for Him, including his most inner thoughts. The Torah says in regards to the burnt-offering, "*When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, and of the flock*" (*Vayikra 1:2*). What does, "*When a man among you brings*" mean? It teaches us that even when there is no Temple, a person's sins can be atoned in the same way as the burnt-offering atoned for him in the Temple. How so? When a person offers himself completely to Hashem, he will grow in Torah and the fear of Heaven, and his sins will be forgiven. Since the Torah states, "*When a man among you brings*" concerning the burnt-offering, and since the burnt-offering atones for the thoughts of the heart (*Yerushalmi, Yoma 8:7*), it follows that a burnt-offering only effects atonement when accompanied by repentance. Furthermore, a person must even sanctify "*the cattle*" to Hashem. This refers to the animalistic nature of the human soul, as the Sages have said: "*Sanctify yourself in what is permitted*" (*Yebamot 20a*), meaning over and above your obligations. When a person does this, he will devote himself entirely to Hashem. His sins will then be atoned and he will be protected from sin, for a person only falls into sin when he contemplates it beforehand, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said: "*A man should not indulge in [perverse] thoughts by day, which might lead him to uncleanness by night*" (*Ketubot 46a*). We also learn that sinful intentions are even worse than sin itself (*Yoma 29a*). Thus when a person sanctifies his thoughts for G-d, in the manner of a burnt-offering, he will not fall into sin.

This explains why the Torah mentions the burnt-offering before all the other offerings. In fact a person is only protected from sin when he offers and sanctifies himself entirely to Hashem, to the point that he does not turn his thoughts from Him. This is why the burnt-offering is more important than all others, for it is through the burnt-offering that a person can completely devote himself to Hashem. He thus elevates even his physical side by sanctifying himself in what is permitted, over and above his obligations, in order to rise to a very high spiritual level. If he lives at this level, he will not sin or require a burnt-offering.

How does a person know if he has managed to sanctify himself and become a burnt-offering for Hashem? It is when he is constantly putting an effort into elevating himself to a higher level, not being content with what he did on the previous day, but by constantly adding to it. This is what the Torah alludes to by saying, "*This is the law of the burnt-offering [olah]: The burnt-offering [olah],*" meaning that the entire nature of the offering is an elevation (*oleh*), which should be an elevation towards Hashem. If a person does not sense a spiritual elevation within himself – and, if rather than asking himself if he has correctly served Hashem yesterday and should add to his service of today, he instead thinks: "*Why do I need to sanctify myself more than necessary? Is*

there no end to this? I pray, study, and I'm careful not to sin. That's enough!" – such a person should realize that he has not yet become a burnt-offering for Hashem, nor has he offered to Heaven the animalistic part of his soul. In fact if he had become spiritual, it would certainly not have prevented him from elevating himself in the service of Hashem, even in areas that go beyond his obligations. Furthermore, since a person who says this to himself thereby neglects his service of G-d and does not renew it each day, it will become a mere habit to him, and he will never elevate himself in the fear of Heaven. In fact it is impossible to arrive at an elevated level all at once. Incremental steps are required, which is why it is written: "*This is the law of the burnt-offering [olah]: The burnt offering [olah]*" – one step (*aliyah*) after another is required, until one reaches the highest spiritual levels.

The Importance of Performing Mitzvot with Zeal

It is written, "*Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt-offering: It is the burnt-offering [that stays] on the flame, upon the altar…'*" (*Vayikra 6:2*). If we examine the verses before us, we will be surprised by numerous things. I would like to explain these issues one by one, and we shall see how they can be answered.

On this verse, Rashi cites the following teaching from the Sages: "*The term tzav [command] always implies urging for the present and also for future generations. Rabbi Shimon taught, 'Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved [such as in the case of a burnt-offering, where he derives no monetary benefit from it]'*" (*Torat Kohanim 6:1*).

This presents a problem: Why did Aaron and his sons need to be specifically encouraged to bring burnt-offerings? Was Aaron demonstrating slack in bringing an offering because it was entirely burned, such that he needed special encouragement to do so? Although the kohanim lived off the sacrifices and offerings that were their share from the Children of Israel, we cannot say that they delayed in bringing offerings to Hashem because of greed. We cannot say that the verse therefore had to encourage Aaron and his sons, as well as the generations to come, not to demonstrate any slack in bringing an offering, which entailed a financial loss!

Furthermore, why was it precisely the Kohen Gadol who had to carry the ashes outside the camp, as it is written: "*He shall remove the ashes to outside the camp*" (*Vayikra 6:4*)? Could another kohen not have carried the ashes outside the camp?

Let us try and explain these issues as best possible. We are fully aware that G-d's will is for us to always obey Him, in which case there will be no need to bring offerings, since there is no need for offerings without sin. This was only necessary because of the sin of the golden calf, which required the construction of the Sanctuary and the bringing of offerings. In fact since the Satan returned to the Children of Israel after the sin of the golden calf, a great deal of wisdom and caution is required to escape it.

This is why, when a person wants to fulfill a mitzvah to the degree of perfection required to proclaim G-d's oneness, he must pay much more attention to it. This is because the evil inclination nourishes itself even more from mitzvot that are done for the sake of G-d, especially mitzvot from which a person can derive no benefit because they are performed entirely for Hashem. In regard to these mitzvot, the evil inclination definitely wants to make a person stumble. Hence we must pay extra attention to such mitzvot, in order for the evil inclination not to have any part in them.

One example would be the prohibition against eating pork. No Jew would even think of wanting to eat pork, which the Torah prohibits. Yet at the very moment that pork is served to a Jew, the evil inclination places in his heart the idea of definitely not eating it, since it is disgusting. However when a person thinks that pork is forbidden to eat because it is disgusting, he thereby ruins the perfection of the mitzvah to not eat pork.

In fact the real reason for the prohibition against eating pork is that the Torah has forbidden it, as it is written: "*A person should not say, 'I am disgusted by pork….' Instead he should say, 'I want it, but what can I do? My Father in Heaven has forbidden it!'*" (*Sifra and Rashi on Vayikra 20:26*). It is only in this way that we perfectly fulfill the mitzvah of not eating pork.

From here we realize that when the evil inclination sees that it cannot prevent a person from fulfilling a mitzvah, it still does all that it can to ruin the degree of perfection to which it is fulfilled. As for the prohibition against eating pork, which is a small, easy mitzvah, the evil inclination hurries to tell a person not to eat it because pork is disgusting and unhealthy. Thus he will not eat it on the one hand, but on the other hand he will abstain from eating it not to fulfill the mitzvah, but only for the sake of his health.

The same applies to every mitzvah. The evil inclination tries to weaken man in his attempt to fulfill mitzvot to perfection. Since it has considerable power, it gives a person secondary reasons for why he must fulfill a mitzvah or avoid a transgression. Above all, it also wants to push a person into not thinking for even a second about fulfilling mitzvot for the sake of Heaven. Thus the evil inclination makes a person instantly lose, on the one hand, what he has gained on the other. That is why we must be careful to quickly fulfill mitzvot when given the opportunity, thus preempting the Satan from coming to stir up trouble.

We learn this great, extremely important principle from Aaron. Let no one suspect him of having delayed in bringing a burnt-offering, which was entirely for Hashem, by worrying about what he was going to gain instead of worrying about Hashem's honor. On the contrary, it is precisely because it was such an easy mitzvah – having certainly been fulfilled in accordance with Hashem's will, given that it was good for all the generations – that the Torah warns us in regards to the easiest mitzvot, that no one should dare not to fulfill them, but must pay considerably greater attention to them. In fact among mitzvot of this kind, the Satan is able to disturb a person easily enough.

Since the Torah wrote this, it means that it has deeply probed the heart of man. The evil inclination is a reality in this world, and it is capable of leading man to worrying about a financial loss, meaning a secondary idea accompanied by a certain degree of laziness, in order for him not to fulfill mitzvot to perfection.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe to *tzav* ("command"), meaning that he was to encourage the fulfillment of this mitzvah in the most unselfish way possible, for it comprised a financial loss. As a result, the evil inclination has more ability to disrupt the intentions of the kohen, which is why he must see the deed to its very end, as it is said: The end of a deed must be done with the same intention as at the beginning. This means that when we start a mitzvah, we must envision the final result.

Hence it is precisely the Kohen Gadol who must carry the ashes outside the camp, even if it seems below his dignity. He does this in order to act for the sake of Heaven. In this way, he will consider himself as secondary and unimportant in comparison to G-d. He will consider himself as the dust of the earth for the sake of His Name, and he will do everything for the honor of G-d, without allowing the evil inclination to disturb him.

This is completely understandable. A man who sees himself as completely annulled before Hashem will not pay attention to a financial loss. This is because one who views himself as being dead, and who is called upon to become dust and ashes, pays no attention whatsoever to money or financial loss.

Spiritual Garments are Acquired by Humility

It is written, "*Moshe brought Aaron and his sons forward, and he immersed them in water. He placed the tunic upon him and girded him with the sash, clothed him with the robe…*" (*Vayikra 8:6-7*).

Whoever looks more closely at this passage will notice that G-d commands Moshe to gather the entire assembly of the Children of Israel at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting so they could be present when he immersed the kohanim and clothed them with the priestly garments. Rashi explains that this gathering of the Jewish people was one of the places where a large number of people occupied a very small place. This teaches us just how important and auspicious that occasion was.

It is nevertheless difficult to understand why Moshe was given the responsibility of immersing and clothing them. Were Aaron and his sons incapable of doing it themselves? This is even more surprising given that everything was witnessed by the entire people!

In reality, it is from here that we draw lessons on the importance which the Torah places on garments. In fact a person's outer garments reveal his inner "*garments.*" This verse teaches us that just as we must clothe our bodies, we must also clothe our souls. Furthermore, just as the value of a garment is related to its beauty, likewise the value of a spiritual garment depends on the beauty and perfection of our mitzvot and good deeds.

Our Sages have taught that physical garments reflect spiritual garments, as it is written: "*But Joshua was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel*" (*Zachariah 3:3*). Our Sages explain that these soiled garments represent Joshua's sons who married women unfit for the priesthood (*Sanhedrin 93a*). Since garments represent spirituality and the inner dimension of a person, it was Moshe Rabbeinu, the leader of all Israel, who dressed Aaron and his sons. This alludes to something that concerns us all: Just as Aaron and his sons annulled themselves before Moshe, who immersed them in water, the symbol of Torah, likewise everyone who yearns for a spiritual garment must humble himself before his rabbanim, who represent the spirit of Torah. In going to learn from his teacher, a student purifies and cleanses himself with the waters of Torah, and as such he will receive a spiritual garment. The path that leads to the acquisition of this garment must therefore pass through humility and self-effacement before the representatives of Torah. Holiness and purity can be obtained by studying and fulfilling Torah, which is compared to living water.

Sacrificing our Desires

The aleph that appears at the beginning of Sefer Vayikra is written smaller than the other letters. As we know, the aleph refers to the Master (*Aluph*) of the universe. Moshe had yielded so completely to G-d that he felt uncomfortable receiving an affectionate call from Him, envisioning this call instead as a simple vayikar – a chance encounter – for Moshe did not consider himself worthy of it. Along the same lines, the Rebbe of Alexander wrote that we become worthy of seeing the greatness of G-d and the power of His Shechinah when we sense our own unimportance. Conversely, the more we puff ourselves up and feel superior to others, the less important G-d's glory and Shechinah seem to us.

In fact when a person becomes entirely filled with a sense of his own honor, he has no place left to acknowledge the greatness of the Creator. Now to merit a spiritual garment (meaning Torah knowledge and a fear of G-d), it is incumbent upon us to yield to the Master of the universe, as well as to the rabbanim and great men of the generation, who represent the spirit of Torah.

The text continues by stating: "*When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem: From animals, from the cattle or from the flock, you shall bring your offering*" (*Vayikra 1:2*). Hence the main principle behind an offering is that it must be from "*among you.*" We must offer ourselves as sacrifices before Hashem.

The term "*animals*" therefore means that we must sacrifice all our animal desires upon the altar of Torah, meaning our will and desires.

The term "cattle" (*bakar*) designates the morning (*boker*). Thus as soon as we arise, we must devote ourselves entirely to our Creator, not occupying ourselves with personal needs first, but starting instead by going to synagogue to pray. Only then should we focus on our personal obligations. The Baal Shem Tov affirmed that it is possible for someone to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, and yet nevertheless not attain a fear of G-d or grow in serving Him. The Baal Shem Tov attributes this to the fact that

upon arising in the morning, such a person places his own needs and desires before the will of G-d. By following material pursuits at the start of the day, a person loses the ability to don spiritual garments, which is the fear of G-d internalized.

Along the same lines, King David wrote: "*As for me, G-d's nearness is my good*" (*Tehillim 73:28*). The tzaddik Rabbi Messod Zohar (my Rav when I studied at the Fublaine yeshiva at the age of 12) explained this verse as follows: "*King David did not ask G-d for glory, greatness, or majesty, but only to see His face. That was his life's goal, and that was what his soul yearned for.*" How can we merit G-d's nearness and receive a spiritual garment? It is by offering our very selves – our will and our desires – to Hashem.

Shemini

Renewing Yourself in Torah Without Flaws or Imperfections

It is written, "*The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, and they put fire in them and placed incense upon it. They brought before the L-RD strange fire, which He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before the L-RD and consumed them, and they died before the L-RD*" (*Leviticus 10:1-2*).

The Sages give numerous explanations for why Nadav and Avihu were punished, explanations such as: "*Moses and Aaron once walked along, with Nadav and Avihu behind them and all Israel following in the rear. Then Nadav said to Avihu, 'Oh, that these old men might die so that you and I should be the leaders of our generation.' However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'We shall see who will bury whom'* " (*Sanhedrin 52a*). It is also stated, "*The sons of Aaron died only because they gave a legal decision in the presence of their teacher Moses*" (*Eruvin 63a*). We also have, "*Aaron's sons died on account of four things: For drawing near to the holy place, for offering, for the strange fire, and for not having taken counsel from each other*" (*Vayikra Rabba 20:8*), and also because they had no wives (*ibid. 20:9*).

From all this it appears that Nadav and Avihu had several shortcomings. They were punished because of their greatness and sanctity, since it was not fitting for great men such as themselves to possess such flaws.

However we must understand how all this squares with the Torah's statement that Hashem would be "*sanctified by those who are nearest Me*" (*Leviticus 10:3*). The Sages have said: "*Moses said to Aaron: 'My brother, at Sinai I was told that I would sanctify this House, and that I would sanctify it through a great man. I thought that either through me or through you would this House be sanctified, but now [I see that] your two sons are greater than you or I'*" (*Vayikra Rabba 12:2*). It is also written, "*Your brothers, all the house of Israel, may weep for the burning that the L-RD has kindled*" (*Leviticus 10:6*). Therefore how can we possibly say that these sanctified men were flawed?

There is absolutely no doubt that Nadav and Avihu possessed tremendous holiness, as their fate testifies. Their life was certainly as holy as their death, and everything they did was for the sake of Heaven. Even when they entered the Sanctuary in a drunken state, or when they offered alien fire, or when they made their comments about Moses and Aaron, they did so only to teach the Children of Israel that if they want to come closer to Hashem and love Him with all their heart, all their soul, and all their might, then they must be attentive to observing mitzvot, be they easy or difficult. In fact they have to be so vigilant in this regard that they would be willing to give their lives for it. Yet the only way of reaching this level is through the study of Torah, for who can say that he is actually close to Hashem and loves Him if he has not diligently labored

in the study of Torah day and night? Because of our many sins, a single shortcoming in serving Hashem can lead to a breakdown in all the ways that we serve Him. This is even more likely when we possess more than one shortcoming in serving Him.

This is still more likely when a person possesses shortcomings in his dealings with his fellowman, for such sins are not rectified by Yom Kippur unless his fellowman has first forgiven him (*Yoma 85b*). A person can truly be far from Hashem in that case, even if he possesses Torah knowledge and good deeds. Besides, how many of us are faultless when it comes to serving Hashem? We must constantly examine our deeds in order to correct our shortcomings and come closer to the Creator. The problem, however, is that this is very difficult to do! It is here that Nadav and Avihu showed the Jewish people the path to follow. Nadav and Avihu saw that despite the sins of the Children of Israel when they made the golden calf, their repentance was accepted, Hashem gave them a second set of tablets, and the Sanctuary was built. They also knew that Hashem would dwell among them on the eighth day, as it is written: "*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them*" (*Exodus 25:8*) – among each and every one of them. How would the Shechinah actually dwell in each person? Through Torah and mitzvot.

Nadav and Avihu thought of telling the Children of Israel that when the Shechinah would come into the Sanctuary, and from there into them, then if they truly wanted to bond with Hashem – in the spirit of, "*The Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah and Israel are one*" (*Zohar III:73a*) – they had to put an effort into perfecting themselves through the study of Torah. They had to rid themselves of every flaw and imperfection that could distance the Shechinah from them.

Furthermore, when imperfections are commensurate with the greatness of an individual, they can lead to enormous problems if not quickly rectified. Sometimes the Shechinah will not want to reside in the heart of a Jew who has many shortcomings, particularly if he is a great man. Thus instead of protecting him, it can harm him because he did not put enough effort into studying Torah. This is what the Children of Israel learned from Nadav and Avihu, namely that when someone seeks to get closer to Hashem, he must love Hashem with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might by putting an effort into studying Torah and performing mitzvot, without demonstrating any signs of weakness. A person with weaknesses or shortcomings, especially if he is a ben Torah, will lose more than he can gain, and he may even be risking his life. Even when a person studies Torah, he may sometimes go through a period when the intensity of his study diminishes. In fact everyone can reach a point when he thinks, "*I've already learned more than enough, and now I'm going to rest a little. I'm going to see what's happening outside. I'll go out a little and deal with my own things.*" Such thoughts will eventually lead to action, and they are capable of making him stray completely off the path of Torah and mitzvot. How will he be able to redeem himself afterwards?

He can do so by renewing himself in Torah. The Sages have said that the Torah should always seem new to a person, as if it was given today. A person must infuse

himself with this concept, for the Torah does not contain old concepts; it is new each day. One can only continue to study when he thinks in this way, a way that is easier to accomplish now, on Shabbat HaChodesh. This day renews each person, enabling him to rise to greater heights in Torah study and mitzvot performance.

The Sanctuary Signals the Eternal Presence of the Shechinah in Israel

It is written, "*It was on the eighth day*" (*Leviticus 9:1*). Here the Midrash states that there was tremendous joy before Hashem in Heaven, as on the day when the world was created (*Torat Kohanim, Shemini 1:15*). The Children of Israel also celebrated with tremendous joy, as it is written: "*A fire went forth from before the L-RD and consumed the burnt-offering and the fats upon the altar. The people saw and sang glad song and fell upon their faces*" (*Leviticus 9:24*). In fact they experienced as much joy as is humanly possible. Commenting on the expression, "*A fire went forth from before the L-RD,*" the Sages said: "*When they saw a new fire descending from Heaven and consuming the burnt-offering and fats upon the altar, they opened their mouths to sing, at which point it is said: 'Rejoice in the L-RD, O you righteous, for praise befits the upright' [Psalms 33:1]*" (*Torat Kohanim, Shemini; Mechilta D'Miluim 20*).

This joy had great significance, for until the Sanctuary was erected, before sacrifices were offered, the Shechinah would leave the Children of Israel whenever they sinned, such as during the incident of the golden calf. When the Sanctuary was erected and the Shechinah returned to them, the Children of Israel knew that sacrifices would atone for their sins from then on, and that the Shechinah would no longer leave them. The Midrash also states, "*For the most part, the Shechinah dwelled with lower beings prior to the sin, but afterwards it left the earth for Heaven. On the day that the Sanctuary was erected, the Shechinah returned to this world and the glory of G-d filled the Sanctuary*" (*Tanhuma, Pekudei 6*).

Furthermore, when the Shechinah returned to the Sanctuary, everyone immediately knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven the sin of the golden calf. Now the Midrash states, "*Before they made the calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, came and dwelled among them. When He became angry with them, they said that He would never return. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them' [Exodus 25:8], and all the inhabitants of the world will know that I have forgiven Israel*" (*Tanhuma, Pekudei 2*). The Midrash also states, "*It is written: 'These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony' [Exodus 38:21] – it is a testimony for everyone on earth that the sin of the golden calf was forgiven*" (*Tanhuma, Pekudei 6*).

Hence there were two aspects to the tremendous joy that occurred on the day the Sanctuary was erected: The joy of the Holy One, blessed be He, over never having to remove His Shechinah from Israel, and the joy of the Children of Israel over the fact that the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven and the Shechinah would never

again leave them. Even when the Temple was destroyed on account of our numerous sins, leaving us with neither sacrifice nor priest nor altar, we still have the prayers that were instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly. These prayers replace the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple, as it is written: "*We will offer our lips instead of bulls*" (*Hosea 14:3*). Our prayers procure atonement so that our sins do not cause the Shechinah to leave, for it remains among Jews even when they sin, as it is written: "*Which dwells among them in their impurity*" (*Leviticus 16:16*). Furthermore, even when Jews have been exiled, the Shechinah has been exiled with them. In the Gemara our Sages said, "*In every place to which they were exiled, the Shechinah went with them*" (*Megillah 29a*). Instead of removing His Presence from the Children of Israel, as He had done before, Hashem would punish them for their sins. However while the Children of Israel were rejoicing in the descent of the Shechinah, the tragedy involving Nadav and Avihu took place. The Midrash states, "*Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu were punished only for minor sins.*" This means that it was according to their great spiritual level that Scripture considered them to have committed a grave sin. It is also written, "*The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took*" (*Leviticus 10:1*) – they too were the sons of Aaron. In their joy, upon seeing a new fire that was descending from Heaven and consuming the burnt-offerings and fat upon the altar, they added love to their love, as it is written, "*each took,*" for the act of taking denotes joy. This entire Midrash needs to be explained. Furthermore, this text gives the reader the impression that they did not commit any sins, so why were they punished?

It would seem that Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, were great tzaddikim, to the point that our Sages enthusiastically spoke of their qualities and said that they surpassed Moses and Aaron (*Tanhuma, Shemini 1*). That being the case, they understood better than anyone else that this moment – with fire descending from Heaven and the Shechinah revealing itself – was very great indeed. Their hearts were filled with great joy, which is why they entered the Holy of Holies and wanted to touch the fire in order to draw upon themselves the holiness of the place. Because they suddenly jumped to a great level of sanctity, however, their bodies could not tolerate it. They could not withstand the great fire of the revelation of the Shechinah, for man cannot cleave to the Shechinah all at once. He must ascend little by little until he merits cleaving to it. Yet Nadav and Avihu believed that they could reach this level in one step, and they rushed into the Holy of Holies, intoxicated and with their heads uncovered (*Vayikra Rabba 12:1*). This was certainly not because they had a casual attitude towards the Shechinah, but because they did not have time to prepare themselves. The proper way to prepare requires a person to ascend little by little, step by step, with enough time to work on himself and rectify what needs to be rectified, until he becomes worthy of cleaving to the Shechinah. In any case, we need to explain why the Holy One, blessed be He, punished Nadav and Avihu so severely amidst this great joy, thereby ruining it. Were the actions of Nadav and Avihu more serious than that of other people, those whom the Holy One, blessed be He, had been patient with and did not punish immediately? We can understand this according to what we said earlier, namely that the Shechinah

returned and descended upon this world on the eighth day of the inauguration. From then on, whenever Jews sin, it does not depart, but sinners are punished until they repent. How did the Children of Israel know this? It is because Hashem punished Nadav and Avihu right away. Hence they knew that the Shechinah would not leave, since Hashem is usually patient with sinners. This is why it was precisely when the Sanctuary was erected that they were punished, to tell them that the Shechinah would no longer leave them, even at a time of sin.

This is why "*Aaron was silent*" (*Leviticus 10:3*). Aaron, the holy one of Hashem, accepted this judgment with love, not protesting G-d's decision. He understood the great benefit that the Children of Israel were given for all the generations by the fact that his sons died on account of their sin, for it was a testimony to everyone in the world that the Shechinah resides among the Children of Israel, and that all the storms in the world cannot make it leave, even if the Children of Israel sin. Despite their sin, they are still called Israel (*Sanhedrin 44a*). Even if they would be exiled from their land, the Shechinah would be exiled along with them, and where the Children of Israel would be, the Shechinah would also be. Aaron had only to accept Hashem's decision and rejoice over the fact that his sons were such great tzaddikim that Hashem chose them to inform the Children of Israel that He would reside in their midst. It was through them that His Name was sanctified and His dwelling was among men, and in them He fulfilled the verse: "*I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me*" (*Leviticus 10:3*).

The Heart of Those Who Seek Hashem will Rejoice

It is written, "*It was on the eighth day, Moshe called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel*" (*Vayikra 9:1*). Rashi states that "*throughout all seven days of the inauguration, when Moshe erected the Sanctuary…and dismantled it daily, the Shechinah did not rest upon it. The Israelites were humiliated and said to Moshe, 'Moshe our teacher, all the efforts we have made were in order for the Shechinah to dwell among us, in order to know that we have been forgiven for the sin of the calf.' Moshe therefore answered them: 'This is the thing Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you [Vayikra 9:6]. My brother Aaron is more worthy and important than I, and by his offerings and service the Shechinah will dwell among you, and you will know that G-d has chosen him'*" (*Rashi on Vayikra 9:23*).

This is difficult to understand. Why did Moshe wait until the eighth day of the inauguration in order for Aaron to replace him? That is, why did he make the Children of Israel wait for eight days? The Sages have said, "*Wherever in Scripture we find the term vayehi, it indicates sorrow*" (*Megillah 10b*). Here it is written, "*Vayehi [It was] on the eighth day*" (*Vayikra 9:1*), and yet we know that on that day there was as much joy before the Holy One, blessed be He, as there was on the day when He created the heavens and the earth! Therefore why does the verse use the term vayehi? Was it because Nadav and Avihu died on that day? They did not die until the end of the day, when the Sanctuary was already standing, not when it was still being erected!

It is also said, "*During all seven days of the inauguration, Moshe used to erect the Sanctuary and take it apart twice each day*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 12:9*). He did this through miracles, as the Midrash states: "*When the work on the Sanctuary was completed, the Children of Israel awaited the coming of the Shechinah to dwell upon it. They went to the wise of heart and said to them, 'Erect the Sanctuary yourselves, and the Shechinah will dwell among us!' They wanted to erect it, but could not. They went to Betzalel and Oholiab and said to them, 'Erect the Sanctuary that you yourselves built!' They began to erect it, but they could not. All the Children of Israel went to find Moshe and said to him: 'Moshe our teacher, we have done all that you have told us. Why does it not stand?'*" (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 11*).

Moshe was tormented by this, so much so that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "*Because you suffered for not having labored or played any role in the work of the Sanctuary, all these wise men have been unable to erect it in your place, so that all Israel may know that it can only stand because of you; otherwise it will never stand. I will only allow it to stand because of you.*" Moshe replied, "*Sovereign of the universe, I do not know how to erect it!*" He said to him, "*Do what you must. It will appear that you are erecting it, but it will stand on its own, and I will write that you erected it.*"

How amazing is this statement by the Midrash! If the Holy One, blessed be He, helped Moshe to erect the Sanctuary on each of the seven days of its inauguration, then why did Moshe doubt during all this time that the Shechinah would descend upon the Sanctuary on that day? After all, the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, helped him was proof that He would make His Shechinah rest upon it! G-d also said, "*I will dwell among them*" (*Shemot 25:8*), meaning that He would help him to erect it. Would G-d not keep His word?

Don't Lose Hope

I thought that I would explain this through the teachings of Mussar, by citing the explanation of the holy Jew of Peshischa Zatzal on the verse: "*Glory in His holy Name, may the heart of those who seek Hashem be glad*" (*Tehillim 105:3*). He states that although a person may not yet have reached lofty levels in the service of Hashem, and although he may still be searching for Him and having doubts, then if it is G-d's will, the very fact that he is seeking Hashem shall give him joy. Hence we read, "*May the heart of those who seek Hashem be glad.*" It is not "*who have found Hashem,*" but rather, "*who seek Hashem.*" This goes without saying that G-d has great joy when a Jew seeks Him out.

Moshe also acted in this way, although he had doubts as to whether the Shechinah would descend upon the Sanctuary, for he did not know with certainty if the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven. He nevertheless did not lose hope, and for seven days he tried to erect the Sanctuary in case the Shechinah would descend upon it. Since G-d had told him to make the Sanctuary for His sake, and that the Shechinah would help him to erect it, Moshe knew what he had to do and that it was G-d's will. However he did not know with certainty if G-d would make His Shechinah dwell upon it just

because He helped him to erect it, since He helps those who seek Him, even if they do not find Him. Moshe was not afraid of wearying the Children of Israel in case the Shechinah would not descend upon the Sanctuary, since he knew that he was doing G-d's will. He was erecting the Sanctuary despite his doubts, because when a Jew does G-d's will – even if he has doubts about His will – Hashem still has great joy and helps him. When G-d saw that Moshe and the Children of Israel were busy erecting the Sanctuary despite their doubts, He rejoiced and helped them. Come the eighth day, Moshe saw that there was great joy before Hashem and he immediately sensed that the Shechinah would descend upon the Sanctuary on that day. He therefore told the Children of Israel, "*Today Hashem will appear to you*" (*Vayikra 9:4*).

Be that as it may, although there was great joy before G-d, there was also sorrow because the Children of Israel had sinned with the golden calf, and they had to be told to build a Sanctuary in order to atone for that sin. True, G-d had forgiven them, but their sin was not completely erased; there was still a trace of it, as it is written: "*On the day that I make My account, I will bring their sin to account against them*" (*Shemot 32:34*).

Although the Sanctuary had been erected and there was joy for Hashem, there was still sorrow because Hashem had to forgive their sin by means of the Sanctuary. Rashi mentions this by speaking about all the efforts made by the Children of Israel in order for the Shechinah to dwell among them, efforts made in order for them to know that they had been forgiven for the sin of the golden calf.

This is why the passage uses the term *vayehi* ("and it was"). In the final analysis, G-d was saddened by the fact that the Sanctuary had only been erected in order to atone for the sin of the golden calf. If the Children of Israel had been worthy, the Shechinah would have rested upon each of them, as the Gemara states: "*At first, before Israel sinned, the Shechinah dwelled with each individual; as it is said: 'For Hashem your G-d walks in the midst of your camp' [Devarim 23:15]. When they sinned, the Shechinah departed from them*" (*Sotah 3b*). It is also said, "*When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He wanted to live among lower beings as among higher beings. When they sinned with the golden calf, He gave them the Sanctuary in order to redeem them*" (*Tanchuma, Nasso 16*).

The Joy of Setting up the Sanctuary and the Descent of the Shechinah

It is written, "*It was on the eighth day*" (*Vayikra 9:1*). The Sages say in the Midrash that there was as much joy in Heaven as on the day that the world was created (*Torat Kohanim, Shemini 1:15*). The Children of Israel also experienced great joy, as it is written: "*A fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed the burnt-offering and the fats upon the altar. The people saw and sang glad song and fell upon their faces*" (*Vayikra 9:24*). In other words, the Children of Israel rejoiced with unequaled intensity. It is also said, " *'A fire went forth from before Hashem' – when they saw a new fire descending from Heaven and consuming the burnt-offering and fats upon the altar, they opened*

their mouths to sing, at which point it is said: 'Rejoice in Hashem, O you righteous, for praise befits the upright' [Tehillim 33:1]" (*Torat Kohanim, Shemini; Mechilta D'Miluim 20*).

This joy was not superficial, but was filled with meaning. Before the Sanctuary was set up and sacrifices were offered there when the Children of Israel sinned, the Shechinah would depart from them more and more, leaving them entirely during the incident of the golden calf. When the Sanctuary was set up and the Shechinah returned among them, the Children of Israel knew that from then on, sacrifices would atone for their sins and the Shechinah would no longer leave them.

Prayers Now Atone for Us

The Midrash states, "*For the most part, the Shechinah dwelled with lower beings prior to the sin, but afterwards it left the earth for Heaven. On the day that the Sanctuary was set up, the Shechinah returned to this world and the glory of G-d filled the Sanctuary*" (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 6*).

Furthermore, when the Shechinah returned to the Sanctuary, everyone immediately knew that Hashem had forgiven the Children of Israel for the sin of the golden calf. The Midrash states, "*Before they made the calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, came and dwelled among them. When He became angry with them, they said that He would never return. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them' [Shemot 25:8], and all the inhabitants of the world will know that I have forgiven Israel*" (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 2*). The Midrash also states, "*It is written: 'These are the accounts of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of Testimony' [Shemot 38:21] – it is a testimony for everyone on earth that the sin of the golden calf was forgiven*" (*Tanchuma, Pekudei 6*). There were therefore two aspects to the great joy experienced on the day that the Sanctuary was set up: The joy of Hashem for never having to remove His Shechinah from Israel, and the joy of the Children of Israel because the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven and the Shechinah would no longer leave them. Even though the Temple was destroyed on account of our numerous sins, leaving us without sacrifice, kohen, altar, or drink offerings, we still have the prayers instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly. These prayers replace the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple, as it is written: "*We will offer our lips instead of bulls*" (*Hosea 14:3*). Our prayers procure atonement so that our sins do not cause the Shechinah to depart, for it remains among Jews even when they sin, as it is written: "*Which dwells among them in their impurity*" (*Vayikra 16:16*). Furthermore, even when Jews have been exiled, the Shechinah was exiled with them. In the Gemara our Sages say, "*In every place to which they were exiled, the Shechinah went with them*" (*Megillah 29a*), something that occurs when they do not fulfill G-d's will. Instead of removing His Presence from the Children of Israel, as He had done before, He punishes sinners.

We also find that when the Temple was destroyed, G-d did not remove His Presence from the Children of Israel, but instead punished sinners. Whatever the case, the Shechinah suffers from the pain of Jews, as the Sages have said: "*When the destruction of Jerusalem was sealed, the Holy One, blessed be he, decreed that all of Creation*

should mourn, as it is written: 'Hashem, G-d of hosts declared that day to be for crying and lamenting, for baldness and for the donning of sackcloth' [Isaiah 22:12]. This shows us that as long as the Children of Israel are suffering, the Holy One, blessed be He, is also immersed in suffering with them, as it is written: 'In all their affliction, He was afflicted' [ibid. 63:9]. The ministering angels came to console Him, but He did not wish to accept consolation" (*Eicha Zutah 1:7*).

In addition, the Sages have said that the Holy One, blessed be He, descended from the highest Heavens, the place of His grandeur and glory, from the holiness of His great Name, and personally mourned for them.

No King Without a People

The rejoicing was so great on the day that the Sanctuary was set up that G-d's joy was similar to His joy on the day that heaven and earth were created. The Sages have compared the establishment of the Sanctuary to the creation of heaven and earth, for the entire goal of Creation was to demonstrate His glory. In fact there cannot be a king without people, and G-d's glory increases when the Children of Israel serve Him, study Torah, and fulfill mitzvot. This is explained in the Zohar: "*Had the brightness of the glory of the Holy One, blessed be His Name, not been shed over all of His creation, how could He have been perceived even by the wise? He would have remained incomprehensible, and the words 'the whole earth is filled with His glory' [Isaiah 6:3] could never be spoken with truth*" (*Zohar II:42b*).

Let us therefore say that from the day the world was created, the Holy One, blessed be He, has been called King. As the liturgical poem Adon Olam states, "*Sovereign of the universe, Who reigned before anything was created, at the time when by His will all things were made, then was His Name proclaimed King.*" In other words, when the world was still desolate, He was not yet king. Although the Holy One, blessed be He, was also King before the creation of the world, He was not yet called king, for "*there is no king without a people.*" When do we begin to call Him king? From the day that heaven and earth were created. Likewise, on the day that the Sanctuary was set up, the Children of Israel proclaimed him King. This is because He was constantly with them from then on, for sacrifices and prayers ensured that He would never leave.

Suffering in this World Leads to Reward in the World to Come

It is written, "*A fire went forth from before Hashem, and it consumed upon the altar the burnt-offerings and the fat. The people saw and sang glad song, and they fell upon their faces*" (*Vayikra 9:24*).

We need to understand why such joy was justified here. It was no doubt a joyous time for all the Jewish people when G-d made His fire descend from heaven to consume their offerings, but what exactly were they rejoicing over? If it was because this was a miracle, G-d had already led them out of Egypt by inflicting ten plagues upon their oppressors, miracles even greater than the heavenly fire which descended to consume their offerings!

Was it this Divine revelation – which the descent of a fire from heaven represented – that impressed them? At the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, they already witnessed a Divine revelation that was without equal!

Other questions arise in the verses that follow: After the death of Nadav and Avihu, who introduced an alien fire without being commanded to, Moshe said to Aaron: "*Of this did Hashem speak, saying: 'By those who are near Me will I be sanctified, and before all the people will I be glorified'* " (*Vayikra 10:3*). These words are difficult to understand. In fact the Torah already clearly stated the cause of their death (they had brought an alien fire), so why does Moshe now mention another reason?

To answer these questions, let us examine the sin of the golden calf. After that sin, G-d told Moshe: "*And now, leave Me alone, that My anger may flare up against them, and that I may consume them*" (*Shemot 32:10*). However Moshe beseeched G-d and prayed incessantly, until He finally reversed the decision to strike His people.

Nevertheless, Hashem did not completely forgive His people on that day, and since that time He stopped conducting Himself as in the past. Instead He sent an angel that went before them, as it is written: "*I will send an angel before you…for I will not go up in the midst of you*" (*ibid. 33:2-3*). He also commanded that they take off their ornaments (meaning the crowns that had been placed on each person's head at Mount Sinai), and so "*the Children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horev*" (*v.6*).

Nevertheless, although G-d deprived the Children of Israel of spiritual revelations, meaning that He removed their crowns and the Divine Presence from their midst, He still showed them physical revelations, such as the Cloud of Glory that led them along the way, flattening mountains and hills before them, as well as Miriam's well and the manna that fed them. Likewise, their garments did not wear out, nor did their feet swell. We clearly see that physical revelations were still provided to them, even if spiritual revelations were not.

This situation profoundly worried the Children of Israel, who feared that it meant that G-d held them in contempt. In other words, they worried that He had decided to reward them for their good deeds in this world, while reserving their punishment for the World to Come, as it is written: "*When the wicked bloom like grass and all the doers if iniquity blossom, it is to destroy them until eternity*" (*Tehillim 92:8*). Our Sages say that if rain falls before we ask for it, it is a bad sign for everyone concerned, for G-d desires the prayers of the righteous, and we may worry that He holds our prayers in contempt.

Yet during the inauguration of the Sanctuary, when G-d brought down His fire from heaven, it constituted a clear spiritual revelation that irrefutably proved to the Children of Israel that He had not forsaken them. Likewise, in seeing Nadav and Avihu dying for having brought an alien fire, they had another proof that G-d punishes them in this world, meaning that He has no intention of condemning them in the World to Come.

It is for this reason that the verse states, "*The people saw and sang glad song, and they fell upon their faces.*" What joy could they have experienced on the day that Nadav and Avihu died? As we have said, it is the joy that comes from a certainty that G-d no longer holds them in contempt, and that He punishes them in this world while reserving their reward for the World to Come.

It is also for this reason that it is written, "*By those who are near Me will I be sanctified, and before all the people will I be glorified.*" Because G-d would be sanctified by those who draw near to Him, all the people would know that He still resides among them, and that He punishes them for their sins in this world in order to shower them with their reward in the World to Come.

This constitutes an ethical teaching for us all: If G-d grants every person all that he needs in abundance, without difficulty or trials, he may fear that he is among "*the evildoer who dwells at ease.*" His benefits may constitute a reward for his small deeds of goodness, thereby depriving him of a reward in the World to Come. However if a person endures some pain and suffering in this world, it means that he is cherished and beloved by G-d, Who tries him when the need arises because of a small deficiency in the fulfillment of a mitzvah, so as to reward him with a perfect World to Come.

We find the same concept with Jacob, who was afraid of his brother Esav. Despite Hashem's explicit promise to Jacob (*"Behold, I am with you. I will guard you wherever you go*" *[Bereshith 28:15]*), he was still afraid that the kindnesses which G-d had bestowed upon him when he lived with Lavan were deducted from his merits, as it is written: "*I have been diminished by all the kindnesses…that You have done for Your servant*" (*ibid 32:11*). How much more should simple men such as ourselves strive not to be among evildoers who dwell at ease, but to be among the righteous who suffer.

Similarly King David said, "*Happy is the man whom You discipline, Hashem*" (*Tehillim 94:12*) – happy is the man whom G-d tries, for in this he feels the greatness of G-d's love for him and His desire to remember him today in order to do good for him in the World to Come. Indeed, our Sages have explained this verse as follows: "*If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. ... If he examines and finds nothing, let him attribute it to neglect in the study of Torah, for it is said: 'Happy is the man whom You discipline, Hashem, and whom You teach from Your Torah'*" (*Berachot 5a*). In fact it is through suffering that we can perfect ourselves in Torah.

The Greatness of Nadav and Avihu

It is written, "*The sons of Aaron, 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*).

Why did Nadav and Avihu die? Our Sages have provided us with several explanations on this subject. In the Gemara we read, "*Moshe and Aaron were once walking along, with Nadav and Avihu behind them, followed by all Israel. Nadav said to Avihu, 'If only these old men might die, so that you and I would be the leaders of our generation.' However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, 'We will see who shall bury whom'*" (*Sanhedrin 52a*).

We also read, "*The sons of Aaron died only because they rendered a legal decision in the presence of their teacher Moshe*" (*Eruvin 63a*). It is also written, "*Aaron's sons died on account of four things: For drawing near to the Holy of Holies [reserved only for the Kohen Gadol], for offering [without having been commanded to offer], for the alien fire, and for not having taken counsel from each other*" (*Vayikra Rabba 20:8*), and also because they had not married (*ibid. 20:9*).

We note that Nadav and Avihu committed several errors, and because of their greatness and sanctity, these faults could not go unpunished. In fact it was not fitting for great individuals to possess such character flaws.

Nevertheless, we need to understand how all the reasons brought by our Sages agree with the testimony of the Torah: "*I will be sanctified by those who are closest to Me*" (*Vayikra 10:3*). The Sages explain this verse in the following way: "*Moshe said to Aaron: 'My brother, at Sinai I was told that I would sanctify this house, and that I would sanctify it through a great man. I thought that this house would be sanctified either through me or through you. Yet now, [I see that] your two sons are greater than me or you'*" (*Sifra, Shemini 1*). After they died, Moshe commanded: "*Your brothers, the entire House of Israel, shall bewail the burning that Hashem ignited*" (*Vayikra 10:6*). That being the case, how can we say that such holy men erred?

It is clear that Nadav and Avihu were extremely holy men, something to which their fate testifies. All their deeds were done unselfishly, and thus all the actions in question (drawing near to the Holy of Holies while intoxicated, offering an alien fire, not marrying, and their "unkind" words for Moshe and Aaron) had a single objective: To teach the Children of Israel that if they wanted to draw closer to Hashem and to love Him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength, then they had to be careful to respect all the mitzvot – be they easy or difficult – in order to reach a state of self-annulment. A person can achieve this in only one way: By investing himself in Torah and mastering his evil inclination.

Nevertheless, no person can truly affirm that he is close to G-d and loved by Him. In fact even if we invest ourselves in Torah day and night, a single deficiency in our service of G-d can tarnish it. How much more is this true for numerous deficiencies in our dealings with other people, something that even Yom Kippur does not atone for without the forgiveness of the offended party (*Yoma 85b*). Hence it follows that we are far from Hashem, even if we know a great deal of Torah and engage in good deeds.

Nadav and Avihu saw that despite the sin of the golden calf, the repentance of the Children of Israel had been accepted. G-d then gave them the second tablets of the

law and the Sanctuary was built. They also knew that on the eighth day, the glory of Hashem would be revealed before the eyes of all Israel, and that He would dwell among them, as it is written: "*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them*" (*Shemot 25:8*). Here our Sages note that the text says "*among them,*" not "*in it*" (*the Sanctuary*), signifying that the Shechinah [Divine Presence] was for the Jewish people. In other words, the place they would devote to His residence would be in the midst of each person, this being on account of Torah and mitzvot.

Nadav and Avihu thus believed that they had to teach the Children of Israel how to act when the Shechinah would be revealed in the Sanctuary, and from there into themselves. If they yearned to draw closer to G-d – in the spirit of the teaching, "*Hashem, the Torah, and Israel are one*" (*Zohar III:73a*) – then they needed to make an effort to be upright in serving Hashem, without any stain that could act as a barrier between themselves and the Shechinah.

Nadav and Avihu also wanted to teach the people that, according to a person's greatness, character flaws can cause enormous damage if they are not quickly rectified. Indeed, the Shechinah will sometimes refuse to dwell in the heart of a Jew who possesses many shortcomings, especially if he is a great man. Thus instead of protecting him, the Torah may cause him to be punished, G-d forbid.

By their actions, Nadav and Avihu created deficiencies in themselves, such that the Shechinah which had come to dwell in the heart of each Jew could not tolerate these deficiencies. Thus given the greatness of Nadav and Avihu, they were punished. In fact it is not fitting to draw closer to Hashem while being filled with character flaws and vices that are at odds with the spirit of Torah.

From the example of Nadav and Avihu, the Children of Israel would learn that they must first be concerned with rectifying their faults so as to be capable of loving Hashem with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength. Only then can the Torah protect them, and they will merit the Shechinah in their midst. From all this, we learn that Nadav and Avihu's objective in bringing an alien fire was to be punished so that the Children of Israel would hear and see Hashem. That being the case, we may consider them to have sacrificed themselves for the entire Jewish people, as it is written: "*I will be sanctified by those who are closest to Me*" (*Vayikra 10:3*). From their example, all the Children of Israel understood that possessing certain character flaws can lead to the loss of all the benefits of investing in Torah, to the point that a person deserves to die, G-d forbid, especially if he is a Torah scholar. Thus anyone who seeks closeness with Hashem must be concerned with loving Him with all his soul by investing himself in Torah and performing mitzvot with all his strength, not with apathy.

The Foundation of Aaron's Service

It is written, "*Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them. Then he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering*" (*Vayikra 9:22*).

The commentators have questioned the significance of the expression "*he descended.*" Does this mean that Aaron was on an elevated area, such that he had to descend from it in order to bless the people? The commentators explain that for seven days Moshe assembled the Sanctuary in the morning and disassembled it at night, and during that time the Holy One, blessed be He, did not rest His Shechinah among the people. Hence Aaron began to suspect that this delay may have been because Hashem was upset with him for having indirectly caused the sin of the golden calf. Although Aaron's intentions had been good – he was looking for a way to distract the Children of Israel, and therefore he made them search for gold until Moshe could return while they were still gathering it – nevertheless they were determined to sin, and they found the time to make the golden calf before Moshe had descended from the mountain. The result was that Aaron was also responsible for this sin. Hence he feared that the Holy One, blessed be He, was upset with him and therefore did not send His Shechinah. In his pain, Aaron turned to Moshe and told him of his worries. Moshe and Aaron entered the Tent of Meeting and asked Hashem to quickly send His Shechinah, but in the meantime Aaron's worries grew. Moshe consoled him by saying that the sin of the golden calf was not dependent on him, the proof being that the Holy One, blessed be He, chose him to be the Kohen Gadol.

Aaron knew that he had to do something to make the Shechinah descend, which is why he tried to excel in the area of humility and radically eliminate all traces of pride within himself. This is what the verse is saying: "*Aaron descended*" – meaning that he made himself descend; he humbled himself before the people and raised his hands to bless them. We still need to understand why Aaron wanted to excel precisely in the area of humility and rid himself of all traces of pride. The explanation is that Aaron feared that his status as Kohen Gadol and the beautiful garments that he wore would lead to a feeling of self-importance. Hence he sought to rid himself of all traces of pride in order to truly be ready and worthy for the Shechinah to descend when he made the offerings. Aaron considered himself to be a simple kohen, not the Kohen Gadol, and he descended toward the people and blessed them with the attitude that the blessing of an ordinary man has definite importance. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw Aaron's sincerity and desire to elevate himself in humility, which is the foundation of all virtues, He immediately revealed His glory before the eyes of all the people, for after Aaron descended from making the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering, we immediately read: "*The glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people*" (*Vayikra 9:23*).

The author of Noam Elimelech explains this verse as follows: "*The tzaddik is constantly connected to the upper worlds. Yet because of his constant yearning*

for Hashem to help the Jewish people and bestow abundance and blessings upon them, he descends a little from his spiritual level and diminishes his connection to G-d. Nevertheless, this descent is inherently beneficial, for when people witness his connection to G-d and his desire to do good for them, a fear and love of G-d is infused in their hearts, and they are aroused to serve Him." Afterwards he adds that the phrase "*and [Aaron] blessed them. Then he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering*" means that Aaron descended from his spiritual level, for the tzaddik is constantly evaluating his own spiritual state – least he has sinned in an imperceptible manner or in thought – and he is constantly in a state of repentance. This is alluded to by the mention of sin-offerings and burnt-offerings, which come to atone for sinful thoughts, whereas peace-offerings allude to a connection to G-d, by which he makes peace among the heavenly hosts. Because of his desire to help the Jewish people, he descends a little from this level.

Let us attempt to explain the concept that the tzaddik is always connected to the upper worlds, but that his desire to help the Jewish people leads to a slight detachment from those worlds. This means that his compassion for the Jewish people in the lower world diminishes his connection to the upper worlds. In reality, this is a good thing, for when Jews realize that the tzaddik has such great love for them, a fear and love for Hashem arises in their hearts and they desire to serve Him wholeheartedly. Aaron was also infused with a great desire to do good for the Jewish people, and he yearned to bless them. Yet in order to bless them, he had to descend a little from his elevated position and connection to the upper worlds. The author of Noam Elimelech explains that the tzaddikim are constantly examining themselves, lest there exists a slight trace of pride or an evil thought in them. Aaron did this as well, and in his great humility he did not allow himself any rest. Rather, he examined his ways least he might unleash the wrath of Heaven and have to repent for something in order for the Holy One, blessed be He, to rest the Shechinah upon the Jewish people. This is the meaning of "*he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering*" – an allusion to the offerings that atone for evil thoughts, whereas peace-offerings allude to a connection to Hashem, which establishes peace among the heavenly hosts. Yet even with all this, Aaron's love for the Jewish people pushed him to descend a little from his level.

Above all, we must not say that Aaron succumbed to pride, which corresponds to the sin of idolatry. On the contrary, this is the way of the tzaddik: To find himself in a constant state of repentance, even for sins that he did not commit. As such the sins of the Children of Israel are erased, and they grow in holiness and purity, to the point of establishing peace among the heavenly hosts and causing the Holy One, blessed be He, to make His Shechinah dwell among them. This is why the Jewish people were filled with such great joy when they saw the Shechinah. They realized the importance of that eight day, the day when the Shechinah descended, and they understood that it was not a one-time event. Rather, the Shechinah would continue to accompany them forever, even in their exile after the destruction of the Sanctuary and the Temple.

Tazria

Arrogant Speech

It is written, "*This shall be the law of the leper on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the priest*" (*Leviticus 14:2*). The Sages have said, "*Whoever speaks Lashon Harah increases his sins even up to the three [cardinal] sins: Idolatry, incest, and the shedding of blood*" (*Arachin 15b*). This is surprising, for the din is that one should die instead of transgressing these prohibitions, and if a person has transgressed them, he is liable to death. Therefore how can leprosy afflict a person because of Lashon Harah and arrogance? Why would his punishment be leprosy in that case? If his sin is more serious than the three cardinal sins, his punishment should be death! Furthermore, with regards to Lashon Harah it is not stated that a person should die instead of committing this sin. We shall attempt to explain. When a leper reflects upon his sorry state, he will realize that his present condition is very grave, since it is written: "*The leper with the disease, his clothes shall be torn…. He shall dwell alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp*" (*Leviticus 13:45-46*). This means that he has to live outside the camp, far from his family and friends. He will feel tremendous shame because everyone will realize from his punishment that he spoke Lashon Harah. In that case the leper will certainly prefer to die instead of living in this way. It is even possible that he would agree to being judged as if he had transgressed the three cardinal sins. Therefore his punishment is certainly severe, for everyone will point at him and say that because his body was afflicted with leprosy, he now has to live alone outside the camp. His humiliation and pain will certainly be worse than if he had died.

Furthermore, the Sages have said that the leper who purifies himself must bring birds as an offering. This alludes to the fact that the leper babbled like birds that chirp (*Arachin 16b*). That is, he spoke Lashon Harah. Just how great is the shame he endures, since the Torah compares him to a bird and a worm, a reference to the scarlet yarn that he must offer, its dye coming from a worm. The leper is also compared to hyssop, which has no consciousness whatsoever, having been created only with the characteristics that Halachah is concerned with. So too for the leper, who instead of being at a higher level than the animals, conducts himself like an animal by speaking Lashon Harah. After all, the leper possesses consciousness, intelligence, and the ability to speak (which lifts him above the animals and enables him to do his Creator's will), in addition to other inborn attributes. The leper therefore fulfills the verse, "*Man has no superiority over beasts*" (*Ecclesiastes 3:19*). He will endure tremendous shame by the punishment and suffering he incurs on account of the Lashon Harah that he spoke.

If we expand upon this issue, we will see that being punished by a leprous affliction for speaking *Lashon Harah* (and for being arrogant), as well as all that ensues from it, comes to him from Hashem measure for measure. In fact there are several reasons that

lead a person to speak Lashon Harah and act arrogantly. The first reason is because a person wants to seem more important by diminishing others, which is why he treats them arrogantly. Regarding this sin, the Sages have said that such a person has no share in the World to Come (*Yerushalmi, Hagigah 2:1; Bereshith Rabba 1:5*).

The second reason is because when a person speaks Lashon Harah about others, he derives great pleasure from humiliating them. He also derives pleasure for speaking against them, almost as if he has been given a crown of victory upon returning from battle. The third reason is that by speaking Lashon Harah, he raises himself up by putting others down. Such a person suspects that others have offended his honor. He therefore feels that he should avenge himself even more, contrary to the verse: "*You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge*" (*Leviticus 19:18*).

The fourth reason is because Lashon Harah may stem entirely from personal motivation, for in this way one may try to prove that his words are more just and true than those of others. He will therefore try and completely contradict what others say by speaking ill of them, contrary to the statement: "*Do not rejoice when your enemy falls*" (*Proverbs 24:17*).

However Hashem, "*the searcher of hearts and minds…the righteous G-d*" (*Psalms 7:10*) knows fully well that this is nothing but sin. Therefore He punishes one who speaks in this way measure for measure, doing to him what he planned on doing to others. Hashem will punish him with a leprous affliction for having raised himself up by putting others down, and henceforth others will be raised as he is lowered and humiliated. For the tremendous pleasure that he derived from humiliating others, he will be stuck with leprosy. He will no longer be the master of his own fate, for the priest will decide whether he will be treated leniently or strictly. He is also afflicted for having suspected others of offending his honor and for having tried to disparage them. The result will be that he himself will be disparaged. Above all, he will be struck with leprosy for having spoken Lashon Harah about others for personal reasons, namely that his words were contradicted and his credibility harmed.

From here it follows that the leper's afflictions correspond, measure for measure, to the Lashon Harah that he spoke. Because of his pleasure and joy, because of his suspicions that others offended his honor, and because of his fears that his words were twisted, he will be afflicted. Thus the letters of the term *negah* ("affliction") are the same as those of *oneg* ("pleasure"). The word *neguiah* (an offense to his honor, an offense by his words) also comes from the same root as negah.

On the expression, "*The priest shall see*" (*Leviticus 13:3*), Rabbi Chaim Eizik wrote: The priest shall see. The term vera'ah [shall see] is written more than 10 times with regards to the priest. However only once is it written that the priest vera'ahu [shall see him]. This means that it is not enough for the priest to see if the affliction has changed; he must also see if the demeanor of the leper has changed. He must notice if his character has improved during the time that he was isolated from everyone else,

even from other lepers. He must also notice if this brought the leper to think about repentance. This affliction is a punishment and rectification for his sin, and if his affliction has changed, it is a sign that the leper has improved somewhat. Yet it has to go further than that. The change in the leper has to be noticeable, for his character must be completely improved.

This can be fully understood according to what we have said, for a leprous affliction and its rectification are very serious subjects. It is therefore not enough for a leper's offerings to rectify his sin. The priest must see that he has been completely healed of his illness, which caused his leprosy. The priest must see that the leper is spiritually healed. Hashem has certainly given him the ways and means to repent, but it must still be seen if he has wholehearted repented. In fact some people only repent superficially, and even if we think that they have repented, the evil in their heart has not been completely uprooted, for something else lies in their mouth and in their heart, something that can get worse later on. Hence a person who says, "*I will sin and repent, sin and repent,*" no opportunity is given for him to repent (*Yoma 85b*), which is why he will commit more serious sins. We should never trust in ourselves. Instead we should go to the tzaddik, who will show us the way to repent more and more each day. As the Sages have said, "*Whosoever has a sick person in his home should go to a Sage, who will invoke mercy for him*" (*Bava Batra 116a*).

The Aim of Suffering is to Bring Man Closer to G-d

In Parshiot Tazria and Metzora, we read about the leper (*metzora*). The Sages have said that the term metzora is formed by the same letters as motzi ra, meaning that it is a punishment for the sin of Lashon Harah, for having spoken ill of others. However this contains another allusion, for leprosy represents suffering. In fact the Gemara states that if a person has any of the four symptoms of leprosy, it constitutes "*an altar of atonement*" (*Berachot 5b*), and suffering removes evil from man, for a person is purified and cleansed of all his sins through suffering. This is why the Torah juxtaposes the verse, "*On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised*" (*Vayikra 12:3*) with the passage concerning lepers, in order to teach us that just as a man brings his son into the covenant of Avraham through circumcision, likewise the pain and suffering that a person endures through leprosy removes evil from him and connects him to Hashem. In fact these are for a person's good, and he should not regret it when they come upon him.

As the Mashgiach of Ponevezh said, leprosy comes a little at a time. At first it attacks a person's home, which is somewhat distant from man, but which he needs for protection against cold and heat. If he does not feel that he has sinned, leprosy attacks his garments, which are closer to him. If he still does not repent, it attacks his body, which is closest to him. This teaches a person not to get too comfortable with his body, but to be sensitive to what Hashem wants to tell him.

We may say that this alludes to the way that we must repent: We must learn from the lesson of the plagues on houses and the plagues on the body, purifying ourselves in order to come ever closer to Hashem.

Who Testifies About Him?

The Gemara discusses the holy Tanna Rabbi Akiva: When Rabbi Akiva was being led to his execution, it was the time for reciting Shema. Thus as his flesh was being torn apart with iron combs, he took upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. His disciples said to him, "*Our teacher, even to this point?*" He replied, "*All my days I have been troubled by this passage, 'with all your soul,' [which I interpret as] 'even if He takes your soul.' I said: 'When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling it?' Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it?*" The Gemara adds: "*He prolonged the word echad until he expired while saying it. A voice from Heaven went forth and proclaimed: 'Happy are you, Akiva, that your soul has departed with the word echad'*" (*Berachot 61b*). What is the meaning of, "*All my days I have been troubled by this passage…. When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling it?*" It means that every day, when Rabbi Akiva recited Shema by saying, "*You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul,*" he had the intention of giving his life for the sanctification of Hashem's Name. He nevertheless thought to himself, "*Maybe what I'm saying is nothing but words, and what I'm thinking is nothing but theory. Who can testify that I am truly ready to give my life for the sanctification of Hashem's Name?*"

It was for this reason that he was troubled throughout his days, until the time came for his execution and his flesh was torn apart with iron combs, truly unbearable suffering. He died a cruel and horrendous death, and at that very moment he took the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven upon himself with joy.

His disciples said to him, "*Our teacher, even to this point*" – even to this point must one rejoice in the service of G-d? He replied, "*Absolutely! Now is especially the time for me to rejoice, since I have found the strength to give my life for the sanctification of Hashem's Name.*" He prolonged the word echad until finally his soul left him as he was still saying it. In other words, during all the time that he was being tortured, he cleaved to the Holy One, blessed be He, with profound joy for having the opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah. We have no idea just how great Rabbi Akiva was. He possessed the soul of Moshe, and the Sages recount that when Moshe ascended to Heaven, the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him Rabbi Akiva teaching various halachot based upon the crowns of the letters. Moshe said, "*Sovereign of the universe, You have such a man, and yet You give the Torah through me?*" In other words, Moshe believed that Rabbi Akiva was more deserving than himself to give the Torah to the Jewish people. The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "*Be silent, for such is My decree*" (*Menachot 29b*).

A Good Investment

The Sages say that Rabbi Akiva came to see Rabbi Tarfon (who was extremely rich) in order to make him an offer. He said to him, "*I have a good investment to offer you. I will go and purchase one or two cities for you.*" Rabbi Tarfon agreed and gave Rabbi

Akiva 4,000 gold dinarim. Once Rabbi Akiva received the money, he distributed it to tzeddakah. One-third went to the poor, and two-thirds went to those who studied Mishnah, Torah, and the words of the Sages. Some time later, Rabbi Tarfon still had not received anything from this "*good investment.*" More time passed, and he asked Rabbi Akiva what was happening. He replied that the investment was an excellent one, better than all others. Rabbi Tarfon began to grow very suspicious, and wanted to see where all his money had gone. Rabbi Akiva brought him to the Beit HaMidrash, opened the book of Tehillim, and to Rabbi Tarfon's great astonishment he read the verse: "*He distributed widely to the destitute, his righteousness endures forever*" (*Tehillim 112:9*). Rabbi Akiva then said to him, "*Here is the city that I bought for you.*" When Rabbi Tarfon understood what was happening, he kissed Rabbi Akiva and said to him: "*You are my master and my guide: My master in wisdom and my guide in good conduct.*" Rabbi Tarfon then gave Rabbi Akiva even more money to distribute to tzeddakah.

We have a great deal to learn from Rabbi Akiva, who despite his greatness did not trust in himself, but troubled himself throughout his life for the fear of Heaven! How much more should we occupy ourselves with our fear of Heaven!

Unity Rectifies Afflictions and Abolishes Suffering

On the verse that states, "*If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eit, or a sapachat, or a baheret*" (*Vayikra 13:2*), the author of Chochmat Hamatzpun states: "*The Ramban said concerning the lesions in question that they were not at all natural and did not exist in the physical world. When the Children of Israel behave correctly with G-d, His spirit constantly protects them and maintains their bodies, their clothes, and their homes in good order. Yet if it happens that one of them sins, some unsightly thing appears in that person's flesh in order to show that G-d has distanced Himself from him. This only happens, however, in a place where G-d has chosen and where He resides. Consequently, these lesions, which are supernatural phenomenon, only appear if a man has great merit, since even the Children of Israel, the chosen people, are only afflicted by this in the chosen land. It is actually a place where a person can calmly devote himself to knowing G-d, and where the Shechinah can reside. All this emerges from what the Ramban wrote.*" [Editor's Note: When the Jewish people live in their own land, we know that the Shechinah actually rests upon them, as evidenced by the expressions: "*Whoever lives in Eretz Israel is considered to have a G-d*" (*Ketubot 110b*), and "*G-d reigns in Eretz Israel*" (*Zohar I:108b*)].

This appears very surprising. Why does tzara'at affliction only strike a person in Eretz Israel, to the exclusion of all other lands? Moreover, the Torah informs us that when G-d punishes, it is in order to lead a man on the right path after he has sinned. Why would G-d only do this in Eretz Israel? Finally, we note that in reality, even in other lands G-d sends calamities and lesions upon sinners. What does this mean?

We will attempt to explain this as best possible. Eretz Israel is a symbol of unity, for at the time of the world's creation, G-d formed the earth beginning from the Foundation Stone (*which was later in the Temple – Yoma 54b; Shir HaShirim Rabba 3:18*), and it was from there that the whole world was unified. Man is also a symbol of unity, for the dust with which he was created was collected from all corners of the world (*Sanhedrin 38a; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 11*), which is a mark of unity. Hence a man damages this unity when he speaks ill of his fellow, for in so doing he separates people, which is why his house, his body, and his possessions are struck first.

When troubles strike someone living outside of Eretz Israel, he should realize that he deserves them, for they come to him from Jerusalem, where one of the three gates of Gehinnom are found (*Eruvin 19a*). Why is it found there? It is in order to bring forth trials that are destined for the entire world. Actually, every Jew has a profound connection with Eretz Israel, even if living elsewhere, as Adam did. Whoever attacks a man's integrity should realize that he harms the unity of Israel and that he will have to suffer the consequences. It is simply that outside of Israel, these afflictions take on a different form.

We have therefore answered our two questions. It is true that everything comes from Eretz Israel, which is essential to the whole world and the source of everything destined for it. It is equally true that there are tragedies and afflictions even outside of Eretz Israel, yet they are different. Why all this? As we know, the Holy Land, and Jerusalem even more, and the Holy of Holies even more so, are the holiest and most important places in the world. Of them it is written, "*The eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end*" (*Devarim 11:12*). Eretz Israel is the place of G-d's abode, and just as He is unique in the universe, the Children of Israel are unique in the world (*see Zohar II:16b*). They should therefore live in unity, without pride or pretension, in order for G-d to live among them. They should learn this from the fact that the unity of the world begins from Eretz Israel, even if men are not worthy of the land's holiness. Therefore one who prides himself (*mitnase*) strikes at G-d's unity, the unity of Eretz Israel, and the unity of the Jewish people. Such a person is punished measure for measure by the affliction that is called s'eit (from the same root as the word *hitnassut* ["pride"]), as well as by other lesions (*sapachat and baheret*), for he has damaged the clarity (*behirut*) of unity and he did not achieve unity (*sapachat*).

We will now explain the different types of lesions and their causes. Sapachat is formed by the same letters as sach taf, where sach designates speech and alludes to gossip. *Taf* has the same numerical value as *Lilith* (one of the names of the forces of evil), meaning that in speaking ill of others, we strengthen the *kelipah* (impurity) in the Holy Land so that it can settle there. Gossip brings about lesions and leprosy (*Arachin 16a*); hence we are struck by sapachat.

As for baheret, the letters of this word recall the expression *harat olam* ("the birth of the world"), for slander truly ruins all of creation, and therefore it is punishable by baheret. Finally, we have already explained that s'eit signifies pride, which damages the unity of G-d, the unity of Eretz Israel, and the unity of the Jewish people.

Having said that one who sins through gossip affects the unity of all these things, we may now respond to the following objection that was once presented to me: Why is a man rendered impure if a small portion of his body is afflicted with lesions, yet he is pure if his entire body is afflicted, as it is written: "*[If] the affliction has covered his entire flesh, then he shall declare the affliction to be pure*" (*Vayikra 13:13*)?

This is also a part of G-d's kindnesses. It suggests that if a person sins a little, the lesions are minor. Hence to prevent him from continuing in this path, he is warned by small lesions on his body or house so that he repents with the help of the kohen. Nevertheless if he commits many sins, lesions attack his entire body, and then the Torah tells us that he is entirely pure because G-d in His goodness does not wish the death of the wicked, but rather that he repents and lives (*Ezekiel 33:11*). G-d does him the favor of rendering him pure so that he repents and does not lose all hope because of the gravity of his sins. This is comparable to the case of the red heifer: The one who burns it becomes impure, whereas the ashes of the heifer purify the impure (*see Bamidbar 19:8,19*). Thus was His wisdom decreed, and it is forbidden to contest His way of directing the world or to object to the mitzvot that He gave us.

It is possible that this is the connection between Parsha Tazria-Metzora and Parsha Shemini, for in the latter it is stated that the Shechinah only descends upon the Sanctuary and the Children of Israel when they observe the laws of family purity (*tazria*) as well as proper speech (*metzora*), for otherwise the Shechinah will leave them (*see Shabbat 33a*). In addition, the Gemara teaches that the Temple was destroyed because of gossip and baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b*).

The statement in Parsha Tazria, "*When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male*" (*Vayikra 12:2*), speaks of a woman who obeys her husband, lives with him in peace and tranquility, and caters to his every need. The phrase "*and gives birth to a male*" means that she does his will (*see Rambam, Hilchot Deot Sotah 12a*), for it is as if she had conceived her husband. To him, she is like a mother who takes care of her baby, hears his cries, and has pity on him. Thus if they are meritorious and live together in peace and holiness, the Shechinah resides among them. However in the opposite case, a fire devours them (*Sotah 17a; Pesikta Zutah, Bereshith 2:23*) and they become inflamed with forbidden desires, with fire being the only thing that remains (*Kallah Rabbati 1*). Therein lay the connection between the two parshiot. How can we arrive at complete unity and the rectification of all that has been damaged? It is by guarding our words and observing the laws of family purity.

Sanctity and Torah are Man's Goals in Life

Parsha Tazria first discusses the impurity of childbirth, but then goes on to deal primarily with skin afflictions and lepers. Now it would seem that the passage concerning childbirth is out of place here, since most of this parsha (as well as Parsha Metzora, which follows it) deals with leprosy. The passage concerning the impurity of childbirth, however, is no longer than eight verses. Therefore why is it placed here?

Furthermore the Chozeh of Lublin, may his merit protect us all, raised a question concerning the verse, "*On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised*" (*Vayikra 12:3*), for it seems to have no connection whatsoever to the impurity of childbirth. Therefore why is the mitzvah of circumcision mentioned alongside the impurity of a woman who gives birth to a boy?

We are aware of the words of the Sages, who said that leprosy comes as a result of the sin of Lashon Harah (*Arachin 16b*). This means that when a person gossips about his fellow or speaks ill of him, the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes him measure for measure with the plague of leprosy. Just as he spoke ill of another person and made him blanch when he shamed him, so too will his own skin change color on account of leprosy.

This is why the Torah commands that lepers must live alone, outside the camp (*Vayikra 13:46*). The Sages have explained, "*Why is the leper different, such that the Torah said, 'He shall dwell alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp'? He separated a husband from his wife, a man from his neighbor. Therefore the Torah said, 'He shall dwell alone'*" (*Arachin 16b*). Because he disrupted the unity of others, his punishment to is remain alone and isolated, without the company of others.

From here we see that the plague of leprosy is a punishment for harming the unity of people, for nothing irritates Hashem as much as strife, and strife results from Lashon Harah and slander. On the other hand, there is nothing better to Hashem than peace and harmony, which is something we see in our parsha. The Torah commands a woman who has given birth to bring a sin-offering and burnt-offering, for she suffered a great deal during childbirth, and in her mind she made a vow that was detrimental to her husband. This means that a woman's sin lay in her thoughts, for her pain drove her to anger, and deep inside she asked why she was suffering so much. Now even if such thoughts and words come as a result of real pain, Jews must be extremely careful with their words. This is why, notwithstanding her pain, she has to bring an offering.

In this way the Torah alludes to just how serious L*ashon Harah* (even the "dust" of it) really is. Thus if a woman who gave birth must bring an offering to atone for the thoughts and words that, despite her best efforts, escaped her lips, how much more has a person grievously sinned if he consciously and deliberately gossips about his fellow and speaks ill of him! Besides the fact that he is punished with leprosy because he took pleasure in speaking Lashon Harah, he must remain alone and outside the camp. This answers the question concerning the connection between the mitzvah of circumcision and a woman who has given birth. A person in this world must circumcise the foreskin of his heart – not just the foreskin of his flesh – meaning that he must excise the afflictions of his heart through complete nullification. He does this by devoting himself to Torah study and the performance of mitzvot. Thus by stating, "*On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised*" (*Vayikra 12:3*), the Torah is saying that because a person sanctified himself and labored in Torah study and mitzvot performance during the 70 years of his life, he will merit to arrive at "*the eighth day.*" This means that

he will have reached his 80th year, having managed to eradicate his evil inclination. How can this be achieved? It is by the fire of the Torah, which is alluded to in the verse, "*A woman who conceived,*" the letters of the word *isha* ("woman") being the same as the word *aish* ("fire") plus the letter hei (numerical value: 5), an allusion to the five books of the Torah. Thus by occupying himself with the fire of the Torah, a person will have offspring who will become Torah scholars. Perhaps he himself will have novel Torah interpretations day and night, and he will have a son in order for his ideas to be perpetuated and renewed, and that more words of Torah may be derived from them. In the final analysis, however, a person is liable to think that since he is circumcised – since he has entered the covenant of our father Abraham and is called a Jew – he therefore has nothing to worry about. This is why the Torah also warns a Jew about being circumcised in his heart. In fact circumcision helps a man become a Jew, meaning that by doing so he enters into the covenant that our father Abraham made with the Holy One, blessed be He.

On one hand we have the covenant of circumcision, and on the other hand the covenant of Shabbat, tefillin, and Torah. One cannot exist without the other, as it is written: "*If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth*" (*Jeremiah 33:25*). If we do not devote ourselves to the fire of Torah study and mitzvot performance, to circumcising our hearts, we will instead be occupied with frivolous pursuits and become infused with pride, a love for honor, and a desire for the pleasures of this world. We may even become speakers of Lashon Harah, which brings about a great deal of evil. We will commit intolerable sins and end up becoming leprous, and people will keep their distance. Even the Holy One, blessed be He, will keep His distance from us, for the leper "*shall dwell alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.*" A person must therefore be careful not to become like a leper – whom people stay away from, lest they get contaminated with leprosy – and thus even Hashem will distance Himself from him. This is why a person must devote himself to the fire of Torah, to Mussar and Chassidut, cleaving to his teachers in order to achieve spiritual perfection. He must circumcise his heart in order to attain his portion in Gan Eden, which is the world of the eighth.

When a person conducts himself in this way, he will merit that the benediction, "*Blessed be he who fulfills the words of this Torah*" applies to him. This is because a person who puts an effort into fulfilling the Torah will elevate his heart in the service of Hashem and become increasingly greater. He will also father novel Torah explanations, merit arriving at the eighth day, the World to Come, and completely remove the foreskin of his heart. He will also have his portion in Hashem.

Lashon Harah Damages the Sanctity of the Shechinah

It is written, "*All the days that the lesion is upon him, he shall remain unclean. He is unclean; he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp*" (*Vayikra 13:46*).

Our Sages have taught (*Torat Kohanim, Tazria 5:12*) that the metzora [leper] was sent to live outside the three camps of the Children of Israel. The Gemara also says, "*If a man has one of these four symptoms of lesions, it is nothing but an altar of atonement*" (*Berachot 5b*). Rashi explains that this was because he was expelled from the camp and humiliated as a result.

My son once asked me why G-d commanded Moshe, on the day of the altar's inauguration, to humiliate the metzora'im [lepers] so severely by expelling them from the three camps. After all, even those who are liable to malkut [lashes], if they suffer humiliation, are exempt from receiving lashes (*Makkot 22b*). How are they different from those with lesions, since they receive no lashes when they endure humiliation? As for those with lesions, although they are humiliated to the point of being expelled from the three camps, they are still not exempt from punishment!

Our Sages have said, "*This shall be the law of the mezora [Vayikra 14:4] – refers to one who motzi shem ra [raises an evil name, i.e., slanders]. It [the five-fold repetition of this matter in the Torah] is meant to teach that if one indulges in Lashon Harah, it is as if he has transgressed all five books of the Torah. It was for this reason that Moshe warned Israel: This shall be the law of the mezora*" (*Vayikra Rabba 16:6*). In other words, these lesions result from the sin of Lashon Harah and slander.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe on the day of the altar's inauguration that he should humiliate those who speak Lashon Harah. Why? Because when we speak Lashon Harah, G-d is, so to speak, humiliated before the hosts of Heaven. In fact the Sages state, "*When the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to create man, He [first] created a group of ministering angels and said to them: 'Do you wish us to make a man in our image?' They said, 'Sovereign of the universe…"what is man, that You are mindful of him; and the son of man, that You think of him?*" [Tehillim 8:5].' He then stretched out His little finger among them and consumed them with fire. The same thing occurred to a second group. A third group said to Him, 'Sovereign of the universe, how did it help the former [angels] when they spoke to You [as they did]? The whole world is Yours, and whatever You wish to do in Your world – do!' " (*Sanhedrin 38b*).

When man sins before G-d, the ministering angels say to Him: "*Sovereign of the universe, You wanted to create man, but we did not. Now that You have created him, he has sinned and ruined Your world. What benefit do You have from him being in Your world?*" The Gemara also says, "*When He came to the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion, whose deeds were corrupt, they said to Him: 'Sovereign of the universe, did not the first [group of angels] speak correctly before You?'*" (*ibid.*).

At that point G-d is, so to speak, humiliated before the hosts of Heaven by the deeds of the wicked. That being the case, a person who speaks Lashon Harah shows absolutely no consideration for the respect owed to his Creator. Furthermore, every man has been created in the image of G-d, as it is written: "*G-d created man in His image; in the image of G-d He created him*" (*Bereshith 1:27*). Therefore when he speaks Lashon Harah about another person – made in the image of G-d – it is as if he were speaking about G-d himself. This goes without mentioning the fact that Lashon Harah itself is very serious, for it kills three people [the speaker, the listener, and the subject]. Thus the three images of G-d are humiliated, which is why the perpetrator is expelled from all three camps. Hence measure for measure, just as G-d was humiliated three times, he is expelled from the three camps.

Forsaking Jealousy and Hatred

My dear brothers, we must avoid speaking Lashon Harah. Saying something truthful about others [if it is also negative and serves no constructive purpose] is Lashon Harah as well, and by doing so we will eventually end up speaking lies. Whoever speaks Lashon Harah about a person, it is only because he wants others to hate that person as well, something which is diametrically opposed to the concept of unity. A person who respects the word of G-d will flee from Lashon Harah that is spoken about the great men of Israel. In this regard, the book Likutei Moharan states the following:

"*Know that Lashon Harah causes damage and diminishes humility. In fact because of the Lashon Harah that people speak, and because of the damage that it causes, it is impossible for the tzaddikim to be humble, since Lashon Harah creates a rift between humility and wisdom. Humility is thus diminished, and it becomes impossible to be humble. Now humility is nothing without wisdom, for it is certainly not out of humility that we lower our heads out of foolishness, a kind of humility that is undignified. Humility is only valuable when accompanied by wisdom. Because of the defect caused by Lashon Harah, a rift is created between humility and wisdom, such that it is impossible to be humble. This was the great character trait of Moshe, for which the Torah extols him: He was so humble that even Lashon Harah could not affect his humility, as it is written: 'Miriam…spoke against Moshe' [Bamidbar 12:1]. There was therefore a defect in the world caused by Lashon Harah, and yet 'the man Moshe was very humble' [v.3]. In fact Moshe was at such a high level, even the defect created by Lashon Harah could do nothing to his humility.*"

Consequently, when ordinary people speak Lashon Harah, they also harm the tzaddikim. In order to rectify this, great men must be in agreement with one another, and regular individuals must be careful about their words, in which case everyone will be united. Furthermore, because of the Lashon Harah that we say about another individual, people tend to view that individual differently, and they look down on him. As a result, an imperfection is created in the Divine image of that individual, the work of G-d's hands, for whom He created the world. The Sages say that Adam was created alone in order to teach that whoever harms a Jewish life, it is as if he destroyed an

entire world. That being the case, speaking Lashon Harah is considered like destroying G-d's world, a sin that cannot be rectified unless we ask forgiveness from everyone we have disparaged. If we fail to do so, this sin will accompany us to the grave. We will have to render an accounting, even in the case of a great individual.

We see that all the misfortunes which people experience start with baseless hatred. Let us therefore put an effort into forsaking jealously and hatred, and to no longer speak Lashon Harah. We will then merit welcoming Mashiach, speedily and in our days!

Metzora

Pride Lies at the Heart of Every Sin

Parsha Metzora deals with the leper, a person who slandered others by speaking Lashon Harah about them. The Torah states that the leper's punishment is to dwell outside the camp and be declared impure.

Man lives in a social setting, even if it only consists of the company of one other person. Here a person is speaking harshly of a third Jew. Have we ever thought about how a Jew comes to speaking ill of others? Why doesn't he deal with his own concerns and leave others alone? How does he arrive at such a low point that he speaks Lashon Harah about other people, especially about other Jews, who are created in the image of G-d?

In several places throughout the Gemara and Midrashim, our Sages have said that pride lies at the heart of every sin. People tend to think that the world belongs to them, and it is true that the Sages have taught that every person should say, "*The world was created for my sake*" (*Sanhedrin 37a*), since the world was created only for Israel. However to jump from this to believing that you alone have a place in this world – that you alone are important while others are totally worthless – is completely mistaken.

Pride is so abhorrent to Hashem that He says, "*Every man who is proud of spirit, I and he cannot both dwell in the world*" (*Sotah 5a*). A person who is completely infused with pride, who is so conceited that he will never yield to others, is capable of sitting among people and speaking ill of them. Someone who feels that he is indispensable, while others are worthless, is a person who will speak Lashon Harah. Hence his punishment is to be humbled like someone who has been forsaken. He must live alone, outside the camp, until his sin has been forgiven.

We may also learn this principle from Shabbat HaGadol, named in memory of the miracles that were done for the Children of Israel before leaving Egypt. The Egyptians worshipped lambs, as it is written: "*If we were to slaughter the deity of the Egyptians*" (*Exodus 8:22*). While in Egypt, the Children of Israel received the order to "*draw out and take a lamb*" (*ibid. 12:21*). In other words: Remove your hands from idolatry, and take a lamb and slaughter it. Their idol will have absolutely no power over you, and neither it nor the Egyptians will harm you. The Children of Israel took lambs on Nissan 10, which was a Shabbat (*Seder Olam*), and tied them to the foot of their beds. The Egyptians asked them what they were doing to their idols, and the Children of Israel answered that on Nissan 14 they would slaughter them. The Egyptians were furious when they heard this, angrily grinding their teeth because their idols had been reduced to scorn. However they didn't harm the Children of Israel in any way, which constituted a great miracle. Hence this particular Shabbat is called "*Shabbat HaGadol,*" for that day, the

tenth of Nissan, was a *gadol* (great) Shabbat. Following this, Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to take the blood of these lambs and place it on their lintels and doorposts. Now everything is revealed to Hashem, and nothing is hidden from Him, not even our innermost thoughts. Therefore why did the Children of Israel have to place the blood of lambs on the lintels and doorposts of their homes? Did the Holy One, blessed be He, need a sign that there were Jews within a given house? Does this mean that Hashem didn't know who slaughtered a lamb and was worthy of being delivered because he trusted and believed in Him, not fearing the Egyptians? The answer is that, as we know, Hashem wants people to serve Him wholeheartedly. Serving Him superficially is not what He wants.

This is why Hashem first struck Egypt with the plague of blood. This alluded to the fact that the Egyptians harmed their own souls, for it was blood that gave them life – blood given to them as a gift from Hashem – which they denied. This was also an allusion to the Children of Israel that when a person harms his own self, meaning the blood that gives him life, he will be struck as the Egyptians were. As for us, because of our many sins the vast majority of our service of Hashem is superficial, manifested only by outward signs. Who knows what our service of Hashem is like on the inside? This is why the Children of Israel received the order to place blood on their lintels and doorposts. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, didn't want the Children of Israel to serve him just superficially by taking a lamb, attaching it to their bed in the sight of the Egyptians, and then slaughtering it, just like someone swaying in prayer before the entire community, while his heart is elsewhere. Above all, the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to pass over the houses of the Children of Israel and see the purity of their hearts, observing that they were serving Him wholehearted in addition to outwardly. This is why they received the order to place blood on their doorposts, an allusion to their service through blood, a service of the heart.

This is how a person must serve His creator, in a completely unselfish way. He must also serve Him wholeheartedly and sincerely. In fact a person must resemble a burnt-offering in this regard, serving Hashem with complete devotion, inside and out. As King David said, "*Because for Your sake we are killed all the time*" (*Psalms 44:23*), just like a burnt-offering that is entirely destined for Hashem.

Hence we must all pay great attention to the way in which we serve the Creator and perform mitzvot. We must not allow self-interest to get involved, for this leads a person to feelings of pride and vanity. As we have said, pride is what actually pushes a person to speak ill of others, for he considers himself as being important and others as being worthless. In that case his deeds will not be acceptable to Hashem, Who will have no desire to dwell together with him in this world. This also describes the tactics of the evil inclination, which attempts to get a person to introduce wrongful tendencies into his performance of mitzvot, teaching him that this is how things are done. If he believes that, he will get caught in the evil inclination's trap and be unable to free himself, losing all that he has gained. Simply put, we must serve the Creator like a

burnt-offering, which was entirely consumed on the altar. Self-interest should not get involved with our service of Hashem, Whom we must serve for His sake, and His sake alone.

Controlling Our Words is One of the Greatest Traits That the Creator Has Given Us

At the beginning of Parsha Tazria it is written, "*When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male*" (*Vayikra 12:2*), and in Parsha Metzora we have, "*This shall be the law of the metzora [leper]*" (*ibid. 14:2*). The Gemara understands this word to be a contraction of *motzi rah* (he who "brings forth evil"), a reference to speaking ill of one's fellow (*Arachin 15b*). Parsha Tazria also contains laws relating to the leper, allowing us to understand things in the following way: He who speaks Lashon Harah conceives and brings forth more of the same in the mouths of others, and from a tiny word of Lashon Harah a tremendous amount ensues, the memory of which cannot be erased.

We know that the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes and rewards people measure for measure (*Sanhedrin 90a*). Now when someone speaks Lashon Harah about his fellow, he causes people to distance themselves from that person, and therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes him accordingly: He is struck with leprosy, his body is covered with lesions, and people are distanced from him, as it is written: "*The leper in whom the plague is…alone shall he dwell; his dwelling shall be outside the camp*" (*Vayikra 13:45-46*). My fellow Jews, we have a great lesson to learn from this. Sometimes we may find ourselves among friends, with the conversation going from one subject to the next, until finally with one slip of the tongue a person will speak Lashon Harah and thereby kill three people: The speaker himself, his listener, and the person being spoken of. It may happen that the speaker was not serious, or that he spoke in jest, spontaneously. Nevertheless his words have already been uttered. They have already entered the minds of his listeners, where they continue to have an effect.

Things are so serious that sometimes (or maybe often) people lose their jobs, or even their standing in society. Everyone scornfully looks down on them and keeps their distance, and all because of what? Because a few words were said in passing. Can we imagine what losses occur because of speech, or what losses we can cause with just a few words?

By reflecting a little in depth on this issue, we can understand the gravity of Lashon Harah, which makes people lose respect for one another and sows discord among them. Perhaps, after having thought about this, we will learn our lesson and change our lives. What exactly does this mean? We know that 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva died, not because they spoke Lashon Harah per se, but because they did not show enough respect for one another.

The Sages also say that when King David's soldiers went out to war, they died in battle despite the fact that they were great tzaddikim. However the soldiers of King

Ahab, who were evildoers and idol worshippers, survived. This was due to the fact that King David's soldiers had speakers of Lashon Harah among them, hence they died in battle, whereas unity reigned among King Ahab's soldiers and they did not speak Lashon Harah. Hence they did not die in battle. From this we see that the sin of Lashon Harah is even more serious than not respecting others.

This still needs to be explained. Being that the punishment for Lashon Harah was leprosy, why did King David's soldiers die in battle rather than contracting leprosy? Furthermore, since speaking Lashon Harah is more serious than not showing respect to others, why were Rabbi Akiva's disciples (who had not spoken Lashon Harah, but simply showed a lack of respect) not struck with leprosy? Why were they instead punished so severely that they died before Shavuot, lacking even the merit to celebrate the giving of the Torah?

This can be explained in the following way: When a person does not show others proper respect, this is a serious sin that indicates the "*beginning of disaster,*" meaning that it is just the start of Lashon Harah. Especially among tzaddikim, a person who does not show proper respect for others is like one who has spoken Lashon Harah. Everyone can see how he lacks respect for others and recounts everything he sees. Actual Lashon Harah then results. Thus for the Holy One, blessed be He, neglecting the respect due to others is considered Lashon Harah. The punishment for this is very severe, for one who neglects showing others proper respect will eventually speak Lashon Harah and merit death.

All this concerns ordinary people. However for tzaddikim, if they commit the sin of Lashon Harah and are not careful about the respect due to others, the Holy One, blessed be He, is extremely exacting with them, as the Sages have said (*Yebamot 121b, Bava Kama 50a*). He therefore punishes them severely and they die. He does not warn them by inflicting leprosy upon them, for the Torah has already warned them to respect one another and not speak Lashon Harah. This is why King David's soldiers (who were tzaddikim, yet spoke Lashon Harah) and Rabbi Akiva's disciples (who were also tzaddikim, yet neglected showing others proper respect) were not struck with leprosy, but instead died.

As a consequence of all this, we realize just how careful we must be concerning the slightest hint of Lashon Harah, especially actual Lashon Harah. This is especially true in our time, when people take Lashon Harah so lightly and feel that they can say whatever they want, thinking that it is probably not Lashon Harah. Who can say what the true cause is for all the traffic accidents and illnesses that kill thousands of people each week? Perhaps it is due to our Lashon Harah, for King David's soldiers and Rabbi Akiva's disciples also died because they provoked Lashon Harah. Consequently, how much death is caused by actual Lashon Harah?

By renewing our love for one another, and by strengthening ourselves by speaking permitted and holy words, Hashem will put an end to our troubles. Amen, may it be so!

The Sin of Lashon Harah

In general, Parshiot Tazria and Metzora are read together. To explain the connection between them, we note that at the beginning of Parsha Tazria it is written: "*When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male…*" (*Vayikra 12:2*), while in Parsha Metzora it is written: "*This shall be the law of the metzora [leper]*" (*ibid. 14:2*). The Gemara understands the latter to mean, "*This shall be the law of one who motzei shem ra [brings up an evil name]*" (*Arachin 15b*). Parsha Tazria also contains laws concerning the leper. As we have said, one who speaks Lashon Harah gives rise to much more of it, and from his few words a great deal of Lashon Harah ensues, which leaves permanent traces.

We know that Hashem punishes and rewards man measure for measure (*Sanhedrin 90a*). Hence someone who speaks Lashon Harah causes others to distance themselves from the people he has disparaged. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes him measure for measure by striking him with leprosy, which leaves his body covered with lesions and causes everyone to distance themselves from him. Thus we read, "*The leper in whom there is the affliction…he shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp*" (*Vayikra 13:45-46*).

This week witnessed Rosh Chodesh Iyar, and this Shabbat we read Parshiot Tazria and Metzora together. Our holy books have already mentioned that man is renewed on Rosh Chodesh, and that all his sins are forgiven. Yet in regards to this month, the Sages have said that 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died – not because they spoke Lashon Harah – but solely because they lacked respect for one another (*Yebamot 62b*).

The Sages also said that King David's soldiers, when they went off to war, were killed in battle despite being completely righteous. However the soldiers of King Achav, despite being evildoers and idolaters, emerged victorious in battle. The reason for this discrepancy is that among the soldiers of King David, there were some individuals who slandered, whereas none of King Achav's soldiers spoke Lashon Harah, which is why they did not die. From here we learn just how serious Lashon Harah is, worse even than not showing respect for others.

In that case, however, we need to understand something: If the punishment for Lashon Harah is leprosy, then why did King David's soldiers die rather than being struck by leprosy for having spoken Lashon Harah? Furthermore, since it is worse to speak Lashon Harah than not to respect others, why were Rabbi Akiva's students – who did not speak Lashon Harah, but simply lacked respect for one another – punished so severely that they died before Shavuot, without even celebrating this holiday, the festival of the giving of our Torah?

We can explain this in the following way: Not respecting others is a grave sin, one capable of leading to the start of a disaster. This means that it is barely the start of Lashon Harah. Especially among talmidei chachamim, when someone is not careful about showing respect for others, it is as if he has spoken Lashon Harah. In fact

everyone will see that this talmid chacham is not careful about showing respect for others, and he will go and talk about what he has seen, the result being that it will lead to actual Lashon Harah. Hence for Hashem, whoever neglects the honor of others is considered to have spoken Lashon Harah, and his punishment is very serious. In fact when we fail to show respect for others, we will eventually speak Lashon Harah and become liable to death.

The first letters of **T**azria **M**etzora (*tav mem*) form the term *met* ("death"), and the last letters of Tazria Metzora (*ayin ayin*) have the same numerical value as the term *kam* (to arise). Furthermore, the numerical value of met combined with the word itself is equal to that of *emet* ("truth"). This means that a person who speaks Lashon Harah brings into existence (*mekayem*) his words which are truth (*emet*), resulting not only in the death of others, but in his own death as well, since everyone dies by the sin of Lashon Harah, the speaker included. He brings about the same results for others, and those who listen to him are also punished.

This is why the Torah comes to warn us against Lashon Harah. One who speaks ill of others is punished by leprosy, for he has caused his death. However if he guards himself from speaking Lashon Harah and only speaks good of others, then kam, he will arise, for he has overcome this grave sin and not spoken Lashon Harah. Woe to those who speak ill of others and will have no way to arise! That is why it is extremely important to be vigilant in regards to the sin of Lashon Harah.

All this, however, concerns ordinary individuals. For tzaddikim who harbor the sin of Lashon Harah and do not respect others, Hashem will demand an accounting from them in regards to the smallest of things, as the Sages have said (*Yebamot 121b, Bava Kama 50a*), punishing them severely, even with death. He does not warn them through leprosy, for the Torah has already enjoined them to respect one another and not speak Lashon Harah. That is why King David's soldiers, who were tzaddikim, and Rabbi Akiva's students, who were also tzaddikim, died rather than being struck by leprosy, for they spoke Lashon Harah and did not respect one another.

We find an indication of the gravity of this sin for tzaddikim with Miriam, who did not really speak Lashon Harah about Moshe, but only the "dust" (*avak*) of Lashon Harah. Nevertheless, she was struck by Lashon Harah, as it is written: "*Behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow*" (*Bamidbar 12:10*). Why? Because in light of her greatness, her words were considered as if they were Lashon Harah. This means that had she spoken actual Lashon Harah about Moshe, she would have died. This is clear.

From all these things, we see just how careful we must be in regards to the "*dust*" of Lashon Harah, and even more so in regards to actual Lashon Harah. This is especially true in our time, when this sin seems so insignificant to people that everyone feels free to say whatever they please, thinking that it is not Lashon Harah. Even if there is no metzora in our time, we must still pay close attention to not speaking Lashon Harah. Who knows whether all the accidents and illness that kill thousands of people every week are not due to Lashon Harah! In fact King David's soldiers and Rabbi Akiva's

students died for having caused Lashon Harah. As a result, how much more does this apply to actual Lashon Harah!

May it be G-d's will that by the sanctity of Rosh Chodesh and Shabbat Tazria-Metzora, a love for others will renew itself in us – as well as permissible and sanctified words – and may Hashem say "*enough*" to all of our ills. Amen, may it be so!

Those Who Reap with Tears Will Merit G-d's Help

The difference that the Torah has established between Parsha Tazria and Parsha Metzora raises some questions: Parsha Tazria focuses primarily on plagues in all their forms – on garments, on the body, and on houses – and it is only the purification of the leper and his offerings that are included in Parsha Metzora. In fact other than in leap years, Parshiot Tazria and Metzora are usually read together because they deal with the same subject. Nevertheless, each has a separate name, and we need to understand why. We may explain this by saying that the first letters of the terms tazria and metzora form the word met (*dead*). This hints to a person that he should establish time to study Torah and "*kill*" himself solely for the sake of Torah. As the Sages have said on the verse, "*This is the law [Torah]: When a man dies in a tent*" (*Bamidbar 19:14*): "*Words of Torah only endure with one who kills himself for it*" (*Shabbat 83b*). This means that when the time comes for learning Torah, we must tear ourselves away from all our useless pursuits, business endeavors, and personal interests in order to sit down and learn Torah as we have planned.

Thus in the names of Parshiot Tazria and Metzora, the Torah is alluding to the establishment of fixed times for learning Torah. The first subject within Parsha Tazria actually alludes to this concept, for the verse, "*When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male*" (*Vayikra 12:2*) can be figuratively explained to designate someone who learns Torah and merits finding novel explanations in it – which is what he "*conceives*" – for these novel explanations allow both him and those who come after him to add further teachings to the Torah. It is similar to one who plants a small seed in the earth, from where it will grow and become a large tree. Numerous are the novel explanations that have been added beginning from a small commentary by Rashi or the Rambam. Sometimes even something we hear from a child is enough to generate numerous new explanations on Torah concepts.

When we examine this subject more closely, this idea is even more fundamental to the second subject that Parshiot Tazria and Metzora focus on, namely the affliction that comes upon those who speak Lashon Harah. In fact Lashon Harah and futile remarks are the absolute opposite of sowing seeds of Torah, for evil words are diametrically opposed to the fertility of Torah and holiness. Hence Scripture takes the initiative by stating that we must establish times for learning Torah and accustoming our children to sowing seeds in the realm to Torah, which will enable them to distance themselves from Lashon Harah. As such, they will never be struck by leprosy.

With this in mind, we can explain why Parsha Shemini is found next to these two parshiot. In fact the term shemini is formed by the same letters as the root of *neshama* ("soul"). Furthermore, we know that the number *shemoneh* ("eight") represents that which is beyond nature, an allusion to the World to Come. This teaches us that a person who wants to lead his soul into the World to Come must establish times for learning Torah; he must "*kill*" himself for it and sow words of Torah.

We find a useful example of the opposite case in the story of Shelomit bat Divri (*Vayikra 24:10-23*). The Sages have interpreted the name "*Divri*" to mean that she was very talkative (*dabranit*). It is clear she made many people stumble in this way, and as a result, measure for measure, she was rendered impure by an Egyptian. To her son she bequeathed her talkative nature and tendency for uttering useless remarks, instead of raising him in such a way that he sowed words of Torah.

In the end, her son also followed in her footsteps, eventually cursing Hashem and being stoned for it. All this stemmed from a lack of devotion to Torah study, the end result being the sin of Lashon Harah and uttering frivolous words, and sometimes even attacking Hashem, G-d forbid. In this regard we read, "*He shall not profane his word*" (*Bamidbar 30:3*). A talmid chacham must never speak profane or futile words, and as our Sages have said, even the everyday conversations of talmidei chachamim should be studied, for they contain useful lessons.

The Appearance of the Maharsha

In his eulogy for the gaon Rabbi Nissim Rebibo Zatzal, Rav Shlomo Amar Shlita (*the Rishon LeTzion*) spoke about a great gaon by the name of Rabbi Eliezer Di Avila Zatzal, who lived in Morocco. In his youth, Rabbi Eliezer had great difficulty understanding the writings of the Maharsha, something that profoundly upset him, even preventing him from sleeping. Hence he continued trying to understand his writings at night as well. One night, a man suddenly entered the Beit HaMidrash and asked him why he looked so sad. Rabbi Eliezer replied that he had a question about something the Maharsha had written, a question that gave him no rest. The man began to discuss the words of the Maharsha with him, until finally he had fully resolved his question. At that point he disappeared. With this story, the Rishon LeTzion was demonstrating how someone who devotes himself to learning Torah receives Divine assistance.

At the end of the eulogy, an elderly man by the name of Rav Kakoun (a relative of Rabbi Nissim, who had studied with him in his youth) went to speak to the Rishon LeTzion. He told him that Rabbi Nissim had confided in him that when he was a young man studying in the Sunderland Yeshiva, he once had difficulty with a commentary from the Maharsha, something that greatly distressed him. He continued studying this commentary for the rest of the night, until finally a man entered the Beit HaMidrash, which would sometimes happen at night. He began to speak with Rabbi Nissim about various issues, until they came to the difficulty posed by the Marharsha's commentary, at which point the man fully resolved his question. Rabbi Nissim was stunned by his explanation and asked him for his name, at which point he suddenly disappeared! Rabbi

Nissim asked Rav Kakoun not to tell anyone about this. Yet now, after his eulogy, the elderly Rav Kakoun felt that he had to tell someone about it. It contained the same lesson as the story told by the Rishon LeTzion, although it took place 100 years later: A person who makes an effort to learn Torah and "*kills*" himself for it merits special Divine assistance.

Acharei Mot

The Goat for Azazel

This week's parsha states, "*The goat destined by lot for Azazel…send it to Azazel, into the desert*" (*Leviticus 16:10*). It is also written, "*The goat will bear upon itself all the iniquities to a solitary land, and he should send the goat into the desert*" (*v.22*).

The Sages have said (*Seder Olam 6*) that on Yom Kippur the Holy One, blessed be He, joyfully forgave the Children of Israel for the sin of the golden calf, telling Moses: "*I have forgiven according to your word*" (*Numbers 14:20*). Moses then descended from the mountain with the second set of tablets in his hands. Thus it is written, "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins*" (*Leviticus 16:30*). Our Sages have also said that the goat for Azazel (*which was not sacrificed in the Sanctuary, but instead was sent into the desert*) is meant to serve as a gift from Hashem to Esau's ministering angel, which is the evil inclination and the Angel of Death (*see Zohar I:190a; II:237b*). The goat is meant to convince it not to disrupt the sanctity of Yom Kippur by making accusations against the Jewish people. It is similar to the gift that Jacob sent to his brother to satisfy his greed and change his mind.

This explanation presents some difficulties that needs to be addressed: 1) Why must a bribe be given to the ministering angel of Esau, rather than to the angel of another nation? 2) Without this bribe, would the Holy One, blessed be He, have been unable to silence Israel's accusers? 3) Why is this goat, which is a gift for Esau's ministering angel, called the "*goat for Azazel*"? Why does it not go by another name? 4) Finally, why did Moses descend from the mountain on Yom Kippur? Why did he need to stay on the mountain for another forty days and forty nights in order to receive the second set of tablets, as it written: "*I remained on the mountain like the first days, forty days and forty nights*" (*Deuteronomy 10:10*)? Would it not have been enough for him to ascend and then immediately descend with the second set of tablets? Moses already knew the Torah from the first time he ascended Mount Sinai, for the Sages have said that Hashem taught him the written Torah during the day, and during the night He taught him the oral Torah (*see Shemot Rabba 47:5*). Since Moses also reviewed what he learned, why did he have to stay for another forty days and forty nights?

We shall attempt to explain. Let us first site the teaching of the Sages on the verse, "*The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau*" (*Genesis 27:22*). Here the Sages have said, "*When the voice of Jacob rings out in the synagogues, Esau has no hands [i.e., he is rendered powerless]*" (*Bereshith Rabba 65:20*). On the verse, "*When you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck*" (*Genesis 27:40*), the Sages have also said that Isaac gave Esau the following blessing: "*If you see your brother Jacob throwing off the yoke of Torah from upon his neck, then decree his destruction and you will become his master*" (*Bereshith Rabba 67:7*). In Isaac's blessing to Jacob – on

which depends the entire existence of Jacob and Israel for the generations to come – he told him that the entire universe exists only by virtue of the Shechinah's presence and the study of Torah. When the Shechinah is no longer present, the world will cease to exist. Now the presence of the Shechinah only comes by the merit of Torah, for it is what sustains the world. Therefore without the Torah, the world could not exist, as it is written: "*If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth*" (*Jeremiah 33:25*). Here the Sages explain, "*If not for the Torah, heaven and earth would not endure*" (*Pesachim 68b*). In the Zohar as well, we find the Torah described as "*the foundation of the upper and the lower worlds*" (*Zohar I:185a*). Even if the world could go on existing, the hand of Esau would still rule. This is what Isaac told Jacob by allusion: Either the voice of Torah will be heard, or the voice Esau will be heard. Hence Jacob's primary weapon in his battle against Esau is the Torah, which is the goal of Creation. Through it, a person can exert an enormous influence on all the worlds. This allows us to understand why it is precisely the ministering angel of Esau (rather than some other angel) that is "*bribed*" on Yom Kippur. The reason behind all sins lies in a neglect of Torah, and since the voice of Jacob is not heard, this strengthens the voice and hands of Esau to do evil and make accusations on Yom Kippur, the awesome day of judgment. The voice of Esau is the voice of accusation, and Isaac's pronouncements cannot be changed, for there is a judgment and a Judge. Hence Esau's ministering angel is bribed by a goat chosen by the High Priest, upon which he lays his hands. He also evokes Hashem's Name over the goat, which greatly nourishes the Satan. Hence it is ready to remain silent and not bring forth the bundle of sins that it had prepared for accusing the Children of Israel.

Even in our days, when there is no Temple and we no longer send a goat to Azazel, this parsha is still read on Yom Kippur. We are therefore considered to have enticed it through this gift, for prayer replaces offerings. We can now understand why Moses chose to descend with the second set of tablets precisely on Yom Kippur, not some other day, for he wanted to show the Children of Israel that it is only by the power of Torah that they can silence their accusers on Yom Kippur, ensuring that Esau's ministering angel will yield before holiness. Also at that time, Moses told the Children of Israel that the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven, hinting to them that by repentance and Torah, Hashem would silence their accusers.

We know what the Sages have said regarding this subject, namely: "*We have learned that Israel nourishes their Father in Heaven*" (*Zohar III:7b*). Yet with our tiny intellects, it seems difficult to understand how man, who comes from dust and returns to dust (*Genesis 3:19*) can "*nourish*" Hashem, Who is omnipotent and nourishes all that lives. Yet it is G-d's will that the Children of Israel should be connected to Him at each instant through Torah. This is what, as it were, "*nourishes*" Hashem, Who then spreads abundance upon us and disregards the voice of our accusers. That being the case, Hashem gave the Children of Israel the responsibility of being able to "*nourish*" Him and silence their accusers, but only through Torah. This issue is discussed by the

Rebbe of Radomsk in his saintly book Tiferet Shlomo. At the end of his chapter on Parsha Acharei Mot, on the verse, "*You shall keep My statutes and My ordinances, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live; I am the L-RD*" (*Leviticus 18:5*), the Rebbe writes: "*All the mitzvot that the Children of Israel perform are a tikkun for the first man, who contained every soul within himself (Tikkunei Zohar 56,90b). This is the meaning of the expression, 'Which man shall carry out and by which he shall live; I am the L-RD,' as if to say that this constitutes Hashem's strength, as it is written: Israel 'nourishes' their Father in Heaven.*"

This is the significance of the preparations that we make on the eve of Yom Kippur, when we repent and resolve to do only good from now on. This is how we "*nourish*" Hashem, prompting Him to silence our accusers.

Acting Normally

It is written, "*The L-RD spoke to Moses after the death Aaron's two sons, when they came near the L-RD and died*" (*Leviticus 16:1*). The Ohr HaChaim asks why the verse states, "*the L-RD spoke*" without mentioning what He said. He also asks why the verse states "*and died,*" since it already says "*after the death.*"

We may explain this in light of a remark by our Sages on the verse, "*By which he shall live*" (*Leviticus 18:5*), namely: "*He shall live by them [the mitzvot], but he shall not die because of them*" (*Yoma 85b*). The Sages also say, "*The Torah's words are firmly held by one who kills himself for it*" (*Berachot 63b*). How can a person abide by both of these teachings? When one separates himself from the pleasures of this world and only eats what is strictly necessary in order to live, it is considered as if he has killed himself for the Torah. In fact the Zohar states, "*The Torah endures only with one who kills himself for it*" (*Zohar II:158b*). Now death always denotes poverty, for the poor are considered to be like the dead, and the Midrash teaches: "*The Torah is not found with one who seeks pleasure and honor in this world, but with one who kills himself for it, as it is written: 'This is the Torah: A man who dies in a tent' [Numbers 19:14]*" (*Yilamdeinu 76b*).

However Nadav and Avihu did not do this. They truly killed themselves for the Torah and sanctity, to the point of being ready to die in order to draw closer to the holy Shechinah. They did not get married for this very reason (*Vayikra Rabba 20:9*), as well as to be close to the Shechinah at all times. Hence the verse twice mentions that they died, in order to teach us that they killed themselves to draw closer to the Shechinah. The verse states, "*When they came near the L-RD and died,*" but what caused their death? It was the fact that they drew too close to Hashem. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: If you want to draw close to Me, you do not have the right to annul even the smallest part of the Torah, even for a limited time. Do not say that these mitzvot will turn you away from serving Me, or that these mitzvot are empty, for have I given the mitzvot to angels? I gave the Torah and mitzvot only to man, as the Sages have

taught: "*The Torah was not given to the ministering angels*" (*Berachot 25b*). When you observe Torah and mitzvot, and when you sanctify your material deeds, you will draw closer to the Shechinah and surpass the level of angels. However if you try to resemble the angels, then as surely as you live, I will take your souls! Furthermore, since you plan on killing yourselves for sanctity and you are not acting normally, you are responsible for your deaths, for I placed man in the world so he could live, not die. Just as it is forbidden to physically injure the body (*Bava Kama 91b*), how much more is it forbidden to kill the body! However by acting normally, and by studying Torah and practicing mitzvot, you can draw closer to the Shechinah. Yet I have not approved of the way you are acting.

This is why the verse states, "*The L-RD spoke to Moses after the death.*" It teaches us that this is precisely what Hashem said here, neither more nor less. What did He say? He said that the Children of Israel should not live austere lives like Nadav and Avihu, who cut themselves off from a normal life and believed that they were angels. It is only by observing the Torah and mitzvot that a person attains holiness, and yet they cut themselves off from the life of this world. We find something similar in the book Arvei Nachal (*Parsha Va'etchanan*), which states that the philosophers who came before the giving of the Torah believed that they could improve their future and ensure the survival of the soul by fleeing into the desert, by nourishing themselves with herbs and doing similar things. They believed that it was impossible to improve otherwise, and they perished in their foolishness. The Torah teaches us that the path which is pleasing to Hashem is to fulfill concrete mitzvot that pertain to this world, as our Sages have said: "*Combine the study of [Torah] with a worldly occupation*" (*Berachot 35b*). A person may ask, "*Why did Holy One, blessed be He, not say this before Nadav and Avihu entered the Holy of Holies, where they died?*" The answer is that they had already feasted their eyes upon the Shechinah at the giving of the Torah, and they were therefore liable for death. As our Sages have taught, "*Nadav and Avihu uncovered their heads and allowed their eyes to feast on the Shechinah, as it says: 'He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the Children of Israel. They saw G-d, and they ate and drank' [Exodus 24:11]*" (*Shemot Rabba 45:5*). G-d did not want to disrupt the joy of the Children of Israel, which is why He waited until the eighth day of the inauguration, as the Midrash states: "*For this the elders, as well as Nadav and Avihu, deserved to be instantly burned. Yet since the day of the giving of the Torah was precious to G-d, He did not wish to harm them on that day…. Yet at a later date, He collected the debt from them*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 15:24*). Why had they feasted their eyes upon the Shechinah? It is because they thought they could approach the Shechinah all at once, and therefore they were punished.

We can now understand a statement found in the Midrash on this parsha: "*After the death Aaron's two sons. Rabbi Shimon opened his discourse with the text, 'All things come alike to all. The same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked' [Ecclesiastes 9:2]*" (*Vayikra Rabba 20:1*). What does this have to do with Nadav and Avihu? We may

explain according to what we have said: The evildoer who rejects the yoke of the Torah is liable to death, and the tzaddik who truly kills himself in order to draw closer to the Shechinah, following the ways of Nadav and Avihu, is also liable to death. We must all choose the middle path, sanctifying ourselves in what is permitted.

The Duty to Mourn the Passing of a Tzaddik

At the beginning of this week's parsha it is written, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons…. 'Speak to Aaron your brother, that he shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary…. With this shall Aaron come into the Sanctuary: With a young bull for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering…. From the assembly of the Children of Israel he shall take two he-goats for a sin-offering and one ram for a burnt-offering'*" (*Vayikra 16:1-5*).

We need to understand this passage. Why does the Torah mention the death of Aaron's sons, given that this was already explicitly detailed in Parsha Shemini? As it is stated there, "*They brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them…and they died*" (*ibid. 10:1-2*). It was then that the Torah should have immediately commanded, "*He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary.*"

In addition to the he-goat for Hashem, why did the Children of Israel need to bring another he-goat for Azazel, one meant to procure atonement for them? Would their repentance alone not have been sufficient to procure atonement for their sins? Was a second he-goat really necessary?

Even if the second he-goat is said to appease the Satan's anger and prevent the Jewish people from being accused on Yom Kippur, we know that the Satan is not allowed to accuse on this day (*Zohar III:255a*). Thus again, one he-goat should have been enough. Furthermore, why did two he-goats have to be brought instead of, say, two sheep?

The death of Aaron's two sons is again mentioned here in order to demonstrate just how important the death of the tzaddikim is in the eyes in the Holy One, blessed be He. The Sages have said, "*The death of a tzaddik is put on a level with the burning of the House of our G-d*" (*Rosh Hashanah 18b*), which is why it is always recalled before the Holy One, blessed be He. This is especially true when they die as an offering and atonement for the Jewish people, for the latter must learn a lesson from them for all time. Actually, Nadav and Avihu were not trying to rebel against Hashem by bringing this alien fire, for the Torah itself states: "*Your brothers, the entire House of Israel, shall weep for the burning that Hashem has kindled*" (*Vayikra 10:6*). Their intentions were certainly holy, and when they brought an alien fire before Hashem, it was with the goal of sanctifying His Name.

This is why the Torah again states, "*After the death of Aaron's two sons,*" for it teaches us that Nadav and Avihu brought an offering in order to come closer to their Father in Heaven, as well as to draw the Children of Israel closer to Him. This idea is

what motivated them to present an alien fire before Hashem. This alludes to the fact that when the Children of Israel would sin before Hashem (thus preventing the Shechinah from dwelling among them), they would be redeemed by the death of the tzaddikim. Hashem would then forgive them and make the Shechinah dwell among them. This is why we also read the account of the death of Aaron's sons on Yom Kippur. It teaches us that not only is the death of the tzaddikim an atonement, but that recalling their death serves as an atonement for all the generations. In fact we cannot rely solely on repentance, for who can guarantee that our repentance is truly from the bottom of our hearts? Thus in addition to the holiness of this day, we must ensure that people hear about the death of the tzaddikim and weep for them, for in this way they will be forgiven. Whoever laments the death of the tzaddikim, the Holy One, blessed be He, proclaims: "*Your iniquity has gone away and your sin shall be atoned for*" (*Isaiah 6:7*).

According to this, we can also understand why the Children of Israel had to bring a he-goat (as opposed to another animal) for their atonement. In fact the he-goat for Hashem was meant to appease Him. It was meant for Hashem to recall the death of the tzaddikim, and thus by their merit to forgive the evildoers among the Jewish people for their sins. It was also meant for Him to forgive those who are not considered tzaddikim. In fact we know that "*there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he always does good and never sins*" (*Kohelet 7:20*). Who knows whether a person is considered to be evil in the eyes of Hashem, though he may be considered, both by himself and others, as a tzaddik?

This is due to the fact that, as the Sages tell us, "*The Holy One, blessed be He, deals strictly with those who are close to Him kechut hasa'ara [like a thread of a hair]*" (*Yebamot 121b*). Hence a *sa'ir* (he-goat) comes to atone for sins that are considered as such by a judgment that is kechut hasa'ara. We now understand why he-goats were needed, not sheep or other kinds of animals.

If we ask why Hashem in His wisdom agreed that the death of the tzaddikim should atone for the Children of Israel, we must say that eventually a tzaddik leaves this world at the appointed time, as it is written: "*The end of man is to die*" (*Berachot 17a*). Thus for the death of a tzaddik to not have been in vain, Divine wisdom decreed that it should atone for the Children of Israel. Now when Jews repent through love, their involuntary sins become merits. Since it is the death of the tzaddik that brings about their repentance, the tzaddik becomes connected with the merit that accrues to the Jewish people. Not only that, but merit is added to the tzaddik for all the generations. In fact each year we recall the death of the tzaddikim and the atonement it brings about, and thus their reward is doubled. Consequently, the Holy One, blessed be He, in no way diminishes their reward.

The Sages refer to this by saying, "*The righteous are greater after death than in life*" (*Chullin 7b*). This means that by their death, the tzaddikim merit the atonement of the entire Jewish people. The result is that everyone repents and their deliberate sins are turned into merits. The tzaddikim therefore have a part in this reward, and they

continue to elevate themselves in the World to Come. This is the opposite of what happens with angels, which Scripture describes as "*standing,*" as it is written: "*I will grant you free access among these who stand here*" (*Zechariah 3:7*). From this we learn that when a tzaddik leaves this world, everyone should weep for him, for the Holy One, blessed be He, considers his death as tantamount to the burning of the Temple. If we weep over the destruction of the Temple each year on Tisha B'Av, we should also weep over the death of the tzaddikim. It is only when we conduct ourselves in this way that the tzaddikim will be able to intercede for us in the world above.

A Warning Against Pride

It is written, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they approached before Hashem and they died*" (*Vayikra 16:1*). Our Sages have given us a parable to explain this: It is like a sick man who is visited by a doctor. The doctor says to him, "*Do not eat cold foods or lie down in a cold, damp place.*" Another doctor then visits him, and he advises: "*Do not eat cold foods or lie down in a cold, damp place, so that you will not die like so-and-so died.*" The latter warned the sick man better than the former (*Torat Kohanim, Acharei Mot 1*). Hence after the death of Aaron's two sons, we read: "*Hashem said to Moshe: Speak to Aaron your brother – he shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary…so that he should not die*" (*Vayikra 16:2*).

This Midrash is difficult to understand. Did Aaron need a special warning, such that Moshe had to threaten him by saying: "*Be careful not to enter the Sanctuary in a prohibited way, so as not to die as your sons died*"? Was it not possible to warn him in a general way, such as by telling him not to enter the Sanctuary at all times, nothing more? Prior to this, when G-d warned him about drunkenness (just after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu), He did not warn him in the same way, for it is written: "*Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Tent of Meeting, so that you do not die – this is an eternal decree for your generations*" (*Vayikra 10:9*). He did not say, "*So that you do not die as your sons died.*" Consequently, why was a more stern warning required here?

My Holiness Dwells Here

It seems that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want Aaron to enter the Holy of Holies often, lest he become used to seeing the Shechinah at all times, for then he would grow proud. In that case, he would be unable to pray for Israel and unworthy of speaking with the Shechinah, for it is written: "*One with haughty eyes and a proud heart, him I cannot bear*" (*Tehillim 101:5*).

Although in regards to Moshe we read, "*Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face, as a man would speak with his fellow*" (*Shemot 33:11*), as well as, "*Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face*" (*Devarim 34:10*), there was still no trace of pride in him. How is this possible? It is because Moshe possessed tremendous humility. When had he succeeded in removing

pride from his heart? It was when G-d revealed Himself to him in the burning bush and said, "*Remove your shoes from your feet*" (*Shemot 3:5*). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "*Since Moshe is constantly being called upon to speak with Me, he may grow accustomed to My glory and eventually demonstrate a lack of respect for Me.*" This is because one who speaks with his teacher once or twice cannot be compared to one who speaks with him nine or ten times, since the latter grows accustomed to him. Hence He warned Moshe: "*Remove your shoes from your feet*" – be careful not to conduct yourself with Me like someone who grows accustomed to speaking with his teacher. Rather, each time that you speak with Me, it should like the first time that I am speaking to you. Why? "*For the place upon which you are standing is holy ground*" – for My holiness dwells here. What did He tell him? "*Remove your shoes from your feet*" – these were not shoes (*ne'aleicha*), but something tightly sealed (*neila*), like a treasure that is hidden from everyone. This is how My word should be to you: Just as no one enters the royal treasury or see what it contains, likewise you must be like someone who looks at a sealed treasure from the outside, not knowing what it contains, and yearning to enter inside. Once a person has entered and seen what it contains, he no longer wishes to leave. This is how My word should be to you, as if it were sealed from the outside. Each time that I come to speak with you, it should seem as if you had never heard My voice before.

When G-d spoke to him in this way, Moshe immediately yielded and conducted himself with humility. Moshe said, "*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and take the Children of Israel out of Egypt?*" (*Shemot 3:11*). At the same time, pride left his heart, for G-d told him: "*Remove your shoes from your feet*" – and the foot represents pride, as it is written: "*Let not the foot of pride come to me*" (*Tehillim 36:12*). Pride left Moshe, never to return again, and he merited to speak with the Shechinah face to face.

However Aaron and Miriam were not aware of Moshe's level, nor did they realize that pride had left his heart, which is why they disparaged him for having separated from his wife. Aaron was surprised by this and said, "*My brother Moshe constantly speaks with the Shechinah. It is therefore impossible for him not to grow proud, since man is forbidden to become accustomed to the Shechinah lest he grow proud.*" This is why G-d told Aaron, "*It is not as you think, that your brother Moshe has grown proud. Moshe has never grown proud, and I speak only with him because he is the humblest of all men upon the earth.*"

Transmitted by an Intermediary

After all that we have said, we can fully understand why this passage was not transmitted directly to Aaron, as was the passage concerning drunkenness. Here G-d commanded Aaron and his sons to enter the Holy of Holies only once a year, whereas Moshe was near the Shechinah at every possible time. Here Aaron was told that he was not at the level of his brother Moshe, which is why this passage was transmitted to him by an intermediary. This was meant to teach Aaron that he could not speak to

the Shechinah at any time, and that only Moshe was worthy of this, for he had not grown proud.

If the passage on drunkenness had been transmitted to Aaron directly, he would not have perceived any difference between himself and Moshe. Since G-d had spoken with Aaron, then ceased to speak with him, it was because he was not worthy of hearing the words of G-d at any given time, as was his brother Moshe because of his tremendous humility.

Kedoshim

Sanctify Yourself in What is Permitted

It is written, "*You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy*" (*Vayikra 19:2*).

In Sefer Vayikra we find the commandment, "*You shall be holy,*" which means "*You shall be separate.*" Likewise in Parsha Shemini we read, "*You are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for I am holy*" (*Vayikra 11:44*). The Midrash explains, "*As I am separate, so shall you be separate. As I am holy, so shall you be holy*" (*Vayikra Rabba 24:4*).

We need to understand what the Midrash means by this. What human being can claim to have reached the supreme degree of holiness of the King of kings, Who is surrounded by angels that fear and tremble before Him? The evil inclination resides in the heart of man, trying to make him stumble with each step and doing everything it can to lead him onto the wrong path. Can we possibly think, despite all the difficulties that hinder our service of G-d, that we can lift ourselves to such high levels of sanctity? That being the case, how can our holiness resemble that of the Creator, and what comparison can be made with Him?

On the verse, "*Every tongue shall swear*" (*Isaiah 45:23*), our Sages explain that this refers to the day of birth, when a person is made to swear an oath: "*Be righteous and never be wicked; and even if the whole world tells you, 'You are righteous,' consider yourself wicked. Always bear in mind that the Holy One, blessed be He, is pure, that His ministers are pure, and that the soul He gave you is pure. If you preserve it in purity, well and good; if not, I will take it away from you*" (*Niddah 30b*). This oath, however, seems to be based on an erroneous assumption, for can a person know what awaits him in this world? Does he know just to what degree he must persevere against the evil inclination? When taking this oath, a person's soul is in the supernal worlds, where evil is absent. He is not subjugated to the evil inclination and obviously thinks that being righteous (not wicked) is the clear choice. He is thus clearly prepared to take an oath to this. Yet when a person comes into this world and is confronted by difficult trials, he seems to step back and regrets the oath that he made, for he did not initially realize that he would have to fight the evil inclination.

With G-d's help, I would like to explain that before a person's arrival into this world, and even before he takes an oath, everyone is shown all the difficulties and trials that he must face. Before a person takes an oath, he is warned that difficult battles await him. Hence he clearly understands what he is swearing to and what awaits him, and therefore it is not a false oath.

The Gemara tells us, "*A light shines above the head [of the fetus], and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other*" (*Niddah 30b*). It is shown the whole world, along with all the trials it must face, so that it can understand where it is going. It is told

that in order to win the battles that await it, it must ensure that this light remains constantly shining above its head, meaning the light of the Torah. It is then assured of winning the war against the evil inclination. Thus even before taking this oath, a person is aware of what he must endure in this world, meaning that his oath is valid.

A person is made to take an oath precisely while his soul is still in the supernal worlds, where it is surrounded by holiness and purity, a place of sanctity and without blemish. This happens so that the soul can infuse itself with holiness, and so that – at the very instant, immersed by the tremendous forces of holiness found in the supernal worlds – this can serve as the impetus for a life of perfection, a life in which a person must confront the trials found along his path. Before descending into this world, G-d gives a person all the strength he needs to fight the evil inclination, providing him with the reserves of holiness and purity that he requires. Thus a person arrives in this world equipped with spiritual sustenance that serves as a weapon against the evil inclination. He also has the strength to keep his oath, for G-d does not send trials to people if they cannot overcome them.

This connects with the explanation of our Sages on the verse, "*Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out*" (*Devarim 28:6*). Here the Sages explained, "*That your departure from the world shall be as your entry into it: Just as you entered it without sin, so may you leave it without [sin]*" (*Bava Metzia 107a*). This is what is required of us: Since we came into this world infused with supreme holiness and possessing great strength, we must be careful not to lose these, for we must leave this world with exactly the same degree of holiness that surrounded us upon our arrival.

That is why G-d commands us, "*Be holy.*" This does not mean reaching G-d's level, which is clearly impossible. We must be as holy as we were before descending into this world, to the time when we absorbed the purity that emanated from the Celestial Throne. If we draw this holiness to ourselves, G-d will provide us with additional holiness, as it is written: "*I am Hashem, Who sanctifies you*" (*Vayikra 20:8*). We understand what holiness this consists of, for we were infused with it even before being born. Such holiness is rooted deep within us, and G-d reminds us of the oath that we took to be righteous and not wicked. We must therefore carefully guard this holiness so as not to lose it, and we must use this power to eradicate the evil inclination and merit eternal life.

This is what G-d is telling us by the phrase "*Be holy.*" The Zohar adds that all the mitzvot given by G-d constitute sage advice and implements that allow us to attain this level of holiness. That being the case, we have the ability to maintain this exceptional level of holiness. Indeed, the keys to achieving it are completely in our hands, for we have everything we need to succeed.

Permanent Holiness

It is written, "*Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for holy am I'*" (*Vayikra 19:2*). Here the Sages immediately note: "*It is written, 'You shall be holy.' Does this mean that you can be like Me [G-d]? Hence we read, 'for holy am I, Hashem your G-d' – My holiness is greater than yours*" (*Vayikra Rabba 24:9*). This is surprising, for can anyone possibly think that the holiness of Israel would equal G-d's? Furthermore, this parsha, according to Torat Kohanim, was said before the entire community. Why was it said before everyone? It is because most of the Torah's major principles depend on it. We find several other parshiot that contain many laws, and yet they were not said before the entire community. Therefore what is the difference between this week's parsha and all the others, such that it was said before the entire community?

I would like to explain this week's parsha with Mussar. Let us begin by noting what we find in the statements of the Sages in various places, namely that the holiness of Israel is greater that of the angels. The Sages say, "*The Children of Israel are dearer to the Holy One, blessed be He, than the ministering angels, for Israel sings praises to Hashem every hour, whereas the ministering angels sing praises but once a day. Others say once a week, while others say once a month. Others say once a year, while others say once in seven years. Others say once in fifty years, while others say once in eternity. And whereas Israel mentions G-d's Name after two words, as it is said: 'Hear, O Israel, Hashem' [Devarim 6:4], the ministering angels only mention G-d's Name after three words, as it is written: 'Holy, holy, holy, is Hashem of hosts' [Isaiah 6:3]. Moreover, the ministering angels do not start singing praises in Heaven until the Children of Israel have sung on earth*" (*Chullin 91b*). The Sages have also said, "*Each day ministering angels are created from the fiery stream, sing praises, and cease to be*" (*Chagigah 14a*). From here we learn of Israel's holiness: When the ministering angels sing Hashem's praises, they immediately disappear. As for the Children of Israel, they pray to their Father in Heaven three times a day, but do not disappear. Furthermore, they sanctify themselves through prayer and cleave to Him, and thus everything they need is given to them through prayer.

May My Body Be Healthy to Serve Him

A man only attains holiness by killing himself in the tent of the Torah, as the Sages have said: "*One should never abstain from the Beit HaMidrash or from Torah, even in the hour of death, for it is said: 'This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent' [Bamidbar 19:14]. Even in the hour of death, one should be engaged in [learning] Torah. Resh Lakish said: Words of Torah only endure with one who kills himself for it, as it is said: 'This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent'*" (*Shabbat 83b*). In regards to Rabbeinu HaKodesh, it is said that at the time of his death, he lifted up his ten fingers and said, "*Sovereign of the universe, it is revealed and known before You that I have labored in the study of Torah with my ten fingers, and that I did not enjoy [worldly] benefits even with my little finger. May it be Your will that there be peace in my resting*

place" (*Ketubot 104a*). He conducted himself with tremendous holiness, and throughout his life he never placed his hands below his belt. Since he distanced himself from the pleasures of this world, he attained holiness.

How can a person reach the point of killing himself in Torah study, since in the end he was created in this world with a physical body, and therefore he must eat, drink, and sleep in order to live? When he sanctifies himself in what is permitted, and only eats, drinks, and sleeps to regain his strength in order to serve Hashem – not for the pleasures of his body – Scripture regards it as if he has killed himself for Torah, since he cannot do more than this. Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk recommends, "*Before washing the hands to eat, we should say Rabbeinu Yona's prayer for one who repents, and after eating the motzi we should say: "I do not eat for the pleasure of my body, but only so my body can be strong and in good health to serve Him. May no sin, evil thought, or physical pleasure come and delay the 'yichud' by the holy sparks of this food and drink.*"

A Life of Holiness from Childhood

When a person sanctifies himself in what is permitted, only stretching out his hand for what his body needs to live, and when he distances himself from the pleasures of this world, Scripture considers him to have not profited from this world. It considers him to have killed himself for Torah and mitzvot, and he thereby attains a level greater than that of the angels. Because this person has sanctified himself to such a degree, he may succumb to pride and think: "*I have sanctified myself more than enough, and I don't need to sanctify myself any further, since in any case the evil inclination does not control me.*" In that case, the Torah tells him: "*Know that My holiness is greater than yours, and even if you killed yourself for Torah today, you have no right to rest. You must work each day until your final day, since the evil inclination can enter you and bring you down from the level you now occupy.*" The Sages have said, "*Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:4*). This means that until a person's dying day, he must conduct himself with great sanctity, never wavering in his service of Hashem. Otherwise the evil inclination may return and make him sin.

This passage was said before the entire community of Israel, and everyone heard it – men, women, and children – in order to teach children that they must not run after the pleasures of this world as children do, and their parents must accustom them to living in holiness and purity from childhood. As we read concerning Yehoshua ben Chanania, his mother brought him as a baby to the Beit HaMidrash in order for words of Torah to enter his ears. Of his mother the Sages said: "*Happy is she who gave birth to him.*" It is the duty of every Jew to educate his sons in Torah and mitzvot, as King Solomon said: "*Train a child according to his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it*" (*Mishlei 22:6*).

Emor

The Greatness of Loving Your Fellowman

It is written, "*Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them…*" (*Leviticus 21:1*). The Sages have stated, " *'Say to the priests' – this is what Scripture says: 'The words of the L-RD are pure words' [Psalms 12:7]. Each time that the Holy One, blessed be He, warns the Children of Israel concerning their holiness and purity, these are Hashem's words, pure words*" (*Tanhuma, Emor 1*).

Consequently, the Torah's intention here is to warn a person to guard his tongue so as to speak a pure language. To understand just how important this is, let us examine an incident that occurred to Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal. One day, during the time of the year when selichot are recited, Rabbi Israel went to synagogue to pray Shacharit. On the way he encountered a man with a noble, radiant look on his face. He had just spent the entire night in synagogue reciting selichot and tikkunim, and the fear of the day of judgment was upon him. Rabbi Israel approached him and said hello, but the man was so engrossed in his thoughts and concerns over "*who will die and who will live*" that it was as if he didn't see him. In fact he didn't even respond to Rabbi Israel's greeting, but instead continued on his way.

Rabbi Salanter walked up to the man and said, "*Sir, you should realize that what is of primary importance to Hashem is not mitzvot between man and G-d, but mitzvot between man and man. Yom Kippur does not procure atonement for sins that one commits against other people [Yoma 85b]. Therefore why didn't you respond when I said hello? What do you have to lose with a friendly hello in return? How is it going to ruin your concentration on the day of judgment? It's precisely the opposite, for I could have removed every harsh decree from you if you had simply responded with a friendly hello.*" These words are quite shocking. In fact people often put a supreme effort into fulfilling mitzvot, yet when things come to a head – when their spirituality is put to the test – that is when they fail. Many people pray with great concentration, yet when they leave the synagogue they don't care at all about others. From the above story, we learn that people must not act like this. We must also fulfill our duties toward other people, which include responding to them with a friendly greeting.

This concept allows us to understand the connection between Parshiot Kedoshim, Emor, and Behar. On the verse, "*You shall be holy*" (*Leviticus 19:2*), Rashi explains: "*Separate yourselves from sexual immorality and from sin.*" Now we know that if a person wants to purify himself from sexual immorality, he must watch what he says, for the covenant of the tongue is connected to the covenant of circumcision (*see the holy book Beit Israel from the Rebbe of Ger, who deals with this subject in detail*). We find this concept at work in the sin of the golden calf, as it is written: "*They got up l'tzachek [to play]*" (*Exodus 32:6*). Here the Sages explain that the term tzachek implies sexual immorality and bloodshed

(*see Tanhuma, Tisa 20 and Rashi*). This means that when we laugh aloud, we also fall into debauchery. This is why, immediately afterwards in Parsha Emor, the Torah warns us about speech (*"Say…and you shall say"*), as mentioned in the Midrash we cited above (*Tanhuma, Emor 1*). Hence a person must guard his tongue, which includes his attitude toward others by greeting them properly, with a proper mouth and pure words. In that case he can completely sanctify and purify himself.

How can a person be certain that what he says will always be pure? It is by keeping in mind that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. This means that he must recall that Mount Sinai humbled itself, which is precisely why the Torah was given upon it (*Sotah 5a; Yalkut Shimoni, Yitro*). A person should also learn from Mount Sinai to humble himself before Hashem as well as other people, in which case the Torah will endure with him (*Taanith 7a*). Moses learned to humble himself from Mount Sinai, and of him it is written: "*The man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth*" (*Numbers 12:3*). A person can then rest assured that his words will be pure, for a humble person never becomes angry, and therefore nothing shameful will leave his mouth. No pride is found in him, for that would go completely against the characteristic of humility.

We can say with confidence that the verse in question, with its repeated use of the term emor (*"emor [say]…v'amarta [and you shall say]"*) deals with the relationship between man and his fellowman. If we speak to someone, yet he ignores what we say, we should repeat it. How? With pure words, with humility, for words that come from the heart enter the heart. The Sages assure us that the words of every G-d-fearing person will not be ignored (*Berachot 6b*). Furthermore, they have explained that the repetition of the term emor is a warning to the old concerning the young (*Yebamot 114a*). If a person is great in Torah, he must not think that he can demonstrate pride around his disciples. Instead, emor v'amarta, he must act humbly with them and speak to them gently (this is the meaning of *emor*, as the Sages have taught). On the verse, "*Thus tomar [you shall say] to the house of Jacob*" (*Exodus 19:3*), the verb le'emor indicates gentle words, pronounced without raising one's voice (*Zohar I:16a*), with gentleness and humility. The Sages tell us (*Tanhuma, Tzav 13*) that the root amar always indicates supplication, as it is written: "*Vayomer [And he said], 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act wickedly'*" (*Genesis 19:7*). Hence this is the connection between Parshiot Kedoshim, Emor, and Behar, humility and love for others being what binds them all.

We find a very instructive story in the Gemara concerning Rabbi Pereda, who would teach a lesson 400 times to one of his students. If, for whatever reason, that student still didn't understand a lesson, Rabbi Pereda would teach it to him another 400 times! For this he was rewarded with 400 extra years of life, and both he and his generation merited a share in the World to Come (*Eruvin 54b*). From here we learn a great principle, namely that a person who gets angry cannot be humble. We see this with Moses, who was the most humble of all men, and yet the Sages said that he became angry on three occasions. When that happened, the Halachah immediately escaped him, for his anger was disruptive.

The strife that we regrettably see today demonstrates that we are in the time immediately preceding the arrival of Mashiach (*see Sotah 49b*). The Satan knows perfectly well that if people were in grow in love for one another, Mashiach would arrive at any minute, for the sin of baseless hatred will have been rectified (*Yoma 9b*). It therefore uses its last weapon to divide people, which is why division is so rampant today, more than ever before. We must realize that now is precisely the time when we must be extremely watchful to love our fellowman and avoid speaking Lashon Harah, especially now, in the generation preceding the arrival of Mashiach. We must view ourselves with humility and put our good middot into action. Doing so will truly hasten the arrival of Mashiach, enabling us to see the glory of his kingdom, speedily and in our days.

The Wise Must be Careful with Their Words

It is written, "*Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself for the dead among his people*" (*Leviticus 21:1*). Rashi states that the term "*say*" is repeated in order to warn the adults about the children. The Ramban writes, "*The meaning of this warning is to state that we are not to assist with our hands in the defilement of children. There are many warnings in the Torah of this nature…such as the prohibition against eating blood and swarming things…and from them we learn that…we must not assist children to ever transgress the law.*"

We need to understand this. If throughout the Torah the rule is that adults cannot push children to commit a sin, then why does the Torah only reveal this to us concerning the impurity of the dead? We may explain this from a moral perspective, by citing a passage from the Mishnah: "*Ben Zoma said, 'Who is wise? He who learns from every person, as it is written: "From all my teachers I grew wise*" [Psalms 119:99]. … Who is strong? He who subdues his inclination, as it is said: "*He who is slow to anger is better than a strong man, and he who masters his passions is better than a conqueror of a city*" [Proverbs 16:32]. Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot, as it is said: "*When you eat of the labor of your hands, happy are you and it shall be well with you*" [Psalms 128:2]. "*Happy are you*" – in this world; "*and it shall be well with you*" – in the World to Come. Who is honored? He who honors others, as it is stated: "*I honor those who honor Me, and those who scorn Me will be accursed*" [I Samuel 2:30]' " (*Pirkei Avoth 4:1*).

We also find the following remark in the Midrash: "*Even so, 'In Gibeon the L-RD appeared to Solomon in a dream of the night, and G-d said: "Request what I should give to you*" ' [I Kings 3:5]. Solomon thought: If I ask for silver and gold and precious stones and pearls, He will give them to me. But what I will do is to ask for wisdom, and that will include everything' " (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:9*).

As a result, a person with wisdom possesses everything. The Gemara states, "*He who has [wisdom] has everything. He who lacks this, what does he have?*" (*Nedarim 41a*). Now wisdom is nothing other than the fear of G-d, as it is written: "*The fear of the*

L-RD is the beginning of wisdom" (*Proverbs 1:7*) and "*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the L-RD*" (*Psalms 111:10*). It follows that not only does a wise person possess wisdom, but that all other virtues are found in him. Wisdom contains power, wealth, and the fear of Heaven, for a wise person is happy with his lot, subdues his inclination, learns from all men, never grows proud, and does not say, "*What do I have to learn from this student? I've studied much more than him!*" Instead he controls himself and learns from him. Yet he rejoices in his lot only with things that belong to him personally. In terms of spiritual matters, he is never satisfied with his lot, and during his entire life he tries to study and learn from every person.

Similar to this idea, the Mishnah recounts that Rabbi Yehoshua had calculated that Yom Kippur would take place on a certain day, but Rabban Gamliel pushed it to the following day. Rabban Gamliel sent him a message in which he said, "*I order you to appear before me with your staff and money on the day that, according to your calculations, should be Yom Kippur*" (*Rosh Hashanah 25a*). Rabbi Yehoshua therefore took his staff and his money and went to see Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh on the day that he calculated to be Yom Kippur. When Rabban Gamliel saw him, he arose from his chair, kissed him on the head, and said: "*Come in peace, my teacher and my disciple. My teacher in wisdom and my disciple because you have accepted my decision.*" The Gemara adds, "*Happy is the generation in which the greater defer to the lesser, and all the more so the lesser to the greater*" (*Rosh Hashanah 25b*).

Hence in the passage concerning the impurity of the dead, we read: "*Say…and say*" – warn the adults regarding the children. In fact one who exhibits pride resembles the dead, those who have left this world, since it is said: "*Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: I and he cannot both dwell in the world*" (*Sotah 5a*). Since there is no place for him in this world, it is fitting for him to leave the world and die. However the Holy One, blessed be He, is patient with him and gives him time to repent.

The Torah clearly teaches us that the young learn just how vile pride is from the High Priest. The High Priest alludes to the great figures of the generation, and the Torah warns them against pride. It prohibits them from rendering themselves impure through the dead, meaning that they do not have the right to grow proud. When the young see that the adults are careful regarding pride, they will conclude: If the adults, who have something to be proud of, are prohibited by the Torah from exhibiting pride, then how much more are we prohibited from exhibiting pride, since we have nothing to be proud of!

Abraham himself fulfilled the verse, "*From all my teachers I grew wise,*" for the Midrash states that the Holy One, blessed be He, made his two kidneys his two teachers, instructing him Torah and wisdom (*Bereshith Rabba 61:1*). Furthermore, he went to study Torah with Shem the son of Noah (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 7*). Now this is difficult to understand, for if the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Abraham two kidneys from which to learn Torah, why did he have to go and learn with Shem? The answer is that

Abraham was afraid of growing proud. He was afraid of thinking, "*All that I have learned, I did not learn from a teacher or from my father, but from myself!*" He went to study with a teacher so he would have no reason to grow proud. After all, can a student stand before his teacher and say, "*All that I learned, I learned by myself, not from you*"? Therefore Abraham thought: "*Up to now, everything I learned, I could say that I learned it from myself. From now on, since I will be studying Torah from a teacher, I will understand nothing on my own, and everything that I learn, I will only learn from my teacher.*"

Likewise King David said, "*From all my teachers I grew wise,*" and our Sages state that in everything King David did, he consulted his teacher Mephiboshet by asking: "*My teacher Mephiboshet, is my decision right? Did I correctly convict, correctly acquit, correctly declare clean, correctly declare unclean,*" and Mephiboshet humiliated David in the Halachah (*Berachot 4a*). It is also said that David went from group to group in order to fulfill the verse, "*From all my teachers I grew wise*" (*Midrash Tehillim 1*). On the other hand, we also learn the opposite from the priest. What does this mean? It means that a priest is forbidden to render himself impure for the dead and exhibit pride with regards to his own possessions. However in regards to spirituality, he is permitted to render himself impure, and in fact he is obligated to render himself impure and exhibit pride, as it is written: "*His heart was lifted up in the ways of the L-RD*" (*II Chronicles 17:6*). Before dying, Rabbeinu HaKadosh said to his son Rabban Gamliel, "*Conduct your rule with men of high standing, and cast bile among the students*" (*Ketubot 103b*). Likewise, the Torah has permitted the High Priest to render himself impure for a dead body that nobody has buried, meaning for a mitzvah. He is also permitted to render himself impure for his wife, as it is written: "*Except for the relative who is closest to him*" – and a wife designates the Torah (*Midrash Mishlei 31:10*). This teaches us that it is a duty for the great figures of the generation to exhibit pride and demand that people honor the Torah in them, an honor that they cannot forego, as the Gemara states (*Kiddushin 32a*).

Why Were Rabbi Akiva's Disciples Punished?

It is written, "*Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: For a dead person, none shall defile himself among his people*" (*Vayikra 21:1*). Here our Sages note an apparent redundancy in the expression "*Say…and you shall say*" (*see Yevamot 114a*). We also see that the verse first speaks in the plural (*"say to them"*), but ends in the singular (*"among his people"*). Why the change?

We may explain this according to a statement in the Mishnah: "*If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:8*). From here we see that a person must teach his students without ever thinking, "*If I teach others, when will I study myself?*" The Sages note that man was born to toil, le'amal (*Job 5:7*). Now the term le'amal evokes the expression *lilmod al manat lelamed* ("study in order to teach"), because no effort or devotion can be greater, namely to give one's time to others. Hence a person who teaches others without thinking about himself is rewarded by the

Holy One, blessed be He, measure for measure, retaining his Torah as if he had been studying it when teaching others. Thus the Sages have said, "*He toils in one place, the Torah toils for him in another*" (*Sanhedrin 99b*).

This is why the verse in question states, "*Say…and you shall say.*" The Torah is alluding to the fact that we must say to ourselves in order to say to others. We must not think, "*I'll study alone,*" for the Torah of one who acts in this way will eventually render him impure, as it is written: "*May a sword fall upon the neck of [the foes of] talmidei chachamim who sit and engage in the study of the Torah, solitary and apart. Not only that, but they also become fools. … [T]hey also become sinners*" (*Makkot 10a*).

This is why Parshiot Emor and Behar are juxtaposed to Parsha Bechukotai: "*Say*" – say to yourself; "*and you shall say*" – to others; "*Behar Sinai*" (on Mount Sinai) – an allusion to humility, for Sinai made itself small before Hashem, and when a man forgoes his Torah in order to teach others, it is a sign that he is not proud. These parshiot are juxtaposed to Parsha Bechukotai, which contains the subject of Torah study – as our Sages have said, 'If you walk in My laws' [Vayikra 26:3] teaches us that G-d is proud that Jews study Torah" (*Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 1*) – in order to tell us that the greatest form of devotion is when a person makes himself small like Mount Sinai so as to teach the Torah to others.

Do Not Claim Special Credit For Yourself

According to this, we may explain the teaching of our Sages when they said: "*Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of disciples from Gabbatha to Antipatris, and all of them died at the same time because they did not treat one another with respect*" (*Yevamot 62b*). This is difficult to understand, for Rabbi Akiva said that "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Vayikra 19:18*) is a great principle of the Torah (*Torat Kohanim 4:12*). Therefore how could his disciples not have fulfilled this teaching from their master?

To this we may add the statement of the Mishnah: "*All glory is due solely for Torah*" (*Pirkei Avoth 6:3*). The disciples of Rabbi Akiva did not study Torah together when one of them needed help. True, they respected one another in everyday life, but that did not help them because they did not study together when one of them did not fully understand a halachah or teaching, since they did not want to lose their time. The Holy One, blessed be He, punished them as a result, for man was created only to teach others, without claiming special credit for himself.

Rabbi Chiya was only honored because he taught Torah to others. He said of himself, "*I ensure that the Torah will not be forgotten in Israel. For I bring flax seed, sow it, and weave nets. I hunt stags with whose meat I feed orphans and from whose skins I prepare scrolls, and then proceed to a town where there are no teachers of young children, and write out the five books of the Chumash for five children, and teach another six children the six orders of the Mishnah. I then tell each one, 'Teach your section to your fellows'*" (*Ketubot 103b*). The Gemara adds that this is what Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi had in mind when he explained, "*How great are the deeds of Chiya!*"

The Water Hollowed out the Rock

Rabbi Akiva himself became the greatest among his generation only in this way. The Aggadah recounts that by the time Rabbi Akiva was 40 years old, he had not studied any Torah (*Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan 6:2*). One day, as he was next to a well, he asked: "*What hollowed out this rock? He was told, "The water that falls on it all day long.*" At that point, Rabbi Akiva logically deduced the same about himself: "*If something this soft can shape something so hard, how much more will words of Torah – which are as hard as iron – shape my heart, which is but flesh and blood?*"

He immediately went to learn Torah. In fact both he and his son sat before their teacher as he taught them both. Rabbi Akiva said, "*Rabbi, teach me Torah!*" He then wrote aleph beit and learned it, aleph tav and learned it, Vayikra and learned it. In fact Rabbi Akiva studied without respite until he had learned the entire Torah.

Since Rabbi Akiva had learned Torah only from the mouth of his teacher, who was not afraid of losing his time, he knew that each person must study Torah with others. He had learned Torah only from those who had studied with him without considering their time, which is why he taught his disciples to do the same. Since they did not, they were punished.

May All Our Deeds be for the Sake of Heaven

It is written, "*The son of the Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel*" (*Vayikra 24:10*). The Midrash states, "*From where did he go out? Rabbi Levi replied: He went out of his world, as may be inferred from the text: 'A champion went out' [I Samuel 17:4]. Rabbi Berekiah said: He went out from the preceding section. He argued, 'It is written, "You shall take fine four and bake twelve loaves*" [Vayikra 24:5]. A king usually eats fresh bread. Does he eat stale?' … Rabbi Chiya taught: He went out as a result of the section regarding ancestry. He came with the intention of pitching his tent among the camp of Dan, but they said to him: 'What right do you have to pitch your tent in the camp of Dan?' He replied, 'I descend from the daughters of Dan.' They told him, 'It is written: "*Each man by his standard, with ensigns according to the houses of their fathers*" [Bamidbar 2:2] – their fathers, not their mothers.' He appealed to Moshe's court and lost his case, and so he rose and cursed G-d" (*Vayikra Rabba 32:3*). It is difficult to understand how he could scorn the showbread by saying that it was eaten cold. All Israel knew that it did not get cold as long as it had not been placed on the Shulchan, and that when the kohanim came to remove it, they found it as hot as when it had been placed there!

The Sages have said, "*All who heard him placed their hands on his head. They placed their hands on his head and said to him, 'Your blood is upon your own head. You brought this upon yourself'* " (*Torat Kohanim 19:2*). In his book Degel HaMussar, Rabbeinu Gershon Liebman Zatzal asks: "*Why did they tell the one who cursed, 'You brought this upon yourself,' since he belonged to the generation of the desert, the*

generation of knowledge? They had stood upon Mount Sinai at the lofty moment when the Torah was given, and they saw all the miracles that took place during the exodus from Egypt, during the war against Amalek, when the sea split, when Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, and so on. The dispute in which he found himself was somewhat of a dispute for the sake of Heaven, not just a dispute for material gain of some kind. He was not allowed to pitch his tent among his tribe, so what was he to do? In the end, he wanted to live with the Jewish people; he only desired good, so what does it mean that he brought this upon himself?"

Who Sees Angels?

To explain all this, let us begin by citing a teaching from our Sages in the Gemara: "*What is the meaning of the text, 'The lips of the kohen should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is an angel of the L-RD of hosts' [Malachi 2:7]? If a Rav is like an angel of the L-RD of hosts, they should seek the law at his mouth. If not, they should not seek the law at his mouth*" (*Moed Katan 17a*). This is difficult to understand. Do people see angels, such that they can tell the difference between one Rav and another? Can they say, "*This one resembles an angel, but that one does not*"? Can they say, "*I will accept the Torah from this one, but not from that one*"?

We may explain this according to a teaching of our Sages: "*Israel is more precious to the Holy One, blessed be He, than the ministering angels, for Israel sing praises to Hashem every hour, whereas the ministering angels sing praises but once a day. Others say once a week, while others say once a month. Others say once a year, while others say once in seven years. Others say once in fifty years, while others say once in eternity*" (*Chullin 91b*). It is also taught, "*Each day ministering angels are created from the fiery stream, sing praises, and cease to be*" (*Chagigah 14a*).

From here we learn that there are some ministering angels who only sing praises before G-d after seven or even after fifty years, at which point they are immediately consumed by a fiery stream. Although they know that they will disappear once they sing praises, they still sing before G-d and give their lives for a single song of praise, regardless of the fact that they will perish immediately afterwards.

This is the meaning of the teaching which states that a Rav must resemble an angel of G-d: Just as an angel has no consideration for its own life when it must bring satisfaction to its Creator, since it knows that it will perish once it sings a song of praise, likewise a Rav must devote himself entirely to words of Torah. And just as ministering angels await no reward for giving up their lives, a Rav must also await no reward, acting solely for the sake of Heaven.

We must not accept words of Torah from the mouth of a Rav who is not like an angel, however, for the Sages have said: "*Do not make it [the Torah] a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an ax with which to cut*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:5*). Whoever does not give his life for the Torah, it is a sign that he hopes for a reward; and whoever awaits a reward clearly proves that he is using the Torah as a crown for self-aggrandizement and an ax with which to cut. The Holy One, blessed be He, will remove such a person from the world.

An Example

The principle here is that whoever gives his life for the Torah must not await any reward or make the Torah into a means for personal gain. Instead, he must study solely for the sake of Heaven and to teach the Jewish people. This is what Rabbi Akiva did, as the Gemara tells us: "*The evil [Roman] government once issued a decree forbidding Jews from learning and practicing Torah. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva publicly gathering people together and teaching them Torah. He said to him, 'Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?' He replied, 'I will explain this to you with a parable: A fox was once walking alongside a river when it saw fish swarming from one place to another. He said to them: "From what are you fleeing?*" They replied, "*From the nets cast for us by men.*" He said to them, "*Would you like to come up on dry land so that you and I can live together, just as my ancestors lived with your ancestors?*" They replied, "*Are you the one they call the smartest of animals? You are not smart, but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!*" So it is with us. If such is our state when we sit and study Torah – of which it is written, "*For it is your life and the length of your days*" – how much worse shall it be for us if we neglect it!' " (*Berachot 61b*).

How did Rabbi Akiva reach such a level that he did not fear for his life and studied Torah without any ulterior motives? It is because during his entire life, he waited for an opportunity to fulfill the words "*with all your soul.*" All that he did was for the sake of Heaven, not for a reward. This is why he did not fear the government or death. He feared only G-d throughout his entire life, not man, and he gave his life in order to sanctify G-d's Name.

Pride is the Source of All Sin

It is written, "*Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself for a person [nefesh] among his people*" (*Vayikra 21:1*). What does nefesh mean? We may say that it designates a person's body, his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, for they constitute the "*people*" of the body (*cf. Nedarim 32b on the expression ve'anashim bah me'at [Kohelet 9:14]*). This means that a person must not make himself impure through pride, for in that case his body and all its parts will also become impure.

Regarding the juxtaposition of Parsha Kedoshim with Parsha Emor, the Zohar states that at the beginning of the former (*Vayikra 19:2*), Scripture warns the entire community of Israel to sanctify itself, and then in Parsha Emor it warns the priests to be holy. Scripture also gives a warning to the Levites, as it is written: "*To the Levites shall you speak and you shall say to them*" (*Bamidbar 18:26*). All this was in order for everyone (*including the great among the people*) to be holy and pure. They were also to be vigilant regarding the 248 members that correspond to the positive mitzvot (*Makkot 23b; Tanchuma, Teitzei 2*), and to sanctify themselves as much as possible.

However this still needs to be clarified. In Parsha Kedoshim the Torah warns the entire community of Israel (*which includes the priests and Levites*) to sanctify itself. Therefore why were the priests and Levites given a special warning?

The answer is that without this additional warning to the priests (*in Parsha Emor*), as well as to the Levites, people could have mistakenly believed that since they were holier than the rest of the Jewish people, they could therefore trust in their holiness, without the need for them to implement extra spiritual fences for themselves. This is why they were given a special warning, for it is precisely because they were holier that they had to sanctify themselves with even greater intensity, lest they fall into pride, which resembles sexual immorality (*see below*). They required an extra degree of sanctity because they worked in the Tent of Meeting, and as the Sages have said: "*The greater the man, the greater his evil inclination*" (*Sukkah 52a*). The Sages explain that the repetition, "*Say to the priests…and tell them*" (*Vayikra 21:1*) conveys a warning to the great regarding the small (*Yebamot 114a*). In other words, after having warned the latter about holiness when addressing the entire community of Israel (*in Parsha Kedoshim*), the Torah again warns the great, the priests and Levites, that they must also distance themselves from sin and pride.

In Parsha Pinchas it is written, "*Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the priest*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*). The Sages have explained that the tribes were scorning him by saying, "*Look at this son of Puti, whose mother's father [Jethro] fattened [pitem] calves for idol worship, and he went and killed a prince of a tribe of Israel*" (*Sotah 43a*). On this Rashi says, "*Scripture therefore traces his lineage to Aaron*" (*Rashi on Bamidbar 25:11*).

The following questions need to be addressed:

1. Why did the tribes scorn Pinchas for having killed Zimri the son of Salu, the tribal leader of Shimon (*Bamidbar 25:14*), since Zimri was liable to death and Moshe had given Pinchas permission to act? Was there any reason for Pinchas to be scorned?

2. Why did they remind Pinchas of the sins of his grandfather Jethro, since Jethro repented, converted to Judaism, and became a tzaddik (*Mechilta, Yitro*)? In fact Jethro became such a tzaddik that he merited having a parsha added to the Torah, a parsha that bears his name (*Shemot Rabba 27:8; Sifri Beha'alotcha 10:29*). Why, therefore, did they remind Pinchas of his grandfather's past sins?

3. If Pinchas was to be reminded of his grandfather's sins, why was it done precisely during the incident involving Zimri? Why not on another occasion?

The explanation is the following: What incited the anger of the tribes against Pinchas was the fact that he was a priest, and therefore he endangered his people by killing Zimri. In fact if the guilty parties had died by his hand there and then, Pinchas would have been in danger of becoming impure, and furthermore he could have died in the fight itself. This is why he was imputed with sin, on the assumption that his zealous action had not been motivated by a love of Heaven. Otherwise, why did he act before those who were older and better than him in exercising G-d's vengeance? Even if he

had acted in accordance with the law, as the Sages have said (*Sanhedrin 82a*), the tribes still believed that his killing of a Jewish leader stemmed from pride. The very fact that Pinchas entered the tent and saw such a lewd act proved (according to his detractors) that pride had warped his judgment. Now pride is in the same category as idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder. Pinchas therefore put himself in danger of idolatry, and he committed a sin by the lewd spectacle that he saw, a kind of sexual immorality. Why did he do these things by entering the tent?

Thus the tribes tried to understand from where this pride originated, and they ascribed it to his ancestry, meaning to his grandfather Jethro, who had been an idolater before repenting (*Shemot Rabba 1:32*). Jethro transmitted this idolatrous trait to his descendants, and although he later became a tzaddik, this ancestral source was still doing damage. This is why the tribes believed that Pinchas had transgressed the warning given by the Torah to the priests to guard themselves from pride, as we have said concerning the verse: "*Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself for a person*" (*Vayikra 21:1*).

To counter the erroneous view of the tribes, Scripture therefore linked Pinchas to Aaron the priest. This meant that although Pinchas was a descendant of Jethro, he drew his actions from Aaron the priest, who was completely humble and said of himself and Moshe, "*What are we?*" (*Shemot 16:7*). This is also why many miracles were performed for Pinchas when he killed Zimri (*Sanhedrin 82b; Targum Yonatan, Bamidbar 25:8*), and it is why Pinchas was protected from all harm – all due to the merit of Aaron the priest. As for someone who is filled with pride, it is certain that there is a defect in him regarding what he inherited from his ancestors. However since Pinchas descended from Aaron the priest – who was exceedingly humble and did everything for the love of Heaven – the influence of Jethro's lineage was no longer perceptible in Pinchas, to the point that Scripture testifies, "*He jealously avenged Me among them*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*), without any personal interest, without pride, and solely for the love of Heaven.

Sages, Be Careful With Your Words

It is written, "*Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself for the dead among his people*" (*Vayikra 21:1*). Rashi states that the term "*say*" is repeated in order to warn the adults about the children. The Ramban writes, "*The meaning of this warning is to state that we are not to assist with our hands in the defilement of children. There are many warnings in the Torah of this nature…such as the prohibition against eating blood and swarming things…and from them we learn that…we must not assist children to ever transgress the law.*"

We need to understand this. If throughout the Torah the rule is that adults cannot push children to commit a sin, then why does the Torah only reveal this to us concerning the impurity of the dead? We may explain this from a moral perspective, by citing a passage from the Mishnah: "*Ben Zoma said, 'Who is wise? He who learns from every*

person, as it is written: "From all my teachers I grew wise" [Tehillim 119:99]. … Who is strong? He who subdues his inclination, as it is said: "*He who is slow to anger is better than a strong man, and he who masters his passions is better than a conqueror of a city*" [Mishlei 16:32]. Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot, as it is said: "*When you eat of the labor of your hands, happy are you and it shall be well with you*" [Tehillim 128:2]. "*Happy are you*" – in this world; "*and it shall be well with you*" – in the World to Come. Who is honored? He who honors others, as it is stated: "*I honor those who honor Me, and those who scorn Me will be accursed*" [I Samuel 2:30]' " (*Pirkei Avoth 4:1*).

We also find the following remark in the Midrash: "*Even so, 'In Gibeon Hashem appeared to Solomon in a dream of the night, and G-d said: "Request what I should give to you*" ' [I Kings 3:5]. Solomon thought: If I ask for silver and gold and precious stones and pearls, He will give them to me. But what I will do is to ask for wisdom, and that will include everything' " (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:9*).

As a result, a person with wisdom possesses everything. The Gemara states, "*He who has [wisdom] has everything. He who lacks this, what does he have?*" (*Nedarim 41a*). Now wisdom is nothing other than the fear of G-d, as it is written: "*The fear of Hashem is the beginning of wisdom*" (*Mishlei 1:7*) and "*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem*" (*Tehillim 111:10*). It follows that not only does a wise person possess wisdom, but that all other virtues are found in him. Wisdom contains power, wealth, and the fear of Heaven, for a wise person is happy with his lot, subdues his inclination, learns from all men, never grows proud, and does not say, "*What do I have to learn from this student? I've studied much more than him!*" Instead he controls himself and learns from him. Yet he rejoices in his lot only with things that belong to him personally. In terms of spiritual matters, he is never satisfied with his lot, and during his entire life he tries to study and learn from every person.

Similar to this idea, the Mishnah recounts that Rabbi Yehoshua had calculated that Yom Kippur would take place on a certain day, but Rabban Gamliel pushed it to the following day. Rabban Gamliel sent him a message in which he said, "*I order you to appear before me with your staff and money on the day that, according to your calculations, should be Yom Kippur*" (*Rosh Hashanah 25a*). Rabbi Yehoshua therefore took his staff and his money and went to see Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh on the day that he calculated to be Yom Kippur. When Rabban Gamliel saw him, he arose from his chair, kissed him on the head, and said: "*Come in peace, my teacher and my disciple. My teacher in wisdom and my disciple because you have accepted my decision.*" The Gemara adds, "*Happy is the generation in which the greater defer to the lesser, and all the more so the lesser to the greater*" (*Rosh Hashanah 25b*).

Hence in the passage concerning the impurity of the dead, we read: "*Say…and say*" – warn the adults regarding the children. In fact one who exhibits pride resembles the dead, those who have left this world, since it is said: "*Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: I and he cannot both dwell in the world*" (*Sotah 5a*).

Since there is no place for him in this world, it is fitting for him to leave the world and die. However the Holy One, blessed be He, is patient with him and gives him time to repent.

The Torah clearly teaches us that the young learn just how vile pride is from the Kohen Gadol. The Kohen Gadol alludes to the great figures of the generation, and the Torah warns them against pride. It prohibits them from rendering themselves impure through the dead, meaning that they do not have the right to grow proud. When the young see that the adults are careful regarding pride, they will conclude: If the adults, who have something to be proud of, are prohibited by the Torah from exhibiting pride, then how much more are we prohibited from exhibiting pride, since we have nothing to be proud of!

Abraham himself fulfilled the verse, "*From all my teachers I grew wise,*" for the Midrash states that the Holy One, blessed be He, made his two kidneys his two teachers, instructing him Torah and wisdom (*Bereshith Rabba 61:1*). Furthermore, he went to study Torah with Shem the son of Noah (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 7*). Now this is difficult to understand, for if the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Abraham two kidneys from which to learn Torah, why did he have to go and learn with Shem? The answer is that Abraham was afraid of growing proud. He was afraid of thinking, "*All that I have learned, I did not learn from a teacher or from my father, but from myself!*" He went to study with a teacher so he would have no reason to grow proud. After all, can a student stand before his teacher and say, "*All that I learned, I learned by myself, not from you*"? Therefore Abraham thought: "*Up to now, everything I learned, I could say that I learned it from myself. From now on, since I will be studying Torah from a teacher, I will understand nothing on my own, and everything that I learn, I will only learn from my teacher.*"

Likewise King David said, "*From all my teachers I grew wise,*" and our Sages state that in everything King David did, he consulted his teacher Mephiboshet by asking: "*My teacher Mephiboshet, is my decision right? Did I correctly convict, correctly acquit, correctly declare clean, correctly declare unclean,*" and Mephiboshet humiliated David in the Halachah (*Berachot 4a*). It is also said that David went from group to group in order to fulfill the verse, "*From all my teachers I grew wise*" (*Midrash Tehillim 1*). On the other hand, we also learn the opposite from the kohen. What does this mean? It means that a kohen is forbidden to render himself impure for the dead and exhibit pride with regards to his own possessions. However in regards to spirituality, he is permitted to render himself impure, and in fact he is obligated to render himself impure and exhibit pride, as it is written: "*His heart was lifted up in the ways of Hashem*" (*II Chronicles 17:6*). Before dying, Rabbeinu HaKadosh said to his son Rabban Gamliel, "*Conduct your rule with men of high standing, and cast bile among the students*" (*Ketubot 103b*). Likewise, the Torah has permitted the Kohen Gadol to render himself impure for a dead body that nobody has buried, meaning for a mitzvah. He is also permitted to render himself impure for his wife, as it is written: "*Except for the*

relative who is closest to him" – and a wife designates the Torah (*Midrash Mishlei 31:10*). This teaches us that it is a duty for the great figures of the generation to exhibit pride and demand that people honor the Torah in them, an honor that they cannot forego, as the Gemara states (*Kiddushin 32a*).

Criticizing Pride and Praising Humility

At the start of this week's parsha we read, "*Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: Let none defile himself for a soul among his people*" (*Vayikra 21:1*). As Rashi points out, our Sages (*Yebamot 114a*) interpreted this verse to mean the following: "*Say…and say – to admonish gedolim ['adults'] regarding haketanim ['the minors'].*" Hence the text is here warning adults to watch over minors so they are not rendered impure through an intermediary.

As for myself, I think that this verse is addressed to Torah sages: "*To admonish gedolim ['great men'] regarding haketanim ['the small']*" – that the wise man should not act contemptuously, nor should he exploit the Torah (*G-d forbid*) for his own ends (*Pirkei Avoth 4:5*). Instead, he should consider himself small and act humbly and modestly. "*Let none defile himself for a soul among his people*" is a Torah command! It means that if we fail to act with humility, then our entire Torah will be diverted from its goal, and only our outer shell will benefit and become prominent. In fact the Torah confers sanctity to man and draws him closer to G-d, but only if he remains humble and self-effacing. The Mishnah takes this approach by stating, "*Rabbi Levitas, man of Yavneh, said: 'Be very, very humble, for the expectation of mortal man is but worms'*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:4*).

Our objective in this world is to fight the evil inclination and build our character by constantly learning Torah, observing mitzvot, and doing good deeds. If we stop learning Torah or doing good deeds, our character may crumble and we will have to start building it again.

Such is the meaning of the aforementioned Mishnah: Man of "*Yavneh*" (a name that evokes the term "to build") – man must be a fighter and build his character. It is in this regard that the Tanna offers advice to those who are great in Torah: "*Be very, very humble.*" Just as the Torah repeats the term "*say*" ("*Say...and say*"), the Tanna also repeats the adjective "*very,*" pointing out that if our yearning to build our character is to remain constant, and if it is not to crumble, then we must be humble and consider ourselves small, for "*the expectation of mortal man is but worms.*" If the inevitable fate of every man is worms, then why should he grow proud over his fellow?

As servants of G-d, we yearn for the World to Come. However if we are crude and filled with pride, character traits that drive man from the world (*Pirkei Avot 4:21*), we will lose on the one hand what we have gained on the other (*Sotah 5a*). All our hopes will

end in failure, and only worms will profit from our thick and corpulent bodies. In fact a self-satisfied person, even if physically thin, becomes thick and corpulent through pride. Hence the advice that every servant of G-d must retain is the following: Remain humble and modest, for this is the only way to achieve your hopes.

Let us examine just how greatly pride is abhorred by the One through Whose word the world was created. As we know, it is forbidden to sacrifice an animal that possesses a blemish (*Vayikra 22:20*). Only a perfect animal may be placed upon the altar and serve as an atonement for the person offering it.

I found the following question in the book Avkat Rochel: Why is an animal with a blemish not suitable to offer as a sacrifice? The main thing is for the sinner to regret his deeds and possess a broken heart, as it is written: "*The sacrifices G-d desires are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise*" (*Tehillim 51:19*)! What does it matter if the animal is perfect or not, since the main thing is a broken heart?

I understand this in the following way: It is obvious that whoever has sinned and wants to bring a sacrifice as an atonement must, before all else, sincerely repent and be cleansed of every defect and sin. In fact without repentance, no sacrifice is accepted by G-d, even the most beautiful and full-bodied! Above all else, Hashem wants a suitable and pure heart at the time of a sacrifice, and if the sinner is still infused with a defect on the inside, his sacrifice will not be accepted.

Since our own flesh must be free of every sin and transgression, and the animal comes as an atonement in our stead [everything done to the animal should have been done to us – (*Ramban on Vayikra 1:9*)], it follows that the animal must also be perfect and without blemish. In reality, this sacrifice is a reflection of the person who offers it: If it possesses a blemish, this indicates that the person offering it also possesses one, meaning that he has not completely repented. That is why such an animal is not suitable to offer as a sacrifice.

In our days, however, since we no longer have the altar upon which to bring our sacrifices, this process has been replaced by prayer, as it is written: "*Let our lips substitute for bulls*" (*Hosea 14:3*). In fact our Sages have affirmed that "*prayer takes the place of sacrifice*" (*Berachot 26a; Bamidbar Rabba 18:21*). Furthermore, we can replace sacrifice by studying those parts of the Torah that deal with the subject, as it is said: "*Whosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah is as though he were sacrificing a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sin-offering, and a guilt-offering*" (*Menachot 110a*).

Therefore before devoting ourselves to Torah, prayer, and learning about the sacrifices, we must ensure that we are beyond reproach and without sin. In the opposite case, our prayers and Torah learning will not be acceptable to G-d. There exists no greater sin than pride and the pursuit of honor. In fact how can a self-satisfied person stand in synagogue or the Beit HaMidrash and study the Torah passages dealing

with sacrifices, while his entire character is deficient? Moreover, Hashem has said in regards to such a person: "*I and he cannot both dwell in the world*" (*Sotah 5a*). Such a person is therefore an insult and offense to the One by Whose word the world came into existence.

This is why we must pay great attention to acting humbly and modestly. This is the meaning of "*to admonish great men regarding the small*" – we must always act with humility, submission, and self-effacement, learning Torah without any ulterior motives. Our prayers will then be accepted, and our soul will light our path in this world and in the World to Come. Amen.

The Festivals Spread Holiness

It is written, "*These are the festivals of Hashem, holy convocations, which you shall designate in their appointed time*" (*Vayikra 23:4*).

In this week's parsha, we read about the holiness of Shabbat and the festivals. As we know, the difference between Shabbat and the festivals is that Shabbat has existed since the six days of Creation and always comes after the six days of the week, which is not the case for the festivals. In fact it is the Jewish people, specifically the Beit Din, that designates their dates, as it is written: "*which you shall designate in their appointed time*" (*see Rosh Hashanah 24a*), meaning that they are the ones who designate them. Hence we conclude the Kiddush for Shabbat with the blessing, "*Who sanctifies Shabbat,*" for it is the Holy One, blessed be He, Who alone sanctifies it. Likewise we conclude the Kiddush for the festivals with the blessing, "*Who sanctifies Israel and the seasons,*" for He sanctifies the Jewish people, and they in turn designate the dates of the festivals.

I have seen in the Torah commentary Sefat Emet by the Gerer Rebbe that the difference between Shabbat and the festivals lies not only in the designation of festival dates, but in something much more profound. The sanctity of Shabbat surpasses human comprehension, which is why the Sages tell us that G-d said: "*I have a precious gift in My treasury, and its name is Shabbat*" (*Beitzah 16a*). Shabbat was given to the Children of Israel as a gift, without work or effort required, which is why man needs an extra soul to receive its light. However the festivals are called "*holy convocations,*" for man must convoke holiness and draw it towards him, something that depends on the holiness of Israel. This is what the Gerer Rebbe says.

From here we learn that the holiness of a festival depends on man, who must prepare himself to receive its light. If he prepared himself correctly, he will receive an abundance of holiness. In the opposite case, however, the festival will have no impact on him. The same applies for Shavuot, which depends on the 49 days that precede it. Hence the Torah does not call it "*the festival of the giving of the Torah*" (*Chag Matan Torah*), but rather "*the festival of weeks*" (*Chag HaShavuot*), for it essentially consists of receiving the Torah, which in turn depends solely on the preparation that precedes it.

There is a direct link between the passage dealing with the festivals and the passage dealing with the blasphemer, which appears at the end of this week's parsha. In Torat Kohanim we read, "*Why did he curse? When he came to pitch his tent within the encampment of the tribe of Dan, they said to him: 'What right do you have to be here?' He said, 'I'm among the descendants of Dan.' They replied, 'Each man by his grouping according to the insignias of his father's household.' He entered Moshe's court and was found guilty. He then arose and blasphemed.*" This is astounding, for not only was he not content with blaspheming, he deliberately blasphemed G-d's Name! How could a man who saw the miracles in Egypt, who witnessed the splitting of the sea, and whose own ears heard G-d saying: "*I am Hashem your G-d*" – a man who certainly did not participate in the sin of the golden calf, otherwise he would have died alongside the other sinners – suddenly sink to such an abysmal level? How was he not afraid to utter Hashem's Name; even more so, how could he have cursed it?

Before answering this question, let us delve into the gravity of the sin of rage. The person who blasphemed had been irritated by the fact that he had not been shown respect, and this irritation turned into rage. Now the Sages have said, "*He who loses his temper, even the Shechinah is unimportant in his eyes*" (*Nedarim 22b*). Here the blasphemer felt that the Shechinah was unimportant, and he blasphemed. Whoever loses his temper is capable of saying or doing things that he would never say or do otherwise, for in his rage he becomes blind to everything before him. In reflecting upon this, I realize that we sometimes get irritated over trivial matters, over meaningless things. I remember that when I was young, a stranger once arrived in synagogue and sat down in someone else's seat. When the latter arrived and saw someone sitting in his seat, he said nothing until the Sefer Torah was taken out. When everyone left their seat to honor it, he took his seat back. When the stranger returned and saw someone sitting there, he said that he had been there before. At that point the other person began to scream, saying that it had been his seat for the entire year, and that today he had simply arrived late. One thing led to another, and their exchange became enflamed with anger, to the point that one person pushed the other while he was holding the Sefer Torah – which ended up on the floor, to everyone's dismay. And it all started from something as trivial as a seat. The stranger could have gone to sit elsewhere, for it wasn't his seat, or the other person could have forgiven him and gone to sit elsewhere to pray that one time. Yet anger ruins everything and drives people out of control. In fact a person's tendency to become angry is what enables us to determine whether we should become friends, for as the Sages have said: "*By three things may a person's character be determined…by his anger*" (*Eruvin 65b*).

Indeed, how could the blasphemer in this week's parsha have reached such a lowly level? What caused it? According to what we have said, since he treated the festivals with contempt, without adequately preparing for them, they automatically did not spread their holiness upon him and he did not benefit from the brilliance of their light. Otherwise he would have been strengthened and used these to study Torah. There is

a principle which states that if a person does not elevate himself, he will inevitably descend and become corrupt. This week's parsha states, "*They shall be holy to their G-d, and they shall not desecrate the Name of their G-d*" (*Vayikra 21:6*). If we make no effort to attain a higher degree of holiness in general, and during the festivals in particular, we will end up desecrating G-d's Name and blaspheming. There can be no worse Chillul Hashem.

If we waste our time during the festivals, it means that we have not submitted ourselves to Torah and that pride prevents us from learning. How can we rectify this? By obeying Hashem's orders and starting to learn Torah. When we submit to words of Torah and the One Who gave them – the Holy One, blessed be He – we will avoid all forms of carelessness. Here too, the blasphemer in this week's parsha did not take advantage of the holy festivals for himself, which is why he descended from his level in an appalling way, to the point of denying G-d when he was found to be in the wrong.

Behar

The Torah is Acquired By Humility

Appearing at the beginning of Parsha Behar (*Leviticus ch. 25*) are the laws concerning the Shmita year. We are commanded to observe the Shmita after having worked the land for six years. For one who observes it, the Holy One, blessed be He, promises that blessings will rest upon the work of his hands during all those years, as it is written: "*Then I will command My blessing for you*" (*ibid. 25:21*). On the other hand, we read at the beginning of Parsha Bechukotai: "*If you walk in My statutes and you will keep My commandments…then I will give your rains in their time*" (*ibid. 26:3-4*). What is the meaning of, "*If you walk in My statutes*"? Rashi cites the Midrash in explaining this to mean: "*That you should labor in [studying] Torah*" (*Torat Kohanim*).

This means that when a person puts an effort into studying Torah, he merits all the blessings mentioned in the Torah. From here we may draw two lessons: When someone observes the Shmita year according to Halachah – this applying not only to a farmer in the field, but to each and every person who has to observe the laws of the Shmita year – he then merits all the blessings mentioned in the Torah. Similarly, when someone studies Torah with fervor and puts an effort into it, he also merits all the blessings mentioned in the Torah, and furthermore he receives rain at the proper time to water the earth.

It would therefore seem that these two things – the observance of the Shmita year and the diligent study of Torah – are linked by a powerful bond.

What is the mitzvah of the Shmita year? A farmer is the master of his fields for a period of six years. His fields are off-limits to the public, and he works, sows and reaps, collects and stores up his harvest and its fruits. Yet come the seventh year, he has nothing to do! He is in no way the master of his possessions in that year, and his fields are open to everyone. Anybody can walk into his fields and take whatever falls into his hand. A farmer cannot feel proud during the Shmita year. He cannot say, "*Everything belongs to me, and I'm the master of my fields.*" It's out of the question! He is not the master during the Shmita year, for then he must conduct himself with modesty and humility, yielding before everyone, for each and every person is as much the master of his fields as he is, and perhaps even more.

As for the study of Torah, what does it consist of? The Sages have explicitly said that the words of the Torah resemble water (*Taanith 7a*), and furthermore that "*water signifies the Torah*" (*Bava Kama 17a*). Just as water moves from a higher level to a lower one, words of Torah move from a higher place to a lower one. This means that words of Torah cannot entrench themselves in, or even penetrate, the heart of the proud. The Holy One, blessed be He, says of a proud person: "*I and he cannot both dwell*

in the world" (*Sotah 5a*). A person who is proud cannot study Torah or learn it from someone else, for he feels greater than him and thinks, "*How can this unimportant person explain the Torah to me?*" Hence the Torah can only penetrate the heart of someone who is humble.

From this we see that humility is the principle means of acquiring the values of the Torah. It is only when a person conducts himself with humility and modesty that he can study Torah. Only in this way can he learn it from someone else, and only in this way can he elevate himself in learning.

Consequently, we see that everything mentioned with regards to the mitzvot of the Shmita year and Torah study are related. The central component of the mitzvah of Shmita is humility – to be self-effacing before each and every person – and the central component of diligent Torah study lies in humility. What lesson can we derive from this?

When a person conducts himself with humility, he merits the Torah. He also merits performing the mitzvah of the Shmita year according to Halachah, in the minutest detail, and through this he merits every blessing mentioned in the Torah. The painstaking study of Torah also provides a person with all his material needs, without interruptions or the need for calculations, because he conducts himself modestly, as he should.

If unfortunately we do not conduct ourselves properly, then we will be punished for not having observed the Shmita year, as well as for not having studied Torah, and the punishment for both will be the same! Our Sages have said, "*By the sin of not observing the Shmita year, the Children of Israel are exiled from their land, the Temple is destroyed, and the land becomes a desert*" (*Tanhuma, Behar 1*). In the Gemara (*Nedarim 81a*), the Sages give a lengthy explanation for a verse in the book of Jeremiah: "*Who is the wise man who will understand this? … For what reason did the land perish? … Because they forsook My Torah*" (*Jeremiah 9:11-12*).

From here we see something amazing. Be it by not observing the Shmita year or by not studying Torah, in either case the Temple is destroyed and the Children of Israel are exiled from their country to lands unknown. That being said, we must ask the following question: In every generation there are people who observe the Shmita year but do not study Torah, and conversely there are people who study Torah but do not observe the mitzvah of the Shmita year. How is it possible to sort these things out? The answer is very simple, and it is given by the verse: "*If you walk in My statutes*" (*Leviticus 26:3*). That is, we must put an effort into studying Torah. It is true that anyone can study it, yet if he fails to put an effort this study, his Torah will be of little value and punishments will start to bear down on him. We must therefore acquire humility, put an effort into studying Torah, and observe the Shmita year. In this way we will merit all the blessings mentioned by the Creator of the universe in His Torah.

Faith is the Foundation of the Torah and Mitzvot

It is written, "*The L-RD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai*" (*Leviticus 25:1*). The Sages ask, "*What does the subject of the Shmita [seventh year] have to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all the commandments given from Sinai? However just as with the Shmita, its general principles and its smallest details all being given from Sinai, likewise all of them were given – their general principles and their smallest details – from Sinai*" (*Torat Kohanim, Behar 1*). This is difficult to understand. Why does the Torah reveal this for the Shmita, rather than for some other mitzvah? To answer this question, let us first cite a statement made by the Ramban (*Leviticus 25:2*): "*The six days of creation represent the days of the world, whereas the seventh day is a Sabbath to the L-RD your G-d, for on it will be the Sabbath to the Great Name…. It is for this reason that Scripture was more stringent regarding the Shmita than with respect to those guilty of violating all other negative commandments…. Whoever denies it does not acknowledge the work of creation and the World to Come.*" Hence the Sages said, "*Exile comes to the world for idolatry, for sexual immorality, for murder, and for not letting the earth rest during the Shmita*" (*Pirkei Avoth 5:9*). By telling us that the Children of Israel were exiled because they failed to observe the Shmita, it follows that Scripture considers the transgression of the Shmita to be just as serious as the three gravest sins. Rashi wrote, "*It is through the transgression of the Shmita that the Israelites are exiled, as the verse says: 'The land will appease its Sabbaths…. The land will rest and appease its Sabbaths.' The 70 years of the Babylonian exile corresponded to the 70 Shmita years that Israel did not observe*" (*Rashi on Leviticus 25:18*).

Jeremiah said to the Children of Israel, "*Thus says the L-RD, the G-d of Israel: I sealed a covenant with your forefathers on the day that I took them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves, saying: 'At the outset of the seventh year, each of you shall send forth his Hebrew brother who will have been sold to you. He shall serve you for six years, and then you shall send him out free from yourself.' However your forefathers did not listen to Me, nor incline their ear. … Therefore thus says the L-RD: You did not hearken to Me to proclaim freedom, every man for his brother and every man for his fellow. Behold, I proclaim you to be free – the word of the L-RD – for the sword, for pestilence, and for famine, and I shall make you an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth*" (*Jeremiah 34:13-17*). Rashi explains, "*Behold, I proclaim you to be free – from Me, that I am not your master to save you, and you shall be free for the sword and for famine.*"

This is difficult to understand. Why is Scripture so stringent regarding the mitzvah of the Shmita, to the point that the Children of Israel were exiled because they transgressed it? Why is transgressing the Shmita compared to the three gravest sins – idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder – for which we are to die rather than commit? After all, we are not obligated to die rather than transgress the Shmita! The words of

the Ramban also need to be explained, for why is it more serious to deny the seventh year than to deny Hashem? With the exception of idolatry, we find nothing like this anywhere else in the Torah.

We shall try to explain all this according to a teaching of our Sages: "*It is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the tzaddik shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]*" (*Makkot 24a*). From here we learn that faith in Hashem is the foundation for the entire Torah. A person who possesses faith can accomplish all the mitzvot, for if he believes in Hashem, he will obey all that He commands him to do. The opposite is also true: Whoever does not possess faith cannot fulfill mitzvot. That being the case for mitzvot in general, how much more does it apply to the Shmita in particular! That is, whoever does not have faith in Hashem will not observe it, and whoever has faith in Him will observe it. This is because the power of the Shmita depends on faith, which frees a person from worry until the end of the seventh year, for he has faith that the Holy One, blessed be He, will fulfill His promise to those who observe the Shmita. Thus we read: "*If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? See, we will not sow or gather in our crops!' I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it shall yield a crop for three years. You will sow in the eighth year, but you will still eat from the old crop until the ninth year*" (*Leviticus 25:20-22*).

This is why the punishment for neglecting the Shmita is so severe. The Sages say, "*Come and see how severe is the dust [i.e., results] of [transgressing] the seventh year*" (*Kiddushin 20a*), and they explain that a man who trades his produce during the Shmita will eventually be forced to sell his moveable property. If he ignores this punishment, he will be forced to sell his fields, followed by his home, and even his own daughter. In the end, he will even have to sell himself to idolatry. A person who fails to respect the Shmita denies Hashem and will eventually become an actual idol worshipper. This is because the Shmita is an essential principle of the Torah, being as important as the three most serious sins, for which we are to die rather than commit.

This is why Mount Sinai is mentioned in connection with the mitzvah of the Shmita. It teaches us that although the entire Torah comes from Sinai, the fact that it is mentioned in connection with the Shmita – which is an essential principle of the Torah – means that all the mitzvot are essential.

One may ask, "*Is it only the mitzvah of the Shmita that depends on faith? Don't all the mitzvot require faith, as King David said: 'All Your mitzvot are faith' [Psalms 119:86]?*" The answer is that a mitzvah that does not imply a financial loss cannot be compared to a mitzvah that does implies a financial loss, and no mitzvah implies a greater potential for financial loss than does the Shmita. When a person has a field, but neither works nor sows it during the entire year because he is observing the Shmita, this indicates that he has faith in Hashem and trusts in His promises.

A person should not say, "*Even if I don't observe all the mitzvot in practice, I still have faith!*" Things do not work this way. Faith can only endure with a person who observes Torah and mitzvot. Hence immediately after Parsha Behar comes Parsha

Bechukotai, which begins by stressing the value of learning Torah, as it is written: "*If you walk in My decrees*" (*Leviticus 26:3*). Here the Sages explain that the Holy One, blessed be He, yearns for the Children of Israel to study Torah (*Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 1*). We are taught that it is impossible to have faith without Torah, and likewise that it is impossible to have Torah without faith, for the two are connected. In this world, a person is like a builder who is constructing a house. How does he go about his task? He first lays a foundation, and afterwards he starts building a house upon it. How does he lay the foundation? He takes sand and earth, adds water to it, and with this mixture he prepares the foundation. If he fails to use these materials for the foundation, any house that he builds will end up collapsing. The same applies to Torah and faith. These are the two materials that form the foundation of man. If a person lacks both of them, he will not have a foundation, meaning that he will be unable to build anything that will last. If he builds something, it will end up collapsing.

This is the lesson that ensues from our parsha. The Torah says "*on Mount Sinai*" when speaking of the Shmita, thereby teaching us that faith without Torah is impossible, just as Torah without faith is impossible.

The Foundations of Faith and the Shmita

It is written, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying…*" (*Vayikra 25:1*). The Sages ask, "*What does the subject of the Shmita [seventh year] have to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all the commandments given from Sinai? However just as with the Shmita, its general principles and its smallest details all being given from Sinai, likewise all of them were given – their general principles and their smallest details – from Sinai*" (*Torat Kohanim, Behar 1*). In reality, we need to ask why the Torah reveals this in the passage on the Shmita, rather than elsewhere.

To answer this question, let us first cite a statement made by the Ramban: "*The six days of Creation represent the days of the world, whereas the seventh day is a Sabbath to Hashem your G-d…. It is for this reason that Scripture was more stringent regarding the Shmita than with respect to those guilty of violating all other negative commandments…. Whoever denies it does not acknowledge the work of Creation and the World to Come*" (*Ramban on Vayikra 25:2*). This is difficult to understand. Why is Scripture so stringent for the mitzvah of the Shmita, to the point that if anyone neglects it, it is as if they were denying G-d? We find no such concept in regards to any other Torah mitzvah, with the exception of idolatry.

Let us try to explain this according to what our Sages have said: "*It is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the tzaddik shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]*" (*Makkot 24a*). From here we learn that faith in Hashem is the foundation of the entire Torah. A person who possesses faith can accomplish all the mitzvot, for if he believes in Hashem he will do everything that He commands him to do. Hence the opposite is also true: One who does not possess faith cannot fulfill mitzvot.

That being the case for all the mitzvot, how much more does it apply to the seventh year! That is, whoever does not have faith in Hashem will not observe it, and whoever has faith in Him will observe it. This is because all the power of the Shmita comes from faith. In fact a person will be certain that G-d will keep His promises to those who observe it, as it is said: "*If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? See, we will not plant or gather in our crops!' I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it shall yield a crop for three years. You will plant in the eighth year, but you will still eat from the old crop until the ninth year*" (*Vayikra 25:20-22*).

Faith is the Foundation of Man

The Sages have said, "*Come and see how severe are the results of [transgressing] the seventh year*" (*Kiddushin 20a*). They explain that a man who sells his produce during the seventh year will eventually be forced to sell his moveable property. If he ignores this punishment, he will be forced to sell his fields, followed by his home, and even his own daughter. In the end, he will even sell himself to idolatry!

Whoever fails to respect the mitzvah of the Shmita denies Hashem and will eventually come to worship idols, by also selling himself. This is why Sinai is mentioned in regards to the mitzvah of the Shmita, in order to tell us that the entire Torah was given on Mount Sinai along with all its great principles and all its details. This is said only in regards to the mitzvah of the Shmita because it is the essence of the Torah. Since this principle is written in regards to what is essential, it teaches us that the same applies to all the mitzvot of the Torah.

One may ask, "*Is it only the mitzvah of the seventh year that depends on faith? Don't all the mitzvot depend on faith, as King David said: 'All Your mitzvot are faith' [Tehillim 119:86]?*" The answer is that a mitzvah that does not incur a financial loss cannot be compared to a mitzvah that does incur a financial loss, and no mitzvah implies a greater potential for financial loss than does the Shmita. When a person has a field, but neither works nor plants it during the entire year because he is observing the Shmita, this demonstrates that he has faith in Hashem and trusts in His promises.

A person in this world is like a builder constructing a house. How does he go about this task? He first lays the foundation, and then he starts building a house upon it. How does he lay the foundation? He takes sand and earth, adds water to it, and with this mixture he prepares the foundation. If he is missing water, he will not be able to lay the foundation, and whatever he builds will end up collapsing.

Along the same lines, the Torah and faith are two basic ingredients of man. If one of them is missing, there can be no foundation, and it will be impossible to build anything. Even if something were to be built, in the end it would not endure. We may therefore say that it is for this reason that the passage on the Shmita was given on Mount Sinai, for it alludes to faith, telling us that faith cannot exist without Torah. When a person studies Torah, he must precede it with faith. Without faith, it will not endure, even before the slightest wind.

Faith Mixed with Torah

Furthermore, whoever has faith, this faith leads him to love others, and he will especially not be jealous of their possessions. He will not covet them or try to take their money, for because he has faith, he believes that all his sustenance comes from G-d, and he will obtain nothing that has not been given by G-d.

When a person possesses faith in G-d and a love for others, he can devote himself to Torah, which was only given when there was faith and peace among Israel, as it is written: "*They had faith in Hashem and in Moshe His servant*" (*Shemot 14:31*). The Sages have said, "*The Children of Israel were only delivered from Egypt as a reward for their faith*" (*Mechilta, Beshalach 6*). Peace reigned among them at that point, as we read: "*Israel encamped before the mountain*" (*Shemot 19:2*) – "*like a single man with a single heart*" (*Mechilta, Beshalach 1*). What does this mean? If it were just to teach us that there was peace among them, the Sages could have said "*like a single man.*" Why add "*with a single heart*"? However the expression "*like a single man*" alludes to the fact that there was peace among them, and "*with a single heart*" alludes to the fact that they had a single faith, which depends on the heart.

This is why the mitzvah of the seventh year was given on Mount Sinai. It teaches us that it is impossible for a man to study the Torah that was given on Sinai unless he possesses faith and a love for others. Whoever does not love others, this shows that he does not have faith. And since he does not have faith, he does not have the right to study Torah. Hence we find both concepts – Torah study and faith – through the juxtaposition of Parsha Bechukotai (*dealing with Torah study*) and Parsha Behar (*dealing with faith*). In fact Torah study is impossible unless it is mixed with faith in Hashem and a love for others.

The Mitzvah of Shmita: The Unity of the Jewish People

It is written, "*For six years you may sow your field, and for six years you may prune your vineyard…but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land*" (*Vayikra 25:3-4*).

Appearing in these verses is Hashem's command to Moshe regarding the mitzvah of shmita, which consists primarily of not working the earth for an entire year every seven years. Furthermore, an additional instruction is given afterwards: "*The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat – for you, for your male servant, for your female servant, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you*" (*v.6*). Elsewhere we read, "*The poor of your people shall eat*" (*Shemot 23:11*).

Let us examine how the mitzvah of shmita is described in terms of the commandment to let fields lie fallow and not to harvest the fruits that grow there. In such a situation, the owner of the field will eat exactly in the same way as his male and female servants. Hence it follows that the nature of this mitzvah is the unity of the Jewish people, the fact that no one should feel superior to another. This is why a person is required to leave his field and vineyard open to everyone once every seven years, in order to

recognize that despite their various differences, all Jews are one. They are all equal – rich and poor, master and servant, newcomer and member of an esteemed family – all of them are equal.

Sefer HaChinuch states something similar regarding the great principles of the mitzvah of shmita (*Parsha Mishpatim, Mitzvah 84*): This enables a person to acquire the attribute of renunciation, for a generous man does not give without the hope of receiving something in return, and renunciation – which primarily consists of the fact that a person does not feel superior to others – is the foundation of the mitzvah of shmita.

This mitzvah was given to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt, in order to remind them not to get caught up again in quarrels and disputes, which were the cause of their suffering in Egypt and which prolonged the exile. In fact Moshe, on the day after he killed an Egyptian who was striking a Jew, saw two Jews having a violent dispute. When he told the wicked one, "*Why would you strike your fellow,*" he replied: "*Do you propose to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?*" (*Shemot 2:13-14*). Here the Torah states, "*Moshe feared and said, 'Surely the matter is known'*" (*ibid.*), regarding which the Sages explain: "*Moshe was thinking in his heart, 'How has Israel sinned in such a way that they are more enslaved than all other nations?' When he heard these words, he said: 'Lashon Harah is rife among them, so how can they be ready for deliverance?' Hence: 'Surely the matter is known' – now I know the cause of their enslavement*" (*Shemot Rabba 1:30*).

Furthermore, the absence of unity and peace among the Children of Israel caused them to breach the 49 gates of impurity (*Zohar Chadash, Yitro 39a*), descending to such a level that they practiced idolatry. Thus as the Sages explain on the verse, "*Draw out and take a lamb according to your families, and kill the Passover sacrifice*" (*Shemot 12:21*): "*Draw out your hands from idolatry, and take for yourselves the lamb of the mitzvah*" (*Mechilta, Bo 11*).

As we know, the Egyptians worshipped rams (*the lamb*), which was a god to them. The proof is that Moshe rejected Pharaoh's suggestion that the Children of Israel bring offerings in the land of Egypt, as we read: "*Moshe said, 'It is not proper to do so…. Behold, if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt before their eyes, would they not stone us?'*" (*Shemot 8:22*).

As a result, since the Children of Israel were suffering in Egypt due to a lack of unity and an abundance of disputes, Hashem gave them the mitzvah of shmita following the exodus from Egypt. The essence of this mitzvah is the unity of the Jewish people, meaning that no Jew is more important or less important before Hashem. All Jews are equal before Him.

That is why this mitzvah was given precisely on Mount Sinai, and it is why the Torah recalls that it was given on Mount Sinai. It is because the Children of Israel already knew, while still in Egypt, that they would leave that land for Mount Sinai and receive the Torah there, but only if they were perfectly united. Thus we read, "*Israel encamped before the mountain*" (*Shemot 19:2*) – "*Like a single man with a single heart*" (*Mechilta, ad loc.*).

We find another novel idea in the mitzvah of shmita: Although all the mitzvot were given on Mount Sinai during the giving of the Torah, it is only in regards to the mitzvah of shmita that the Torah expressly states: "*Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai*" (*Vayikra 25:1*). [Rashi deals with this issue and gives his own interpretation.] We shall now explain why Mount Sinai has a greater connection to the mitzvah of shmita than to the other mitzvot.

Before the giving of the Torah on Sinai, and as a precondition for the giving of the Torah, Jews had to reach an elevated level in terms of perfecting themselves as a people and being united. In fact the Torah testifies that this precondition was fulfilled when the Children of Israel reached Mount Sinai, as it is written: "*Israel encamped opposite the mountain*" (*Shemot 19:2*). Here the Sages note that the term "*encamped*" is in the singular, meaning that Israel acted like a single man with a single heart (*Mechilta, ad loc.*). It was only after acting in this way that they could approach and receive the Torah.

Because the essence of the mitzvah of shmita is the unity of the Jewish people, as we have explained, and since everyone is equal before Hashem, the Torah chose to highlight Mount Sinai (for there too, unity was required to receive the Torah) in regards to the mitzvah of shmita. It therefore said "*at Mount Sinai*" in regards to the mitzvah of shmita, for Mount Sinai is where the Children of Israel achieved such complete unity that they could receive the Torah.

If we think deeply about this concept, we will realize just how important the mitzvah of shmita truly is. The Torah has given us a mitzvah that comprises the concept of Jewish unity, as it is written: "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Vayikra 19:18*). Regarding this mitzvah, Rabbi Akiva said: "*[It] is a great principle of the Torah*" (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:3*). In this regard we also find the story of how a non-Jew went to see Hillel to be converted, but only on condition that Hillel teach him the entire Torah as he stood on one foot. Hillel converted him and said, 'What you hate, do not do to your fellow" (*Shabbat 31a*), which is the translation of the mitzvah, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*."

Unity is thus a great Torah principle, and since we stated that the essence of the mitzvah of shmita is love for others and the unity of the Jewish people, it too is a great principle of the Torah. It is the entire Torah while standing on one foot, just like the mitzvah of loving your fellow as yourself.

There is more. All the mitzvot that deal with relations between man and man (such as giving charity, not stealing, etc.) are mitzvot that the nations of the world can understand. However these do not include the mitzvah of shmita, which also contains the realization that a person, in and of himself, possesses nothing, and that everything he has is a gift from the Creator. The mitzvah of shmita is thus extremely important, for it weighs as much as all the other mitzvot, dealing with relationships between man and man as well as between man and G-d. That is why Mount Sinai is mentioned in regards to this mitzvah.

By way of allusion, the term shmita has the same numerical value as "*fifty*" (*gates of purity*) and the Name Sha-dai. This tells us that Hashem says dai (*"enough"*) to the troubles of a man who observes the mitzvah of shmita and is not afraid of having nothing to live on. Hashem protects all the doors of his home, and he will reach the level of the fiftieth gate of sanctity. In fact a person who practices charity gives life to the world, and he is also the partner of G-d, Who said *dai* ("enough") to Creation (*Zohar III:251b*). Such a person will be protected from the danger of breaching the fifty gates of impurity, and he will grow in sanctity. By the merit of observing the mitzvah of shmita and all the other mitzvot, we will also emerge from our present exile and hasten the Final Redemption, speedily and in our days. Amen!

The Connection Between the Shmita and Mount Sinai

Concerning the verse, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying…*" (*Vayikra 25:1*), Rashi asks: "*What does the subject of the Shmita have to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all the mitzvot stated from Sinai? However just as with the Shmita, its general principles and finer details being all stated from Sinai, likewise all of them were stated – their general principles and their finer details – from Sinai.*"

This does not seem to answer his question. Why does the Torah say this here, precisely in the passage dealing with the Shmita, rather than in some other passage, from where we could have also learned that the details of the mitzvot were given from Sinai?

I would like to explain this by first citing the Midrash: "*Tabor and Carmel, which came from the ends of the world, boastfully proclaimed: 'We are high and the Holy One, blessed be He, will give the Torah on us'*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 13:3*). However He gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, for it humbled itself by saying: "*I am low.*" When the Children of Israel saw that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not give the Torah upon the mountains which had boasted, they made the following inference: If a mountain, which is nothing but a collection of earth, humbled itself before the Holy One, blessed be He, then how much more should we, who have received the order to be humble, conduct ourselves with humility! They immediately humbled themselves before G-d, as it is written: "*They stood at the bottom of the mountain*" (*Shemot 19:17*). In other words, they acted with even more humility than the mountain.

Because they acted in this way, they became worthy of receiving the Torah, for words of Torah only endure with one who is humble (*Taanith 7a*). Since they acted with humility, they became deeply united to one another, as it is written: "*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain*" (*Shemot 19:2*), from which our Sages derive that they were like a single person with a single heart (*Mechilta*). There was a lack of unity prior to Sinai, but when they arrived at Sinai they learned humility and unity from the mountain. Since the underlying reason for division among the Children of Israel was the pride which they felt in regards to one another, when they found themselves all equal, they were again united.

We also find the subject of unity in the passage on the Shmita. There we read, "*For six years you may sow your field…but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land*" (*Vayikra 25:3-4*). The Torah obligates anyone who owns a field to leave it open to everyone during the seventh year. From here, the Torah teaches us humility and baseless love, for during the seventh year whoever owns a field opens it to every Jew, whether he loves him or not, and everyone has the right to do whatever he wants with it, and nobody can prevent him. Hence it is regarding this mitzvah that the Torah tells us that all the details of any mitzvah were given from Sinai. Since we learn something that concerns the entire Torah from this passage – namely that the details of every mitzvah were given from Sinai – it follows that the entire Torah depends on this passage in all its fundamental principles. Not only that, but the entire Torah rests upon the principle of unity and mutual love. This is what Hillel told a non-Jew who wanted to convert, a man who asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while he stood upon one foot. Hillel converted him and said, "*What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and learn it*" (*Shabbat 31a*).

Twelve Thousand Pairs

Who is greater for us than Rabbi Akiva, who taught: "*You shall love your fellow as yourself [Vayikra 19:18] is a great principle of the Torah*" (*Torat Kohanim, Kedoshim 4:12*)? It is said that Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of disciples, and they all died around the same time because they failed to show respect for one another (*Yebamot 62b*). This seems difficult to understand, for if they failed to show respect for one another, how could they be called Rabbi Akiva's disciples? After all, they failed to listen to the teaching of the teacher, namely that "*you shall love your fellow as yourself*" is a great principle of the Torah. We also need to understand why it is said that he had 12,000 pairs of disciples, rather than 24,000 disciples! It seems that the disciples of Rabbi Akiva did not properly interpret his teaching, for they thought that when the Torah said, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself,*" it was referring to a single individual, not to "*all your fellows*" in the plural. Hence they each showed respect to only one other disciple, not to all the rest, such that the Sages designated them as "*12,000 pairs of disciples.*" Each of them became friends with only one other disciple, showing respect to him alone. Thus two disciples formed a pair, and because there was a lack of unity among them all, they suffered a grave punishment and all died in a short period of time between Pesach and Shavuot. This is because when unity is lacking, every misfortune can occur.

Let us think about the greatness of unity. The Mishnah in Bikkurim describes the ceremony surrounding the bringing of bikkurim [firstfruit] to the Temple as follows: "*All the cities that constituted the ma'amad [representatives] gathered in the city of the ma'amad, and they spent the night in its open place without entering any of the houses…. The flute was played before them until they reached the Temple mount…. The rich brought their bikkurim in baskets overlaid with silver or gold, while the poor used wicker baskets of peeled willow-branches*" (*Bikkurim 3:2-8*).

The Torah wanted to put the rich and the poor on an equal footing – the rich who brought their offerings in vessels of gold and silver, and the poor who brought their meager offerings in wicker baskets of peeled willow-branches. Hence everyone slept in the streets of the city without returning home, for when they stood before the King of kings, everyone was equal before Him. Hence it is said that G-d "*did not respect princes, and a prince was not recognized before a poor man, for they are all the work of His hands*" (*Job 34:19*).

The flute was played before them, and the word chalil (*"flute"*) evokes the word chalal (*"hollow"*). Whoever came to Jerusalem to bring bikkurim had to feel like the most empty of all, and that no one was greater than the other. Everyone was equal, and the offering of each person was a pleasing odor to G-d because they brought it out of love for Him. As the Mishnah says, "*It is the same whether a man offers much or little, so long as he directs his heart to Heaven*" (*Menachot 110a*).

Bechukotai

All Depends on the Effort We Invest in Torah Study

On the verse, "*If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments*" (*Leviticus 26:3*), Rashi cites the Sages in explaining: "*What is the meaning of, 'If you walk in My statutes'? It means that you must toil in the study of Torah.*" We must point out that for Rashi, the question here is why the Torah uses two similar terms ("walk" and "keep"), since laws known as *chukim* ("statues") are also considered to be *mitzvot* ("commandments") and are contained in them. Why does the Torah state this directive twice? It is apparently because two distinct issues are being addressed here: 1) The study of Torah; and 2) the observance of mitzvot. In order to truly observe mitzvot in their totality and in every detail, we must study Torah beforehand. Only then can we reach our desired goal, which is the wholehearted observance of mitzvot in every detail. We must also ask why, concerning statutes, the Torah uses the expression "*walk,*" whereas for commandments it uses the term "*keep.*" What does each term mean?

We shall attempt to explain this as best we can, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah: "*Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water*" (*Isaiah 55:1*). This is difficult to understand, for it is obvious that someone who is thirsty should drink. Therefore what does the prophet mean by this statement? I believe that he is alluding to a profound truth, which is that there are people whose entire lives revolve around quenching their desires and pursuing wealth. However the more they have, the more they want, for "*the lover of money will never be satisfied with money*" (*Ecclesiastes 5:9*), and "*if he has a hundred, he wants to turn them into two hundred*" (*Kohelet Rabba 1:32*). These people will even abandon their own families for money, despite knowing that they will eventually die and leave all their money behind, as it is written: "*At a time of a man's passing from this world, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls accompany him, but only Torah and good deeds*" (*Perkei Avoth 6:9*). Nevertheless, such people put great effort into acquiring things in this fleeting world, completely bent on the pursuit of wealth.

It is in this regard that the prophet tells us, "*Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water.*" This refers to people who thirst after money and the pleasures of this world, in effect telling them: You – go to the water – just as a thirsty person drinks water. Yet if he drinks salty water, not only will his thirst not be quenched, he will be thirstier than ever! The same applies to work: If we work solely for money, we will hunger even more for it and never be satisfied. This is why we must invest our efforts into eternal life, not into this fleeting life. That is, we must invest our efforts in Torah. When we invest all our efforts in water – meaning in Torah – we will gain both this world and the World to Come, for by the merit of Torah we will arise at the resurrection of the dead. Thus "*go to the water*" means "*go to the Torah.*" This is what we must thirst after, and it is where we must place our efforts, for the Torah is man's entire life, both

in this world and in the World to Come. This is the sense of the expression, "*If you walk in My statutes*." It is Hashem's voice proclaiming: "*Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water.*" We must invest our efforts in the right place, in the study of Torah, not in the futile pursuits of this world, for a person's life on earth is fleeting; the wind passes over it and it is gone (*Psalms 103:15-16*).

A person must realize, however, that when he takes it upon himself to study Torah, he must concentrate his forces on defeating the evil inclination, which constantly fights him and says: "*You already perform numerous mitzvot and you're an honest man! Why do you also have to study Torah?*" To this a person must respond, "*The study of Torah is like a law that cannot be understood [a chuk]. So even if I don't understand it, I still must study.*" By the study of Torah, a person will come to fulfilling mitzvot. Yet if he fails to study, the mitzvot he does will not be fulfilled as they should be, and he will constantly fall into the traps of the evil inclination. Hence the Torah warns us that it is not enough to study without putting an effort into it. We must elevate ourselves in Torah study, for only then will life take a turn for the good. It is like telling someone, "*If you work hard for a few days, both day and night, you will become immensely rich.*" In that case he will completely change. He will not eat, drink, or sleep as before, and all his time will be spent working. He will work well beyond his normal capabilities, and that which seemed strange to him yesterday will seem normal to him today, and even more so tomorrow, as if he were following an immutable law. The same applies to the effort we invest in the study of Torah. Each day we will feel different than the day before, elevating ourselves more and more. We will walk counter to our nature and destructive habits, which is what constitutes: "*If you walk in My statutes*." It means elevating ourselves and investing everything into Torah. We will then receive the bliss that awaits us in the World to Come, as it is written: "*How abundant is Your good that You have stored away for those who fear You*" (*Psalms 31:20*). Now there is nothing "*good*" other than Torah (*Perkei Avoth 6:3*), and thus we will merit the reward described by the Sages: "*In the future world…the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the Shechinah*" (*Berachot 17a*). If we fulfill mitzvot with the greatest degree of love, we will merit the light of understanding them. From here we see that the second part of the verse, "*and keep My commandments*" (which means, according to the view of the Torah, the daily observance of mitzvot), only happens once we have performed the first part of the verse: "*If you walk in My statutes,*" a reference to the study of Torah. In fact studying Torah can be considered as a prerequisite for performing mitzvot.

As a result, the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot require great preparation against the evil inclination. Even before the giving of the Torah, we see that the Children of Israel prepared themselves for 46 days to receive it. In fact they elevated themselves from the 49 gates of impurity towards the 49 gates of purity. Yet in that case, why did they need three extra days of isolation, as Hashem said to Moses: "*You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout*" (*Exodus 19:12*), as well as: "*Be ready after three*

days" (*v.15*)? After all, they had already been prepared for a long time at that point. The answer is that the evil inclination is very powerful when it comes to receiving the Torah, and so a person must prepare himself as much as possible. Thus preparation leads to the goal. This is especially true when the time comes for action, for then the evil inclination is even more powerful and whispers doubts into a person's ears and inflicts terrible hardships upon him. Hence he must prepare himself even more. All this is contained in the words, "*If you walk in My statues,*" a reference to constantly preparing ourselves, walking against our nature, and progressively growing. How can we do this? By reducing to a minimum the pleasures that we seek in this world. This idea is alluded to in the word *im* ("if"), formed by the letters aleph and mem, and having a numerical value of 41. This means that we should add a little more to the 40 days in which the Torah was given, all while preparing ourselves as the Children of Israel did in the desert. This is what walking means – progressively growing – for then we will arrive at: "*If you keep My commandments.*" We must keep the mitzvot; we cannot neglect them. Therein lies the difference between "*walking*" and "*keeping,*" for the diligent study of Torah is a preparation for the performance of mitzvot, resulting in tremendous spiritual growth.

The Goal of Prosperity is Mitzvot Observance

It is written, "*If you walk 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 26:3-4*). Scripture seems to be telling us that the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards man in this world when he observes mitzvot. Therefore how is the teaching in the Gemara fulfilled, namely: "*There is no reward for mitzvot in this world*" (*Kiddushin 39b*)?

We may explain this according to Rashi, who said: "*If you walk in My statutes…. It means that you must toil in the study of Torah; and observe My commandments – you shall toil in the study of Torah in order to observe and fulfill.*" From the fact that the Torah placed the study of Torah before the observance of mitzvot, we learn that it is impossible for a person to fulfill mitzvot unless he puts time into diligently studying the Torah. When one puts an effort into studying Torah, one ends up observing mitzvot. This is why some people observe certain mitzvot but not others, for they fail to put an effort into Torah study and instead they focus all their efforts into this fleeting life. Hence they take pleasure in this life, but not in observing Torah mitzvot. Yet one who puts an effort into learning Torah will find great pleasure in it, as well as in the mitzvot, and he will end up observing them in great detail, for that will be the fruit of his labors.

Going Further and Further in Torah Study

An indication that Torah study enables a person to fulfill all the mitzvot lies in the fact that the word *amal* (arduous study) is composed of the same letters as *ma'al* (using something sacred for a mundane purpose). In other words, one who studies Torah will not

betray it, betrayal consisting of appropriating something that is holy for oneself, for example by appropriating Torah mitzvot by accomplishing some of them while rejecting others, as a person does with something that belongs to him. Yet when someone puts an effort into studying Torah, he fulfills "*If you walk in My statutes*" – like someone who walks with his face turned towards a specific place, and who goes from place to place in order to arrive at his goal without getting tired on his journey, for he knows that he will be able to rest when he reaches his destination. Thus one who studies Torah in this world will not grow tired from all his effort, for he goes further and further in the rungs of Torah. Our Sages have praised the talmidei chachamim by saying, "*Talmidei chachamim have no rest either in this world or in the World to Come*" (*Berachot 64a*). Here Rashi explains that "*if you walk in My statutes*" means going from yeshiva to yeshiva and from Beit HaMidrash to Beit HaMidrash. In fulfilling "*If you walk in My statutes,*" we merit to arrive at "*observe My commandments,*" meaning the fulfillment of all the mitzvot. As for one who concerns himself with this fleeting life, that habit will prevent him from fulfilling the mitzvot of the Torah, which constitute eternal life, for he puts no effort into them.

What our Sages meant by saying, "*The reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:2*) is that when a person fulfills the mitzvah of Torah study, the Holy One, blessed be He, enables him to perform all the mitzvot, and in this way his reward in the World to Come will increase. Thus Rabbeinu Yona Zatzal explained in his commentary on Pirkei Avoth: "*Not that this is the reward, for how could it represent a reward? This is not so, for the reward is in the World to Come. In this world, however, we benefit from the result of the mitzvah, insofar as it helps us to perform other mitzvot. Thus the capital grows in the World to Come.*"

Hashem Gives Generously

How can a person arrive at observing all the mitzvot? It is by studying Torah with the goal of putting it into practice, as Rashi states. The Holy One, blessed be He, also gives abilities to a person in this ephemeral world, enabling him to perform all the mitzvot, easy or difficult. In fact many mitzvot depend upon physical things, mitzvot such as leket, shikcha, peah, masserot, and bikkurim. The Holy One, blessed be He, gives man the study of Torah in order for him to observe and accomplish, for otherwise how can he fulfill mitzvot without material goods?

Hashem gives him all this so he can fulfill them. One who studies Torah merits to fulfill all the mitzvot, and it is therefore fitting for him to receive the possessions of this world, not as a reward, but as a means of performing all the mitzvot. This is what constitutes, "*I will provide your rains in their time*" – "*your rains*" constituting of materiality. The Holy One, blessed be He, gives man material possessions in proportion to what he needs to fulfill mitzvot. Once He opens His storehouse, He gives in abundance, as it is written: "*I will pour out upon you blessing without end*" (*Malachi 3:10*). In other words, a person will receive even more than what he needs to perform mitzvot.

However a person who does not devote himself to Torah study is not given the possessions of this world, for he does not study and therefore cannot fulfill mitzvot. In fact only one who studies Torah has the ability to fulfill all the mitzvot. If a person says before the Celestial Court when he is being judged, "*I was poor and did not have the ability to fulfill mitzvot because of my poverty,*" the Court will tell him: "*You did not have enough sustenance because you did not put enough effort into learning Torah. If you had studied, the Holy One, blessed be He, would have given you enough to perform the mitzvot, for He only gives material goods in order to perform them, and the Sages have said: 'I have acted wickedly and destroyed my livelihood' [Kiddushin 82a]*."

Some may object by saying that there are many wealthy people who do not study Torah. We reply that the Ba'alei HaTosafot have already answered this by saying, "*The Holy One, blessed be He, created three gifts in the world: Wisdom, strength, and riches. Whoever merits one merits them all. When does this occur? When they come through the power of the Torah's wisdom and the fear of Heaven. Otherwise there is no strength or wealth that can help man in any way*" (*Da'at Zekenim 32:1*). Jeremiah said, "*Let the wise man not glorify himself with his wisdom, and let the strong man not glorify himself with his strength, and let the rich man not glorify himself with his wealth. For only in this may one glorify himself – contemplating and knowing Me*" (*Jeremiah 9:22*).

These three abilities, when they do not come from the Holy One, blessed be He, will be to the detriment of the one who possesses them. Our Sages have taught that the verse, "*Riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune*" (*Kohelet 5:12*) applies to Korach (*Sanhedrin 110a*). The Sages also say, "*Two rich men arose in the world, one in Israel and one among the nations of the world – Korach in Israel and Haman among the nations of the world – and both of them were destroyed from the world. Why? Because their gifts were not from the Holy One, blessed be He, but they snatched it for themselves*" (*Bereshith Rabba 22:7*).

Through Torah, the Jewish People are Above Nature

It is written, "*Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand; and your enemies will fall before you by the sword*" (*Vayikra 26:8*). From here we learn that when the Jewish people are connected to Torah and mitzvot, they are granted supernatural power, to the point that five of them can pursue a hundred, and a hundred of them can pursue ten thousand. Yet when they are far from Torah and mitzvot, a single non-Jew can pursue a hundred Jews. Because of our many sins, this occurred in Nazi Germany and Poland, when a single German guarded a hundred Jews without any fear, and when only two Germans guarded an entire camp of Jews, who were paralyzed and had no strength to even raise their arms or heads.

The same thing occurs today: When I walk along the streets of New York City, I see non-Jews looking at us with scorn in their eyes, which has not always been the case. It's a sign that anti-Semitism is increasing from day to day, even with regards

to Israelis. Non-Jews falsely claim that Jews are seizing all the wealth in the United States, and that they control all branches of the financial world.

Yet everyone knows that there are only a few million Jews in the world, whereas there are billions of non-Jews and Jews cannot control the financial world because they comprise an extremely small minority among the wealthy. Therefore why does the entire world accept the lie that Jews are all rich and possess the world's key treasures? Why do they ignore the fact that most of them are really poor and would not have enough to eat if G-d did not have pity on them, that only a small percentage of them are rich, and that those who are rich give generously to tzeddakah? How can non-Jews lie like this, fabricating anti-Semitism by such statements?

When Jews follow G-d's ways, the nations of the world view them with the proper degree of respect and consideration, which brings about a sanctification of G-d's Name. The nations of the world recognize that it is by the merit of Israel that the world endures and receives abundance (*Yerushalmi Gittin, end of ch. 5*). Yet when Jews leave the right path, the nations suddenly get the impression that they are numerous. If a single Jew owns a store, they say that a hundred Jews own stores. If two Jews own stores, they claim that there are two hundred, and one hundred Jewish stores become ten thousand. Thus anti-Semitism is born, for Jews seem to number in the thousands in the eyes of non-Jews, who have the impression that they control the financial world. Jews are therefore punished through the intermediary of the nations.

As a result, when Jews cleave to G-d and His mitzvot, they are above nature. That is, no one can harm them, and a single Jew can pursue a thousand, while a hundred Jews can pursue ten thousand.

If our understanding of this is correct, we may add that when the Jewish people pursue the right path, G-d introduces a supernatural element into nature and raises Jews above it. In fact it is written, "*For even a thousand years in Your eyes are but a bygone yesterday*" (*Tehillim 90:4*), a verse that the Sages interpret as meaning that one of G-d's days is equal to a thousand years (*Sanhedrin 97a*). This is surprising: (*1*) How do things change if G-d's day is equal to one thousand years or more, be it for Him or for us? (*2*) If such indeed is the case, why does G-d's day have to be so long? And if it does have to be so long, why is it limited to a thousand years?

This is what we may say on the subject: The Holy One, blessed be He, divided Creation into six days, and on each day He manifested Himself as the ruler of the world (*Otiyot d'Rabbi Akiva 1*). G-d revealed Himself to all of Creation to show that He is One and that there is no other. He demanded that every person recognize Him as the ruler and sovereign of the world, and each day He derived great satisfaction and pleasure from His work. However G-d foresaw that Adam would sin before Shabbat, which is what happened (*Sanhedrin 38b*), and that he would incur death. How could G-d destroy the world that He had created, and to which He had given the Torah, the goal of all Creation (*Pesachim 68b, Nedarim 32a*)? What would become of the world and the Torah? Who was going to study it?

Under such circumstances, Hashem saw that it was good to lengthen His day to one thousand years. In reality, time has no meaning to G-d. Therefore when we speak of one of His days, it means that the immense pleasure that he received from Creation was equal to what a man would experience if he could live a thousand years, with all his days being filled with pleasure. It is in that sense that G-d's day is like a thousand years to man, for the expression conveys the magnitude of the pleasure that G-d received from Creation (and particularly from the Torah it contained). Even when a man sins, repentance will earn him pleasure equal to a thousand years.

The Gemara evokes this very same idea concerning the verse, "*I am Hashem your G-d*" (*Shemot 20:2*): Every word that came from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, split into 70 languages, an unattainable feat for a mere mortal, and something only possible for G-d (*Shabbat 68b*). The same applies to a day of the Holy One, blessed be He, which although unique, is comparable to a thousand years of a person's life spent in happiness caused by Torah study and mitzvot observance.

To explain this in more depth, we know that there are two mitzvot in the Torah (honoring one's parents and sending a mother bird off before taking her young) about which it is said: "*So that it will be good for you and that you may prolong your days*" (*Devarim 22:7*). Here the Sages have said, " *'So that it will be good for you' means on the day that is wholly good, and 'that you may prolong your days' [means] on the day that is wholly long*" (*Kiddushin 39b, Chullin 142a*). Such is not the case for life in this world, which is short and filled with suffering, and where neither days nor years are prolonged.

What does a prolonging of days in the World to Come mean? If a righteous person departs from this world and two days later Mashiach arrives, his time in the World to Come will have lasted just two days. Is this the meaning of "*prolonging*"? Where is the reward, therefore, that G-d has promised a righteous person in terms of prolonging his days in the World to Come?

According to what we have said, we clearly see that a day of the Holy One, blessed be He, is like a thousand years of experiencing infinite pleasure, like a day that will be extremely long, without limit. Thus when a person is in the World to Come for two days, even if Mashiach were to arrive almost right afterwards, he will have experienced pleasure in the World to Come equivalent to having spent two thousand years enjoying infinite pleasure, along the lines of "*no eye has seen it, G-d, if not You.*" Even if he spends but a few hours in the World of Truth, it will also be satisfying to him and a source of pleasure for many years, for in such a world the feeling of the Holy One's majesty and holiness is so lasting and real that a person has the impression that he is experiencing a pleasure that is absolutely infinite.

In addition, a person's reward in the World to Come is proportional to his work in this world multiplied by more than a hundred, so that it becomes as great as possible. For example, when someone lives 60 or 70 years in this world while studying Torah and performing mitzvot, it is as if he studied 60 or 70 thousand years, of which the

Holy One, blessed be He, rewards him for every instant. Concerning such a reward it is said: "*Mah rav tuvecha [How abundant is Your goodness] that You have stored away for those who fear You*" (*Tehillim 31:20*).

We may explain that man relates to mah (the word adam [man] has the same numerical value as mah [what], and the Tetragrammaton also has that same numerical value when written with additional alephs – *Zohar Ruth 102b*). The Holy One, blessed be He, has reserved a reward for man that can be designated by mah, a reward that he can neither imagine nor describe. If he studies Torah, G-d greatly multiplies his reward, and since the day is divided into hours, minutes, and seconds, how many millions and indeed billions of seconds of infinite pleasure will a man receive in the World to Come! The Sages have clearly said, "*There is no reward for a mitzvah in this world*" (*Kiddushin 39b*), for the Holy One, blessed be He, multiplies the reward for performing a mitzvah in the World to Come.

Reward is therefore above nature and logic, for the Jewish people are also above nature when they occupy themselves with Torah study, mitzvot observance, and walking in the right path. They are then stronger than the nations of the world, and furthermore abundance comes into the world through their merit.

A Taste for Learning Torah

In the Midrash our Sages say, "*If you walk in My statutes [Vayikra 26:3]. This bears on the text, 'I considered my ways and I returned my feet to Your testimonies' [Tehillim 119:59]. David said: 'Sovereign of the universe, every day I used to plan and decide that I would go to a certain place or to a certain dwelling, but my feet always brought me to houses of prayer and houses of study.' Hence it is written, 'I returned my feet to Your testimonies'*" (*Vayikra Rabba 35:1*).

I find it difficult to understand the connection between King David's thoughts and the verse in this week's parsha: "*If you walk in My statutes.*" Let us begin by citing the explanation of our Sages on the verse, "*Man is born to toil*" (*Job 5:7*). They begin by recalling the verse, "*The toiling soul toils for him, for his mouth urges him on*" (*Mishlei 16:26*), and note that as he works in one place, the Torah works for him in another. The Sages then cite Rabbi Elazar as teaching, "*Every man is born for toil, as it is written: 'Man is born for toil.' I still do not know, however, if he was created for the toil of the mouth or for the toil of work. When the verse says, 'his mouth urges him on,' this tells me that he was created for the toil of the mouth. Yet I still do not know if he was created for the toil of Torah or for the toil of [mundane] speech. Yet when it is said, 'This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth' [Joshua 1:8], this tells me that he was created for the toil of Torah*" (*Sanhedrin 99b*).

From here we learn that the more one studies Torah, the more pleasure he finds in it. Likewise the more one immerses himself in the frivolous pursuits of this world, the more pleasure he finds in that as well. Hence we find the fulfillment of all Torah

mitzvot only with one who studies Torah, for that is the fruit of his work. The Sages teach that study leads to practice (*Kiddushin 40b*), and there is no practice that is not preceded by study. Commenting on the phrase, "*and observe My commandments*" (*Vayikra 26:3*), Rashi writes: "*You shall toil in the study of Torah in order to observe and fulfill,*" meaning that because we study Torah, this work will lead to the fulfillment of all mitzvot.

Regularity

We can now understand what the Midrash is saying. King David studied with tremendous intensity, to the point that he was one with Torah and mitzvot. In fact when he wanted to go elsewhere, to a place devoid of Torah, his feet automatically brought him to places of prayer and study because he had studied so much. This is not a reference to his *raglav* ("feet"), but to his *regilut* ("regularity"). The Midrash therefore begins with this verse in order to tell us that the study of Torah leads to the regular performance of mitzvot, for only one who studies regularly can perform them all.

Furthermore, the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards a person who studies Torah measure for measure, meaning a definite reward in the material realm. In this context, the Sages have said that "*the Torah toils for him in another [place]*." Since he has given up toiling in this fleeting world in order to devote himself to learning Torah, he succeeds in fulfilling all mitzvot, something that can only be achieved by a person with enough to live on.

The Effort to Invest in Torah

The Sages tell us that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar lived in a cave for 12 years, and when they emerged they saw a man tilling and sowing. Upon seeing this, they exclaimed: "*They forsake eternal life and engage in temporary life!*" Whatever they cast their eyes upon was immediately burned. On the eve of Shabbat, before sunset, they saw an elderly man holding two bundles of myrtle. "*What are these for?*" they asked. "*They are in honor of Shabbat,*" he replied. "*But shouldn't one be enough?*" they asked. "*One is for Zachor and the other for Shamor,*" he answered. Rabbi Shimon said to his son, "*See how precious the mitzvot are to Israel!*" At that point, their minds were put at ease (*Shabbat 33b*).

This presents a difficulty. Why was Rabbi Elazar's mind not at ease prior to seeing this elderly man? He apparently was afraid of his father's reaction, who once said: "*If a man tills in the tilling season, sows in the sowing season, reaps in the reaping season, threshes in the threshing season, winnows in the season of wind, what will become of the Torah?*" (*Berachot 35b*). Hence when they emerged from a cave and Rabbi Elazar saw people abandoning eternal life for temporary life, he felt resentment and burned them.

However Rabbi Shimon was not of the same opinion. He knew that it is impossible for everyone to study Torah all day long. Yet by sowing and reaping, grain is produced and it becomes possible to say a blessing over it. In fact we fulfill many mitzvot in the

field, such as leket, shikcha, and pe'ah (obligatory gleanings), and the mitzvot of terumot and ma'aserot only result from toiling in the field. When the Children of Israel occupy themselves with the life of this world, they accomplish many mitzvot, and they do not forget what is essential.

Rabbi Elazar said, "*Father! Before, you used to say: 'If a man tills in the tilling season, sows in the sowing season, reaps in the reaping season, threshes in the threshing season, winnows in the season of wind, what will become of the Torah?' Why have you changed your mind, such that you're saying that all this not only concerns tilling and sowing, but is the cause that allows us to fulfill mitzvot?*" When they met the elderly man carrying bundles of myrtle in honor of Shabbat, Rabbi Shimon said to his son Rabbi Elazar: "*My son, if they happily breathe in the scent of myrtle without being commanded to, and if they take two bundles instead of one in honor of Shabbat, then how much more will they fulfill all the other mitzvot that they have been commanded to observe with joy, and not out of habit! You must admit that everything they do in this world is only done in order to fulfill mitzvot, and they will certainly not forget G-d!*"

When Rabbi Elazar heard this, his mind was put at ease.

Bamidbar

Everyone is Included in the Count

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read: "*The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after the exodus from the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take a census of the entire assembly…from 20 years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the army in Israel'* " (*Numbers 1:1-3*). Here Rashi comments, "*Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often: When they left Egypt, He counted them. When [many] fell because of the golden calf, He counted them to know the number of the survivors. When He caused His Shechinah to rest among them, He counted them.*" We begin a new book with this week's parsha, the book of Numbers. From the very start, however, we encounter a subject that needs to be clarified and understood, namely the census of the Children of Israel. The Torah is eternal and addresses every person in each generation. The mitzvot are eternal as well, and the accounts given in the Torah also constitute lessons that apply for all time. For example, Parsha Korach teaches us the lowliness of dissension and what awaits those who provoke it with erroneous arguments and obstinacy, until they themselves are lost.

The census of the Children of Israel occurred at a given point in time, and their numbers were susceptible to change. Today they are a certain number, and tomorrow they are another number. Therefore why did the Holy One, blessed be He, decide to describe this subject in His Torah and bequeath it to every generation? It can only be because the census contains a timeless lesson for all the generations and everyone among us. What is the lesson that we learn from the census of the Children of Israel? We shall soon see. Hashem demands that we focus our efforts in this world on the study of Torah and unity, each being ineffective without the other. This is because we cannot attain the Torah without unity, and the Torah without unity does not lead to a bond with Hashem. Instead, such an approach leads to ruin.

Man was born with the role of "*serving and protecting*" the Torah and cleaving to the Creator. To accomplish this task, he must understand the world through the study of Torah. Just as a person must understand how a car works in order to drive it (otherwise he may be risking his life), and just as he must know how to correct problems as they arise when operating a machine, so too must he realize that there are other people in the world, people who also have a role to play in it. He needs to realize that he must respect, love, and see them as they truly are, namely an integral part of Creation. Above all, a person must realize that within everyone created by Hashem, there exists a soul that is a Divine spark, the spiritual component within man. If a person is content on studying Torah while forsaking the respect he owes to his fellow – and thereby failing to perform the mitzvah, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" – it might be

because he thinks that he is rectifying Creation through his study of Torah. Such an idea is completely mistaken! Far from cleaving to the Creator of the universe, such a person is in fact destroying himself. What he is actually doing is failing to recognize the Divine spark in his fellowman. He is also failing to recognize the Torah and the true purpose of others, which is his way of denying all that is important.

Hence the Creator of the universe gave us, as part of the goal of Creation, the mitzvah: "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Leviticus 19:18*). In other words, you must not only respect your family and circle of friends, but all Jews, those included in the task of "*working and keeping [the garden]*." The goal of this work, namely the study of Torah in unity, must be accomplished by everyone. Therefore at the giving of the Torah we read, "*Israel encamped opposite the mountain*" (*Exodus 19:2*), like a single person with a single heart. This was the only way that the Torah was received, with the Children of Israel standing in the desert and humbling themselves like the dust of the earth, each yielding before the other. It was only then that they could receive the Torah and achieve perfection.

In light of all this, we understand that the Creator of the universe knows all His creations, including their numbers, even those of insects and animals, as well as the number of grains of sand. Everything is counted. That being said, why did Hashem tell Moses to take a census of the Children of Israel? It was in order for them to realize that they cannot live separately, but instead to be counted among the collective, among the group.

Just as people know the number of their children, siblings, and friends, so too did the Holy One, blessed be He, demand unity among the people, that they be aware of one another and help each other before the giving of the Torah. Since the Torah only endures among the humble (*Taanith 7a*), the Children of Israel merited to hear Hashem's words at the giving of the Torah because they nullified themselves and were humble. Now the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of man together have the same numerical value as Torah (*611+2=613*), and they will be illuminated by the Divine spark found within each person.

This also explains the expressions found at the beginning of this week's parsha. The expression, "*The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai*" means that we must nullify ourselves before others, and in so doing we will merit a connection to Hashem. This will be like the giving of the Torah, when Israel encamped opposite the mountain, which represents the evil inclination (*see Sukkah 52a*). This alludes to a person rising up like a mountain and separating a person from his fellow, from the Creator of the universe, and from His Torah. The Children of Israel fought, encamped before the mountain, and humbled themselves. Thus by the power of unity and mutual love, we can fight the evil inclination and overcome it.

The expression, "*In the Tent of Meeting*" alludes to the present world, which a person must "*work and keep*." Everyone was created starting from one man, and therefore no one can say that he cannot love his fellow. Everyone descends from the first man, which is why we must be united.

The expression, "*On the first of the second month*" means that if a person wants to work for the Jewish community and see to its needs without exception, he can only succeed if he humbles himself before people ("the second"), meaning that he does not place himself before others. It is during the *chodesh* (month), a sign that he must constantly *l'chadesh* (renew) his love for others. He will then see himself as being second, meaning as secondary with regards to others, and this will lead to a connection between Hashem, the Torah, and Israel, which are one. The expression, "*The second shana [year]*" alludes to the fact that we must never *leshanot* (change) our feelings with regards to others, meaning that we must always love them. By being secondary to others, and by everyone fulfilling the mitzvah, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself,*" we will fulfill the goal of the exodus from Egypt.

From here we see that unity and love for others is of the utmost importance. If a person harms his primary bond with others, he also harms the Divine spark that he carries within himself. He will no longer be connected to Hashem, Who can no longer help him in any way. That being the case, what can we say? We must obviously love others like ourselves, for then we will be truly connected to the Holy One, blessed be He, at each hour and every instant. May Hashem help us to achieve this. Amen, may it be so.

Completely Nullifying Yourself to Obtain the Torah

The Shulchan Aruch teaches: "*We always read Parsha Bamidbar Sinai before Atzeret [Shavuot]*" (*Orach Chaim 428:4*). We need to understand why the Sages decreed that Parsha Bamidbar must be read before Shavuot. We also need to understand the connection that exists between the parsha and the festival.

We may explain this according to what is said in the Midrash: "*The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai [Numbers 1:1]. Why in the desert of Sinai? Our Sages have inferred from this that the Torah was given to the accompaniment of three things: Fire, water, and desert*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 1:7*).

It is possible that by saying this, the Sages wanted to teach us that it is only through the Torah, which contains these three elements, that a person can preserve what he has studied and defeat the evil inclination that seeks to control him each day. This is because the Sages have said, "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote. If you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). We also read, "*David said: Do not let my legs go where they want, but rather towards Your Torah*" (*Midrash Tehillim 119*) – all day long in the Beit Midrash, where the evil inclination does not enter. It will accompany a person all the way to the Beit Midrash, but upon reaching it, the evil inclination has no authority to enter.

Now since the evil inclination is made of fire – as it is said: "*The flaming fire His attendants*" (*Psalms 104:4*) – a person can only resist it through the power of the Torah, which is compared to fire, as it is said: "*Is My word not like a fire, says the L-RD*"

(*Jeremiah 23:29*). The evil inclination is like a small fire that can be extinguished by just about anything, and the Torah is a great fire that can never go out, as it is written: "*Its flashes are flashes of fire, a great flame. Many waters cannot quench love*" (*Song of Songs 8:6-7*). When a person is faced with a small fire, but has no water to extinguish it and fears that it will spread, what does he do? He places it within another fire, at which point it disappears. Likewise the fire of the evil inclination disappears within the fire of the Torah.

In order for a person not to grow proud because of the fire of the Torah, he must humble himself and resemble water. Just as water moves from higher to lower ground, a talmid chacham must conduct himself with humility. The Torah only endures among the humble, who are comparable to water, for it moves from higher ground to lower ground (*Taanith 7a*). When a person conducts himself with humility, the evil inclination will be unable to infuse him with pride. Since he achieves humility, it leads him to completely nullify himself to serve G-d, like a desert. Such a person, who nullifies himself for the words of the Torah, is therefore compared to a desert. He never complains about G-d's ways, in accordance with the statement of the Sages: "*It is incumbent on a man to bless [G-d] for the evil in the same way as for the good…even if He takes your soul*" (*Berachot 54a*). Thus King David said, "*All my bones will say, 'O L-RD, who is like You?'*" (*Psalms 35:10*), which teaches us that he annulled each of his bones for the Holy One, blessed be He, by doing all that He commanded him.

Hence the Sages instituted the reading of Parsha Bamidbar next to the festival of Shavuot. It reminds a person that the Torah will only endure when he makes himself into a desert for carrying out G-d's will, like a slave who is entirely subservient to his master and does everything he commands him. We find something similar in Parsha Para and Parsha HaChodesh, which we read before Passover so as to remind ourselves for prepare for it (*Rashi, Megillah 29a*). We also read in the Midrash, "*Why do we read Ruth during Shavuot? Because the Torah was only given through suffering and poverty*" (*Ruth, Zutah 1*). Now Ruth, who was the daughter of Moab's king (*Nazir 23b*), completely annulled herself for the Torah and mitzvot. Hence she merited to have King David as a descendant.

Even in the desert, the Children of Israel only merited to receive the Torah when they annulled themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, and announced: "*All that the L-RD has said, we will do and we will obey*" (*Exodus 24:7*). This means that they completely humbled themselves before the words of Hashem, having the desire to do everything that He would command them. Because they attained a very high spiritual level at that point – since the evil inclination had been ripped from their hearts (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:15*) – Hashem was concerned lest they succumb to pride. He therefore said to them, "*Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely die. A hand shall not touch it, for he shall surely be stoned or thrown down. Whether animal or person, he shall not live*" (*Exodus 19:12-13*). Since they did not approach the mountain and they stood at a distance, they did not arrive at pride, and they all immediately devoted themselves to Hashem.

We need to understand why they were told, "*Whether animal or person, he shall not live.*" If a Jew, who had sanctified and purified himself for three days prior to receiving the Torah, had been told not to touch the mountain, then how much more was it forbidden for an animal, which was not sanctified, to touch the mountain!

However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of Israel: If you transgress – if you come closer to the mountain and touch it – you will end up becoming proud. Therefore even if you possess Torah, you will be like animals, as the Sages said regarding Doeg: He was great in Torah, being able to weigh every reason logically in the Torah, and he counted 300 fixed laws "*on a tower flying in the air*" (*Sanhedrin 106b*). Nevertheless, because he failed to completely control himself in the area of Lashon Harah, he did not leave this world without having forgotten his studies. At his death, three angels of destruction came to him: One caused him to forget his learning, one burned his soul, and a third scattered his ashes to synagogues and schoolhouses.

Preparing for Shavuot

In the order of the Torah's parshiot, we always read Parsha Bamidbar before Shavuot (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 428:4*). We need to understand why the Sages have instituted this order in the reading, as well as what the connection is between Parsha Bamidbar and Shavuot.

I would like to explain this according to the statement of the Sages on the verse, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai*" (*Bamidbar 1:1*). The Midrash states, "*Our Sages have inferred from this that the Torah was given to the accompaniment of three things: Fire, water, and desert*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 1:7*). It may be that by this teaching, the Sages wanted to show man that he can only safeguard his learning and resist the evil inclination, which seeks to control him every day, by means of the Torah which possesses these three characteristics. As our Sages have said, "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). In other words: If you study Torah, you will not be delivered into its hands; otherwise you will be.

The Sages have also taught that David said, "*Do not let my feet go where they want to, but towards Your Torah all day long in the Beit HaMidrash*" (*Midrash Tehillim 119*), for the evil inclination does not enter the Beit HaMidrash. It accompanies man wherever he goes, but when it comes to the Beit HaMidrash, it has no right to enter.

Since the evil inclination is made of fire, as it is written: "*He makes…the flaming fire His attendants*" (*Tehillim 104:4*), a person can only resist it by the power of Torah, which is compared to fire: "*My word is like fire, the word of Hashem*" (*Jeremiah 23:29*). The evil inclination is like a small fire that anything can extinguish, and the Torah is a blazing fire that never goes out, as it is written: "*Its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of G-d. Many waters cannot extinguish the love*" (*Shir HaShirim 8:6-7*). What does a person do when he has a small fire that he is afraid will spread, but lacks water to extinguish

it? He throws it into a blazing fire, where it will be consumed. Thus the fire of the evil inclination is consumed by the fire of the Torah.

In order for a person not to grow proud on account of the fire of the Torah, he must humble himself and resemble water. Just as water always flows from a higher to a lower place, a talmid chacham must conduct himself with humility. The Torah only endures with the humble who are like water, who descend towards a lower place (*Taanith 7a*). From the fact that they conduct themselves with humility, the evil inclination cannot instill pride in them. When we attain humility, this leads to annulling oneself in the service of Hashem like a desert, as Moshe did when he separated himself from his wife because he spoke with the Shechinah at all times: "*He did not deal with his own affairs, but with those of Israel*" (*Tanchuma 96:13*).

When a person frees himself for the sake of learning Torah, and when he resembles a desert, he will never blame Hashem for anything. Thus the Sages have said that a man must say a blessing over evil just as he says a blessing over good, even if his life is taken (*Berachot 54a*). King David said, "*All my bones will say, 'Hashem, who is like You?'*" (*Tehillim 35:10*), which teaches us that he devoted all his bones to Hashem by doing everything that He commanded him.

They Elevated Themselves to a Very High Level

This is why the Sages instituted the reading of Parsha Bamidbar close to the festival of the giving of the Torah. It is in order to remind man that the Torah only endures in him when he makes himself into a desert for G-d's will, like a slave who annuls himself before his master and does everything that he commands.

We find other things similar to this, for the Sages instituted the reading of Parshat Parah and Parshat HaChodesh before Passover in order to remind us to prepare for the festival of Passover (*Rashi, Megillah 29a*). We find this mentioned in the Midrash: "*Why do we read the scroll of Ruth on Shavuot, which is the giving of the Torah? In order to teach us that the Torah was only given through hardship and poverty, and Ruth – who was the daughter of the king of Moab – devoted herself to Torah and mitzvot, which is why she merited for King David to descend from her*" (*Ruth Zutah 1*).

The Children of Israel also merited to receive the Torah in the desert after having completely freed themselves for Hashem. They said, "*Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear*" (*Shemot 24:7*), which teaches us that they completely annulled themselves before G-d's words and wanted to do everything He commanded. In fact they elevated themselves to a very high level at that point (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:15*), and the evil inclination was removed from their hearts. The Holy One, blessed be He, feared that they would become proud, which is why He said: "*Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge. Whoever touches the mountain will surely die. A hand shall not touch it, for he shall surely be stoned or thrown down, whether animal or man*" (*Shemot 19:12-13*). Since they did not approach the mountain, but stood far from it, they did not become proud, and they immediately devoted themselves to Hashem.

Like an Animal

We need to understand why they were told, "*animal or man.*" We can logically infer that if the Children of Israel, who devoted and purified themselves for three days before the giving of the Torah, were not to touch the mountain, then how much more was an animal, which is not sanctified, not to touch the mountain!

However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of Israel: If you transgress – if you approach the mountain and touch it – you will become proud; and if you become proud, even if you possess Torah, you will be like an animal. Thus our Sages said with regards to Doeg, "*Where is he who enumerated all the letters of the Torah? Where is he who weighed all the light and heavy [precepts] of the Torah? Where is he who counted the towers – who counted 300 fixed laws on a tower flying in the air?*" (*Sanhedrin 106b*). Nevertheless, because he spoke Lashon Harah, Doeg did not leave the world before having forgotten what he had learned. When he died, three angels of destruction came: One made him forget everything he had learned, another burned his soul, and a third spread his ashes among synagogues and houses of study.

Who Can Weigh the Importance of Mitzvot?

In the order of the Torah reading on Shabbat, we always read Parsha Bamidbar before the festival of Sukkot, as the Shulchan Aruch states (*Orach Chaim 428:4*). We need to understand the reason for this decision by our Sages, for what connection is there between Parsha Bamidbar and Sukkot?

Sefer Bamidbar begins with the verse, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt, saying….*" A question naturally arises: Why does the verse specify where and when Hashem spoke to Moshe, which is not the case anywhere else? I would like to explain this according to what Rabbeinu Bechaye says in his introduction to the parsha: "*All the deeds of man are weighed, and G-d evaluates all sins, the gravest as well as the lightest, punishing in measure to the gravity of the sin. G-d does not forget, and the judgment belongs to Him. Man cannot know it, for his intelligence is not so great as to understand how Hashem weighs the deeds of the righteous and the wicked.*"

Along the same lines, the Rambam writes: "*Someone whose sins are more numerous than his merits will die because of his wickedness…. Likewise a country which has a multitude of sins will be destroyed as a result…. Similarly, if the sins of the entire world were more than its merits, it would then become corrupt.... This measuring system does not work on a one-to-one basis, as there are some merits that outweigh many sins…. On the other hand, there are some sins that outweigh many merits…. Only G-d knows how to evaluate sins and merits in this respect*" (*Hilchot Teshuvah 3:2*).

Commensurate with the Effort

There is no man in the world who knows the reward given for observing mitzvot, as the Mishnah teaches: "*Be as careful for a minor mitzvah as for a major one, for you*

do not know the reward given for the mitzvot" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:1*). There is nobody in the world who can properly weigh mitzvot in regards to sins. Only Hashem can do so. It depends solely on the difficulty that a person experiences when he performs a mitzvah, something that only Hashem knows.

There may be a rich man who gives 1,000 gold coins to tzeddakah, and a poor man who gives but a single penny, and yet the offering of the poor may be more valuable to G-d than that of the rich. How so? It is because the poor man gave with all his heart, whereas the rich man did not. In this regard the Sages have said, "*Commensurate with the effort is the reward*" (*Pirkei Avoth 5:21*).

Devoted to the Torah

The Sages have taught, "*Rabbi Papa said to Abaye: 'How is it that miracles were performed for former generations, yet miracles are not performed for us? It cannot be because of their [superiority in] study, for in the days of Rav Yehudah all of their studies were confined to order Nezikin, whereas we study all six orders, and when Rav Yehudah came [to the law] in Uktzin: "If a woman presses vegetables in a pot*" (*or, according to others, "olives pressed with their leaves are clean*"), he used to say: "*I see all the difficulties of Rav and Shemuel here.*" We have 13 versions of Uktzin, and yet when Rav Yehudah drew off one shoe, rain used to fall, whereas we torment ourselves and cry loudly, and no notice is taken of us!' He replied, 'The former generations were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of the Name; we do not sacrifice our lives for the sanctity of the Name.' There was the case of Rav Adda bar Ahava, who saw a heathen woman wearing an [immodest] red head-dress in the street. Thinking that she was a Jewish woman, he arose and tore it from her. It turned out that she was a heathen woman, and they fined him 400 zuz" (*Berachot 20a*).

From here we learn that although the later generations learned more Torah, yet because they did not study it with complete devotion, the Torah of the previous generations was valued more by Hashem, even if it comprised fewer things.

Before the Giving of the Torah

This is why the Torah goes into detail in Parsha Bamidbar, which as we know is always read before the festival of Sukkot. This teaches us that just as the verse detailed things that it could have summarized with two or three words, every other instance of "*vayedaber*" in the Torah also comprises many things that are not explicitly stated. Insofar as the performance of the 613 mitzvot is concerned, we must also draw a practical lesson from this: Even if they seem to be easy mitzvot, we must realize that they comprise many things that have not been explained, things that man cannot see with his physical eyes. The Torah revealed this to us before the giving of the Torah, so that man may know that before taking the yoke of the Torah and mitzvot upon himself, there are many rewards for observing mitzvot that he cannot possibly even imagine. Some mitzvot appear easy but their reward is immense, whereas others appear difficult but their reward is less. It does not depend on whether the mitzvah is easy or difficult, for they are not evaluated according to human criteria. Rather, it is Hashem alone Who knows how to weigh mitzvot and sins.

The Order of the World

It is written, "*The Children of Israel shall encamp, every man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting*" (*Bamidbar 2:2*).

In the Midrash our Sages say, "*Holy and great were the Children of Israel beneath their banners. All the nations looked at them with rapt attention and wonder, telling them: 'Cleave to us, come to us, and we will make you leaders, nobles, and priests.' The Children of Israel replied, 'What greatness could you confer upon us? Could you confer upon us anything like the greatness which G-d conferred upon us in the desert by giving us the banner of the camp of Judah, the banner of the camp of Reuven, the banner of the camp of Ephraim, the banner of the camp of Dan? Can you, perhaps, confer upon us anything like the greatness which G-d conferred upon us in the wilderness? For although we repeatedly sinned, He pardoned us again and again, assuring us: "Your camp shall be holy*" [Devarim 23:15].' The wicked Bilam also looked at them and gazed out upon them, but could not touch them, as it is said: 'Bilam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling by tribe' [Bamidbar 24:2]. He said, 'Who can touch these men, each of whom dwells under his own banner?' " (*Tanchuma, Bamidbar 11*).

We need to understand the response given by the Children of Israel: "*Can you, perhaps, confer upon us anything like the greatness which G-d conferred upon us in the wilderness?*" Why is forgiveness of sin mentioned here?

We shall attempt to explain this according to the teaching of the Maharal (*Netivot Olam 1*), who states that the holy Torah represents the true order of man [seder ha-adam], the way in which he must act, and what all his actions must adhere to. Just as the Torah is the order of man, it is also the order of the world [seder ha-olam], the order of everything that exists. This is what we read in the Midrash, namely that Holy One, blessed be He, consulted the Torah and created the world (*Bereshith Rabba 1:1*). In regards to this, our Sages have said: "*If [a man] feels pains in his head, let him engage in the study of Torah*" (*Eruvin 54a*). This is because when a man experiences physical discomfort, it indicates that he has disturbed the internal order that he should possess. Hence he must study Torah, which is the order of the world. As a result, the proper physical order of his body, which is his health, will automatically return.

Sin Has No Part in the Order of the World

Thus because Jews study Torah, they participate in the order of the world. Along the same lines, the Sages have said: "*Whoever studies Torah laws each day is assured of life in the World to Come, for it is said: 'Halichot [the ways of] the world are his' [Habakkuk 3:6]. Do not read halichot, but halachot [Torah laws]*" (*Niddah 73a*). From here it follows that Torah laws, halachot, are the ways that every Jew must follow. When Jews study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, they enter into what is the order of the world, and when they do not study Torah, they have no part in the order of the world.

This is why the other nations were jealous of the Children of Israel. When they saw them encamping beneath their banners in an unparalleled way, they immediately wanted to take their Torah from them – even if it meant turning the Children of Israel into nobles – just as long as they abandoned their Torah. However Israel is a holy nation. Whatever greatness they are given in this world, it counts for nothing in regards to that greatness. In fact when we find ourselves in this order, we are not attacked by either illness or ferocious animals, and furthermore the cloud goes before us, lowering mountains and raising valley before us (*Pesikta Rabbati 31*). It surrounds us like a walled city is surrounded by ramparts, and nothing in the world can attack us (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 42a*). Furthermore, the cloud provides us with everything we need, washing and ironing our clothes, and we have no need to do anything (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 4:24*).

Why does all this happen?

It is because of the holy Torah, which we study and which is the order of the world, as well as the order of our body and the order of our soul. As a result, we do not come to sin, for sin has no part in the order of the world. That is why the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives our sins when we study Torah.

The Praise of the Children of Israel

The Torah only endures with someone if he is organized in his learning, as the Sages have said: "*If you see a student whose studies are as hard [to learn] as iron, it is because he has failed to systematize his studies. ... Resh Lakish made it his practice to repeat in systematic order his studies 40 times, corresponding to the 40 days during which the Torah was given, and only then would he come before Rabbi Yochanan. Rabbi Ada bar Ahava made it his practice to repeat in systematic order his studies 24 times, corresponding to the [24 books of] the Torah, Prophets and Writings, and only then would he come before Rava*" (*Taanith 7b-8a*).

Along the same lines, the Sages have said in regards to prayer: "*A man must always prepare himself first for his prayer, and then say it*" (*Rosh Hashanah 35a*). This is why the holy Ark went before the Children of Israel, to teach us that the holy Torah is the order of the world, be it in the spiritual or physical realms, and that the entire order of the tribes and banners only had power when the Torah was leading the way.

Generally speaking, the nations of the world were jealous of the banners of Israel because the holy Torah is the order of the world, and whoever cleaves to the Torah becomes part of the order of the world. Nothing harmful can then touch them, for evil is outside the order of the world. Furthermore, when Jews study Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives their sins, for sin is also outside the order of the world. When the nations saw that the Children of Israel encamped beneath their banners in an unparalleled way, they became jealous and wanted to take this away from them. Hence they told the Children of Israel, "*We will make you leaders, nobles, and priests*" – all because the nations of the world wanted to destroy that order.

It is for this reason that the Children of Israel are praised by Scripture itself, as it is said: "*Every man by his banner according to the banners of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting.*"

Hashem's Love for Israel

It is written, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by number of the names, every male according to their head count'*" (*Bamidbar 1:1-2*).

These verses open Sefer Bamidbar, which begins with a description of the journeys of the Children of Israel during their 40 years in the desert. We need to understand why the above passage specifies that the Creator's revelation to Moshe took place in the desert of Sinai. After all, it is obvious that Hashem revealed Himself there! Furthermore, what does the text mean by specifying that this revelation took place in the Tent of Meeting?

Our Sages have examined these questions in the Midrash, where they say: "*Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains [Tehillim 36:7]. The righteousness which You bestow upon the world is as visible as the mountains. Your judgments are like the great deep [ibid.]. That is, the judgments which You execute within the world are like the great deep: Just as the deep is concealed, likewise the judgment which You bring upon men is concealed. How so? The destruction of Jerusalem actually took place on the 9th of Av, but to Ezekiel it was shown as being on the 20th of the month. Why so? In order not to make the actual day of destruction widely known. However when He is about to make Israel great, He explicitly states the place, the day, the month, the year, the era, namely: After their exodus from the land of Egypt, saying…*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 1:1*).

He Counted Them Out of Love

Yet what greatness was there here, such that the passage had to describe it in such a detailed way?

To understand this, we must turn to Rashi: "*Because they were precious to Him, He counted them often. When they left Egypt, He counted them. When [many] fell because of the golden calf, He counted them to know the number of the survivors. When He caused His Shechinah to rest among them, He counted them.*"

This means that the act of counting them, even if there is a reason for it (such as to record how many of them remained) is proof of G-d's great love for them. We must add that when they left Egypt, when He counted them for the first time, it is possible that there was a reason for it, namely to record how many of them had left Egypt. Likewise after the sin of the golden calf, when He counted them, it is possible that there was a reason for it as well, namely to record how many of them remained. Yet here, when He counted them, what reason could there have been for it?

As a result, it was only due to Hashem's love for Israel that He counted them each time. Thus the census that took place after the exodus from Egypt, as well as the census that occurred after the sin of the golden calf, took place for no reason other than Hashem's love for them. This is similar to a situation in which a person greatly cherishes an object, and looks for a reason to examine it, to use it and show it to everyone. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to count the Children of Israel out of His love for them, which is why He sought every opportunity to do so.

Furthermore, because of Hashem's love for them, the census is described in great detail.

The World was Created for Me

In the Midrash, the Sages explain that the goal of the census was to declare that for Hashem, every Jew is a world unto himself. It is like a man who has diamonds and goes about counting them. Imagine someone telling him, "*You have so many diamonds! Perhaps you would like to give me one?*" This would be a foolish request, for although he indeed possesses many diamonds, each of them is worth a fortune. If such is the case for simple jewels, how much more does it apply to the Jewish people! Although they number 600,000, each of them is worthy of having had the world created for his sake. Each Jew can maintain its existence by the breath of his mouth. Despite being numerous, each of them is very special!

This is the love that G-d has for Israel. "*You are the children of Hashem your G-d.*" Each of them is as important as a son is to his father. Even if a man has ten sons, each of them is dear to him, and he will suffer when any son suffers and rejoice when any son rejoices, as if he were his only son.

We know what the Sages have said, namely: "*Whoever destroys a single Jewish soul, Scripture considers him to have destroyed an entire world, and whoever preserves a single Jewish soul, Scripture considers him to have saved an entire world. ... Therefore every single person is obliged to say: 'The world was created for me'*" (*Sanhedrin 37a*).

This means that every Jew is a world unto himself, a miniature universe. This is something that he must realize and that he must say: The world was created for me! This obligation is incumbent upon everyone!

The War Against the Evil Inclination

Above all, we must add that in the census which the Children of Israel were ordered to undertake, only those above the age of 20 years were counted: "*From 20 years old and up, all who are able to go forth to war in Israel.*" We may explain the reason as being that, as we know, a person is not liable for punishment until the age of 20 years, as it is written concerning Sarah: "*At the age of 100, she was as a woman of 20 in regards to sin*" (*Rashi on Bereshith 23:1*).

As a result, the only men counted were those who were liable for punishment. This is what constitutes "*all who are able to go forth to war*" – he who goes out to wage war against the evil inclination. He can emerge victorious from this war by dominating

the evil inclination, and he can even acquire great spoils, an enormous and wonderful reward in the World to Come. On the other hand, he risks falling and being punished.

This can be understood according to what we have said, which is that the main reason for the census was to demonstrate Hashem's love for the Children of Israel, since it was for their sake that the world was created. When is this love primarily demonstrated? When we do His will, for that leads to His love, and we thereby fulfill the lofty goal for which we were created. It is for this reason that the Children of Israel were counted precisely starting from the age of 20, the time when they begin to serve the King, when they do His will by fighting against the evil inclination, which is the Satan, the Angel of Death that seeks to make them stumble.

Since we are now at the time just before the giving of the Torah, the most fitting moment during the counting of the Omer – the time when we prepare to receive the Torah – we must possess this understanding, which will change our entire acceptance of the Torah. From now on, it is not an acceptance solely as part of the community, but a personal acceptance as well.

Each of us truly merits for the world to have been created for ourselves. Hence each of us, when standing at the time of the giving of the Torah, is a world unto himself. Each of us is one, unique and special, whom the Creator sent into this world because He believes in our ability to fulfill mitzvot and carry out His will. There can be no greater demonstration of love than this.

Furthermore, if we are intelligent enough to understand that others are at the same elevated level as ourselves, since they too are worthy for the entire world to have been created for them, we must also demonstrate respect for others and take their advice into consideration, since they are the sons of the King, created in the image of G-d. In this way, we will succeed in rectifying the sin of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, who lacked respect for one another, and in this way will hasten the arrival of Mashiach, who as we know will only come as a result of baseless love.

The Greatness of Nadav and Avihu

The verse states, "*Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered an alien fire before Hashem in the desert of Sinai, and they had no children. And Elazar and Itamar ministered during the lifetime of Aaron their father*" (*Bamidbar 3:4*).

This verse mentions two things in regards to Nadav and Avihu, one being that they died because they brought an alien fire, and the other being that they had no children. We must explain why these two things are juxtaposed.

Sforno explains, quite simply, that they died for not having had children, which is why Elazar and Itamar received the priesthood. If they would have had sons, the latter would have become kohanim after their deaths. Thus the verse is speaking about one and the same thing.

To me, the verse seems to be teaching us about the greatness of Nadav and Avihu. They were so great that the priesthood was given to them as a heritage, and they could

have transmitted it to their sons after them, not to Elazar and Itamar. Nevertheless, since they offered an alien fire, they died before Hashem and the priesthood was taken from them, the reason being that "*I shall be sanctified among the Children of Israel*" (*Vayikra 22:32*). As Moshe said to Aaron, "*By those who are near Me will I be sanctified*" (*Bamidbar 10:3*), because the Holy One, blessed be He, is stringent with the tzaddikim, holding them to account for the slightest error.

We Are Always Counted Before G-d

It is written, "*Hashem spoke to Moshe…. Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel*" (*Bamidbar 1:1-2*).

Rashi cites our Sages (*Midrash Aggadah*) in stating, "*Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often. When they left Egypt, He counted them. When [many] fell on account of the golden calf, He counted them to determine the number of survivors. When He came to make His Shechinah dwell among them, He counted them. On the first of Nissan the Sanctuary was erected, and on the first of Iyar He counted them.*"

The author of Shiurei Torah is surprised by Rashi's statement: How can we attribute such an attitude to G-d, an attitude which – although common in man – consists of constantly counting what we value? How can we assert that He also constantly counts the Children of Israel out of love? In fact we regularly count what is valuable to us in order to accurately determine its quantity. However does Hashem, for Whom nothing is a mystery, really need a census for this?

Sometimes, when clarity of mind is lacking, men count their possessions even when they already know how much they have! They do this in order to assure themselves that their possessions are indeed intact, and to remove all doubts from their mind. Yet can G-d have doubts?

Let us try and explain this concept. It is certainly impossible to compare the "*counting*" carried out by the Creator to that done by a human being. This is because, as we already stated, nothing is hidden from Him. He alone probes the heart and mind, searching all that is stirring within each of us. Indeed, "*He counts the number of the stars, to all of them He assigns names…. His understanding is beyond reckoning…. He gives to an animal its food, to the young ravens that cry out*" (*Tehillim 147:4-9*). Since He knows the exact number of animals, then He certainly knows the number of His children, human beings, and doesn't need a census.

Nevertheless, He constantly counts them out of love. Why? In order for men to realize that G-d counts [i.e., evaluates] them in every circumstance. When we do wrong, Hashem probes deep inside and takes an accounting of us in order to decide what punishment to inflict, be it severe or light. He may even conduct a more in-depth accounting that considers details that only Hashem knows, details that our meager intellect cannot grasp.

Likewise, when we climb to a higher spiritual level, G-d counts us and judges us lovingly and carefully in order to make His holy presence dwell within us. In this way, we will merit all the good reserved for us in the World to Come, near G-d.

"*Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often*" – Hashem loves us when we hoist ourselves up, and even when we stumble and adopt shameful ways. In fact it is said, "*For Hashem admonishes the one He loves*" (*Mishlei 3:12*). Now we are His children, and in this regard we may cite the verse: "*Know in your heart that just as a father chastises his son, so Hashem your G-d chastises you*" (*Devarim 8:5*).

We must internalize the fact that even when we diminish in Torah, even when we sin, we are counted by G-d, which is why we are sometimes punished by Him. If we improve ourselves in performing mitzvot and learning Torah, we will also be counted. As a result, we must devote ourselves to constantly examining our ways and scrutinizing our deeds in order not to be counted at a time of spiritual decline, but rather in a state of spiritual elevation.

This is why the verse states, "*Take a census,*" which in Hebrew is *Se'u et-rosh* (literally, "Raise the head"). We are advised to constantly be in the process of elevation ("head" being a term for "elevation"), thus being counted for good and for blessing in order to become a receptacle for G-d's kindnesses. We will be punished in the opposite case, and even if we do not immediately understand why, G-d alone holds all secrets, for all His deeds are just.

The words of the Midrash now seem clearer: "*Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often*" – meaning both at a time of spiritual elevation and well as spiritual decline. When they left Egypt, He counted them while they were immersed in the 49 degrees of impurity, before being delivered. Nevertheless, G-d counted them out of His love for them, using the attribute of mercy rather than the attribute of justice to liberate them from the crucible of Egypt.

Likewise, He counted them when they made the golden calf, in order to identify and punish those who had committed this sin, as it is written: "*I, Hashem, plumb the heart and test the innermost thoughts, to give a man according to his ways, the fruit of his deeds*" (*Jeremiah 17:10*). This applies in their moment of weakness, thereby making them understand that He is punishing them because they abandoned the source of living waters in order to dig broken cisterns.

Finally, He counted them when the Sanctuary was being erected, when He desired to make His Shechinah dwell among them, as it is written: "*Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them*" (*Shemot 25:8*). The goal of this census was to prepare them for attaining the ideal state, for they could only receive the Shechinah in a state described by the verse, "*The wise will shine like the radiance of the firmament*" (*Daniel 12:3*).

Thus each person must realize and understand that he is counted at every instant, be it in a state of spiritual elevation or, in the opposite case, a state of spiritual decline.

Hashem looks on from above and evaluates the deeds of man in order to decide if they tilt towards good or evil. Thus a person's actions are weighed and can render him worthy, or they can render him unworthy (through a judgment or in-depth judgment). Even minor deeds, whose value we fail to grasp, are not overlooked by the Throne of Glory, and Hashem knows how "*to give a man according to his ways, the fruit of his deeds.*" Furthermore, even good thoughts are taken into account and rewarded during a more in-depth judgment, as was the case for Jacob, in regards to whom it is said: "*G-d answers the righteous according to his way.*"

Whatever is Numbered Cannot be Annulled

It is written, "*Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' household*" (*Bamidbar 1:2*).

This week's parsha goes into great detail concerning the census of the Children of Israel as it describes their numbers. Since we are aware that the Torah as a whole exists only to guide our steps and show us the path to follow, we need to learn the lessons contained in the census of the Children of Israel and understand why the Torah counts each tribe separately, not mentioning the number of all the tribes combined. Clearly, G-d counted the Children of Israel in order to bestow importance upon each of them, to express His love for them, and to make all of them realize that each person is deeply loved by Hashem as His cherished child, as the verse states: "*Israel is My firstborn son*" (*Shemot 4:22*). The Children of Israel are extremely precious to G-d, Who considers them His children, as it is written: "*You are the children of Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 14:1*). It is therefore out of love that Hashem counted them. Thus He counted the members of each tribe separately to demonstrate that He considers each of them as His only son, as if it were the only tribe that exists and there were no others. As mentioned in the laws regarding permitted and forbidden, "*Whatever is numbered…cannot be annulled*" [see Zevachim 73a], for it consists of something precious and important. Likewise G-d counted the Children of Israel because He loves and cherishes them.

Hence this is the lesson we derive from the census of the Children of Israel: Just as Hashem showers His children with love by numbering them, likewise we must learn to love others with all our soul and all our strength. The Torah commands, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Vayikra 19:18*), meaning that we must be concerned with the needs of others and be very careful not to harm them, as it is said: "*Let the honor of your fellow be as dear to you as your own*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:10*). G-d cherishes us, and we must emulate Him by valuing and respecting others.

To the question, "*How can I reach such a high spiritual level?*" the answer is: Bamidbar (*"In the desert"*). By considering ourselves as a desert – a place trampled on by the feet of everyone – and by fleeing from pride, we can more easily honor and respect others. We have already mentioned the fact that whoever yearns for Torah must make himself like a desert, just as our Sages teach concerning the verse, "*From the desert*

to Mattanah" (*Bamidbar 21:18*): "*If a man allows himself to be treated as a desert, upon which everybody treads, the Torah is given to him as a gift*" (*Eruvin 54a*). This means that the Torah will be given as a gift (*mattanah*) to anyone who considers himself as a desert. The same applies here: In order to adopt an exemplary approach in our relationship with others, we must consider ourselves as a desert and act with humility. Indeed, how can an arrogant person – someone who thinks that the world was created just for him – possibly be conciliatory and also give to others? On the other hand, a person who likens himself to a desert and acts with modesty will clearly be mindful of others, and consequently he will respect, honor, and value them.

This is why the census of the Children of Israel is mentioned in Parsha Bamidbar. It teaches us that to attain this degree of love for others, and to fulfill the commandment to love every Jew as ourselves, we are obligated to consider ourselves as a desert, meaning something abandoned, and we must adopt the traits of humility and simplicity. In regards to Joab the son of Zeruiah, of whom it is written, "*So Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up and struck [Joab] and killed him, and [Joab] was buried in his house, in the desert*" (*I Kings 2:34*), our Sages say: "*Was his house a desert? … It was like a desert, for just as a desert is free to all, so was Joab's house free to all*" (*Sanhedrin 49a*). Such behavior demonstrates a true love for others, namely to leave one's home open to all by fulfilling the teaching of the Sages: "*Let the poor be members of your household*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:5*), meaning that we must feed and shelter those in need. Our Sages have also affirmed that Yom Kippur rectifies the sins that we have committed toward G-d, but not the sins that we have committed toward others unless they have forgiven us first. This demonstrates the importance that Hashem attributes to respecting others.

One day a wealthy Jew from Brazil told me that every year a national celebration was held in his country. During festivities lasting a week, everyone would gather to sing and dance, and they would rejoice as they ate and drank in a wild celebration. Now it is known that Brazil harbors some of the largest criminal organizations in the world, groups that kidnap the wealthy and hold them hostage for enormous sums of money. I asked him if he wasn't afraid of being kidnapped during these festivities, to which he replied that out of respect for the nation, these organizations have promised not to harm anyone during that entire week. All criminal organizations agree not to disrupt the joy that fills the nation during this time.

I then thought to myself: If they understand the need to be united for the sake of a national holiday so as not to disrupt a repugnant celebration – which only consists of debauchery and drunkenness – how much more should we strive to live in peace with our fellow for the sake of our Creator! We must be careful not to hamper G-d's joy and to love each person with all our heart, and not only for a week. In fact we must be concerned with the mitzvah, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" throughout our lives.

Our Sages have affirmed that "*G-d, the Torah, and Israel are one.*" The term used for "*one*" is not echad, but chad, which has a numerical value of 12 – an allusion to

the 12 tribes of Israel. It is only when all the tribes without exception are united and connected together that G-d, the Torah, and Israel are one. This is the only condition that allows Hashem to connect the Torah and Israel and to make them one. Furthermore, the Torah itself constitutes an allusion to the unity of Israel, since all the letters in the Torah correspond to the souls of the Jewish people. This means that the Torah unites with us only when we are completely united as one.

Nasso

Elevating Ourselves Through Torah Study and Ethical Conduct

The holy Zohar notes that Parsha Nasso is the longest in the entire Torah, containing 176 verses, more than any other parsha. Why so lengthy? One book provides an answer: Parsha Nasso is usually read around the time of Shavuot, and especially just after it. Since we received the Torah on Shavuot, we are being told: "*It's very good that you received the Torah, but now you must study it more.*"

This is similar to what happens when a person becomes a doctor. What does he do at that point? He opens up a medical practice. Similarly, a person who becomes a lawyer opens up a legal office once he receives his diploma. The same happens here: Once we have received the Torah on Shavuot, it is time for us to study it even more.

This is why Parsha Nasso is so lengthy: It teaches us that if we devote ourselves to the Torah, we must not choose the shortest path, but precisely the longest one. When we speak of a long path, it means extending the time that we study, not shortening it by constantly looking at the time and wondering when it will finally be over! We learn this from this week's parsha, the longest in all the Torah. It is called nasso, a word that evokes *hitnassut* ("elevation").

Actually, the Torah's goal is to teach man how to elevate himself. We saw to our bitter regret how Hitler, when he planned on exterminating Jews, sent his generals a famous letter (which people have actually seen) in which he explained his reasoning: Jews are an ethical people, and if Jews have ethics, they have a different goal in the world, and therefore they present an obstacle for us, which is why we must wipe them out. Unfortunately, this is one of the reasons why Hitler did what he did, but thank G-d he did not succeed, for we have always preserved our morality. We have always been here, and we will always be here, right under Hitler's nose.

Hence the Torah wants us to study and perform mitzvot so we can elevate ourselves. However we must keep one thing in mind: When people see a kippah-wearing Jew spitting or screaming in the street, their first reaction will be to say, "*Look at that Jew!*" Yet if somebody else were to do the same, suppose someone French, nobody would look at him or say anything.

When a Jew smokes on Shabbat, Hashem can forgive him. When someone eats treif food, Hashem can forgive him as well. Yet when someone profanes Hashem's Name, by bothering his neighbors for example, there is no forgiveness, for such behavior is not ethical in any way.

This is the lesson that we learn from Parsha Nasso, which as we stated designates elevation. We must not feel superior to others or think that we are better than them, but instead we must elevate ourselves and become moral people. This means knowing

how to conduct ourselves in life, and working on ourselves in order to grow in the service of Hashem. Woe to the person who elevates himself without being filled with virtues in the service of Hashem.

In Parsha Nasso, the Torah addresses whoever wants to elevate himself in the study of Torah, attain lofty spiritual levels, and be motivated by study. He must yearn to constantly elevate himself, for there is no limit to how far we can progress in the service of Hashem. This is why the parsha states *nasso* et *rosh* (literally, "elevate the head") for yearning must begin with the head. This is good advice for everyone to follow, for if a person elevates himself and yearns to serve Hashem, he can reach the level of lighting the nerot, the lamps of the Sanctuary, and progress to ever-higher levels.

Reflecting on this, we realize that this is precisely man's goal in life. This is the great difference between man and animal, for animals have no goal in life, as we very well know. No one has ever seen an animal punching a ticket at a train station or walking around with a suitcase. Even if we were to dress one up, as they do in the circus, it would still remain an animal. An animal's entire life consists of eating and drinking, and then it dies. However man has a tremendous goal in life, and he possesses the ability to modify his nature. Unfortunately, this also means that he can become more animal-like.

Hence the Torah teaches everyone to behave as a man, as a true human being, without tending towards animalistic behavior. In other words, he must act ethically. Thus the Torah comes to help a person elevate himself. Again, this does not mean that a person should rise above others or become proud. That is completely out of the question, for the Torah is acquired only through humility (*Perkei Avoth 6:6; Taanith 7a*), and its sole objective is to teach man to be humble, to speak gently. This is why it helps man on both ends, training him to break away from his negative instincts, while at the same time teaching him to remain humane, moral, and humble.

Thus the Sages have said, "*Who is strong? He who subdues his inclination*" (*Perkei Avoth 4:1*). They did not say, "*Who is strong? He who lifts heavy weights.*" That's not strength! True strength consists of knowing how to control one's instincts, govern one's anger, and conquer the negative aspects of one's nature. It means, for example, that a wealthy person still acts with humility. It means that he will not feel superior to others, nor will he flaunt his wealth.

We learn all this from Parsha Nasso. Elevate yourself, yes, but rise above yourself, not others. Always be moral, humane, humble, and gentle with everyone, all through Torah study and ethical conduct.

We Can Only Elevate Ourselves by Studying Torah

It is written, "*Nasso et rosh [Elevate the head] of the sons of Gershon*" (*Numbers 4:22*). The Midrash states, "*Hence it is written: 'It is more precious than pearls, and all your desires cannot be compared to it' [Proverbs 3:15]*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 6:1*). Now the

term peninim (*"pearls"*) always designate a start, as it is written: "*Lefanim [In former times] this was done in Israel*" (*Ruth 4:7*). This is difficult to understand, for what does a start have to do with Torah and mitzvot? Also, what proof does this verse bring for something that happened in the past? We can understand this by first explaining the reason of the decree of the Sages that Parsha Bamidbar must be read before Shavuot, and that Parsha Nasso must be read after it (*Tur, Orach Chaim 428*). In fact during the holiday of Shavuot, the day of the giving of the Torah, everyone studies more and performs additional mitzvot. When the holiday is over, however, people return to their work and put these things out of mind. Although people resolved to improve themselves and study more during the year, material concerns make them forget their resolutions in spite of themselves, preventing them from carrying them out. Sometimes people just give up and say, "*I can't do everything that I resolved to do.*"

Hence the Sages have decreed that Parsha Nasso is read immediately after the holiday, for this parsha begins with the expression, Nasso et rosh (*"Elevate the head"*). This tells us that a person is obligated to earn a living and support his family, and that even if he does not succeed in accomplishing all the resolutions that he took upon himself during the holiday, he must still not get discouraged. Neither should he allow the evil inclination to say to him, "*Since you can't do everything that you decided upon, you should even forget about the little that you can do.*" He should chase the evil inclination away and do what he can, even if it is not much. The Gemara teaches, "*One who sacrifices much and one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to Heaven*" (*Berachot 5b*). When a person completely loses hope and does not want to do anything, it would have been better for him to not have made any resolutions. However if he does even a little, his resolutions count for something.

This is why the Torah states, "*Elevate the head.*" Even if a person does not succeed in fulfilling all his resolutions, he should not become sad. He must not allow the evil inclination to entice him, but instead he must lift his head high and do what he can. How can a person reach this level? It is by setting aside a fixed time for learning Torah, for through it he will succeed in repulsing the evil inclination, as the Sages have said: "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). Hence the verse states: "*Nasso et rosh [Elevate the head] of the children of Gershon*" (*Numbers 4:22*) – the name Gershon evokes gerushin (*to expel*). This means that the Torah expels the evil inclination, and when a person studies Torah, the evil inclination immediately flees. In fact the Sages say, "*If one studies Torah, painful sufferings are kept away from him*" (*Berachot 5a*).

True, a person must earn a living, meaning that he cannot study Torah for the entire day. However our Sages have left us the story of Rabbi Idi the father of Rabbi Yaakov, who traveled from his home to the Beit Midrash. Now the road to the Beit Midrash was a long one, and it took him three months to get there, whereupon he would study Torah for a single day and return. Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "*Whoever studies Torah for even one day in the year, Scripture accounts it to him as though he had*

studied throughout the year" (*Chagigah 5b*). Therefore even if a person cannot study Torah all day long, he should put an effort into studying it for at least a few hours, morning or night. He will then be able to fulfill the resolutions he took during Shavuot, and he will elevate himself, as it is written: "*Elevate the head.*" This is because Torah study enables a person to elevate himself. However if a person fails to study immediately after the holiday, or if he studies only after a certain time, since the giving of the Torah has passed and he has not fulfilled his resolution, he will forget what he studies.

The Sages have said, "*If a person hears a word of Torah and gradually keeps it, then even if he keeps the first, he will keep the last. However if he gradually forgets it, just as he did not keep the first, he will not keep the last*" (*Sifri, Devarim 48*). We find in Megillat Chassidim: "*If you abandon Me for one day, I will abandon you for two days*" (*Yerushalmi, Berachot 9:5*). The Torah makes another allusion in the verse, "*Elevate the head of the sons of Gershon gam [also]*" – even if a person cannot start something new that he resolved to do for serving Hashem, let him at least add to what he normally does. If he normally goes to synagogue only on Sunday or Shabbat, he should start going every day, or at least twice a week, and so on. The Midrash states, "*If a man has been undone by sin…what should he do to live? If he was accustomed to reading one page of Scripture, let him read two pages, and if he was accustomed to studying one chapter of Mishnah, let him study two*" (*Vayikra Rabba 25:1*). Hence the verse uses the term gam (*"also"*), an indication that we must add something. Even if a person cannot start from scratch, he should put an effort into at least adding something to his service of Hashem. In fact a person must start, immediately after the holiday, to carry out everything that he resolved to do, for he will only experience a true elevation when he takes it upon himself to add to his Torah study and good deeds. Even if it is only a start, because he started to study Torah at the beginning of the year, Scripture considers him to have studied throughout the year, and he will end up doing so in practice. However if he fails to start and does not make any resolutions during the holiday, he will never be able to safeguard the Torah he learns. Even if he studies, since he failed to start and did not make any resolutions during the holiday, he will not safeguard his Torah.

Since Parsha Nasso is close to the giving of the Torah, all the great principles of the Torah depend on it. The Sages, who counted the letters of the Torah, found that this parsha is the longest one in the entire Torah. This tells us that it is essential and that we must start from it. A person who takes upon himself the yoke of Torah study during the holiday, and who studies it immediately afterwards, even if just a little, is promised that his Torah will endure.

Can Someone Be a Nazir in our Time?

A Chassidic story tells of a simple man who went to see the saintly Rabbi Aaron Zatzal, the Rebbe of Karlin. The man told the Rebbe of his great anguish, caused by the fact that he did not have a revelation of Eliyahu HaNavi. Upon hearing this, the Rebbe smiled and asked the man: "*Who told you that you're worthy of receiving a*

visit by Eliyahu HaNavi?" The man almost became angry: "*What kind of question is that?*" he asked. "*It's obvious that I'm worthy of it, since I conduct myself like a Nazir: I don't shave, I don't drink wine, and I never go to funerals!*" The Rebbe continued his questioning: "*And who told you that a Nazir merits the revelation of Eliyahu HaNavi?*" The man immediately replied, "*It's obvious that he does! We see it with the valiant Samson, who was a Nazir. The spirit of Hashem began to stir in him, which means that he merited the revelation of Eliyahu.*"

The end of this story does not concern us. However it is certain that the thinking of this simple Jew – who believed that he was a holy Nazir because he refrained from shaving, drinking wine, and going to funerals – should make us think, for really what is a Nazir? What does his holiness consist of, and does the concept of a Nazir as described in our parsha apply in our time? On the verse, "*You shall be holy, for I Hashem your G-d am holy*" (*Vayikra 19:2*), the Ramban gives an explanation according to what the Sages said (*Yevamot 20a*), namely that it consists of restraining (*lehitnazer*) and distancing oneself from certain things, even non-prohibited things, and to sanctify oneself "*in what is permitted.*" This means that in our era as well, and for each of us, there are things that are truly permissible, things that carry no prohibition whatsoever and are in no way forbidden. They consist of neither transgressions nor sins, yet they encompass the area of pleasure, things that we can easily live without, for they really change nothing. It is precisely concerning such things that Scripture says, "*You shall be holy.*" Even if these things are permissible, you – a Jew – are not to engage in them if you really want to serve G-d and elevate yourself a little above this material world. Instead, distance yourself from them and sanctify yourself even in things that are permitted.

This is the nature of the Nazir. Who does not cut their hair? Just about everyone gets their hair cut when it becomes cumbersome. Furthermore, we know from books of Kabbalah that hair is compared to kelipot (*forces of impurity*), which evoke sin. It is therefore obvious that they must be removed by cutting, especially when they create problems for placing tefillin on the head, as mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim. It states that it is forbidden to place the head tefillin on a thick tuft of hair. Yet what should a man do if he wants to sanctify himself, to become a Nazir? He refrains from cutting his hair, and for 30 days he lets them grow, thus deciding to become a Nazir devoted to G-d. In this way he sanctifies himself in what is permitted; he distances himself even from things that are allowed. Consequently, his nature does not reside in the fact that he does not cut his hair, but rather in the holiness and the distance between himself and permitted things. His intention is not to refrain from cutting his hair, but rather to separate and sanctify himself with great holiness.

There is more. As we know, drinking wine makes a person cheerful, as the verse states: "*Wine that gladdens the heart of man*" (*Tehillim 104:15*). The Sages have also said, "*There is no rejoicing except with wine*" (*Pesachim 109a*). It is therefore obvious that a person can become joyful by drinking wine. By drinking wine, he can arrive at serving

the Creator with greater joy, and is there anything loftier than joy? We know that all the rebukes addressed to the Children of Israel came about because they "*did not serve Hashem your G-d amid gladness and goodness of heart*" (*Devarim 28:47*). We therefore see that joy is a great principle in serving Hashem, and we received the commandment to serve G-d in joy.

However the Nazir sanctifies himself by what is permitted. He avoids drinking wine, and he even separates himself from the vine in order not to arouse any desire to drink wine. This means that he serves Hashem in joy without drinking wine, but instead by studying Torah, for "*the orders of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart*" (*Tehillim 19:9*). We find this idea alluded to in the word nazir, which is formed by the letters of the word ner and the letters yud and zayin. Ner (*"lamp"*) – these are the mitzvot, for "*a mitzvah is a ner [lamp] and the Torah is light*" (*Mishlei 6:23*) – and the letters yud and zayin have the same numerical value as the word tov (*"good"*). Now tov refers to the Torah, for there is nothing good other than Torah (*Pirkei Avoth 6:3*). This means that the Nazir sanctifies himself by performing mitzvot and studying Torah.

Furthermore, who among us does not know that escorting the dead is a great mitzvah? This mitzvah is among those whose fruits are eaten in this world, while the principle is reserved for the World to Come (*Peah 1:1*). If the deceased has nobody to take care of him, if he has no heirs, the mitzvah is dozens of times greater. However the Nazir, once again, sanctifies himself in what is permitted and does not allow himself to become impure for a corpse. He does not participate in a funeral, but instead elevates himself with supreme holiness.

Consequently, in our time each person can also resemble a Nazir. However this does not mean that he is already a Nazir and deserving of its rewards if he refrains from drinking wine, cutting his hair, and participating in funerals. Absolutely not! These are only meant to teach us that the essential thing is to "*sanctify yourself in what is permitted,*" meaning that we must become holy by distancing ourselves from permitted things as well. Let us inflict a little damage upon our cravings for material things, all while broadening the extent of our holiness. Then we will truly be like a Nazir devoted to Hashem.

Elevating Yourself Through Torah Study

The Sages instituted the reading of Parsha Bamidbar before the festival of Shavuot and the reading of Parsha Nasso after the festival (*Tur, Orach Chaim 428*). This is because during Shavuot, which is the day we received the Torah, everyone resolves to add to their Torah learning and mitzvot performance, but they return to their work and forget their resolutions once the holiday has passed. Although each person took it upon himself to improve his ways and study throughout the year, his worries make him forget despite his best intentions, preventing him from truly fulfilling them. Hence he will sometimes lose hope and think, "*I don't have the ability to fulfill everything that I took upon myself!*"

This is why our Sages instituted the reading of Parsha Nasso immediately after the festival of Shavuot. In fact this parsha begins with the expression, "*Elevate the head.*" The term nasso means to elevate, thereby telling us that although a person is responsible for his family, and although such a responsibility may prevent him from doing everything that he took upon himself during the festival, he cannot lose hope and is forbidden to become discouraged. He must not allow the evil inclination to enter him and say, "*Since you can't fulfill all the resolutions that you took upon yourself, it's not worth the trouble of doing even what you can fulfill!*" He must chase this thought away and do whatever he can, however little it may be.

The Gemara teaches, "*One who sacrifices much and one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to Heaven*" (*Berachot 5b*). Yet when a person completely loses hope and does not do the little that he can, it would have been better had he not taken anything upon himself, rather than to commit himself to doing something and not fulfilling it. Even if he does but a little, what he has committed himself to doing is important.

Even for a Single Day a Year

This is why the Torah said, "*Elevate the head.*" Even if a person does not fulfill all his resolutions, it should not make him sad, and he must not allow the evil inclination to entice him. He should instead elevate himself and do everything that he can. How can he elevate himself? By fixing times for Torah study. By learning Torah, he can chase away the evil inclination, as the Sages have said: "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). Hence it is written, "*Elevate the head of the sons of Gershon*" (*Bamidbar 4:22*). Do not read Gershon, but gerushin (*"chase"*), for the Torah chases away the evil inclination. When a person studies Torah, he immediately chases the evil inclination away, as our Sages have said: "*One who studies Torah, the forces of evil leave him.*"

Even if a person who works for a living cannot study for the entire day, the Sages have spoken to us about Rabbi Idi, the father of Rabbi Yaakov. To reach the Beit HaMidrash, Rabbi Idi had to travel an extremely long way, a three-month journey by foot. Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "*Whoever studies Torah for even one day a year, Scripture considers him to have studied throughout the year*" (*Chagigah 5b*).

Therefore even if a person cannot study for the entire day, he should at least make an effort to study for a few hours, morning or evening. In this way, he will manage to fulfill what he took upon himself during the festival of Shavuot. He will then be able to elevate himself, as it is written: "*Elevate the head,*" for learning Torah elevates the head.

If a person fails to study Torah immediately after the festival, however, and if he fails to keep his word, he will forget what he has studied. This is because the giving of the Torah has already passed, but he did not fulfill his resolutions. The Sages have said, "*If a person hears a Torah teaching and immediately fulfills it, then just as the initial teaching will endure with him, likewise what he immediately fulfills will endure with*

him. Yet if he hears and immediately forgets, then just as the initial teaching will not endure with him, likewise later teachings will not endure with him" (*Sifrei, Devarim 48*). In Megillat Chassidim we read, "*If you abandon Me for one day, I will abandon you for two days*" (*Yerushalmi, Berachot 9:5*).

Adding to Torah Study

The Torah makes another allusion in the verse: "*Elevate the head of the sons of Gershon gam [also]*" – even if a person cannot start something new that he resolved to do in the service of Hashem, he should at least add to what he has been doing up to now. Hence the Midrash states, "*If a man has been undone by sin…what should he do to live? If he was accustomed to reading one page of Scripture, let him read two pages, and if he was accustomed to studying one chapter of Mishnah, let him study two*" (*Vayikra Rabba 25:1*). This is why the verse uses the term gam (*"also"*), meaning that he must add something. Even if he cannot start something new, he should at least put an effort into adding something "*also.*"

This is what our Sages meant in the Midrash on the verse, "*It is more precious than pearls*" (*Mishlei 3:15*), namely that the term peninim (*"pearls"*) always designate a start (*Bamidbar Rabba 6:1*). That is, a person must start immediately after the festival to fulfill everything that he resolved to do in terms of additional Torah study and good deeds, even if it is only a start. If he starts something at the beginning of the year, Scripture will consider him to have studied throughout the year, and he will eventually study all year round.

However if he fails to start and does not make any resolutions during the festival, he will never be able to safeguard the Torah that he learns. Even if he studies, since he failed to start and did not make any resolutions during the festival, he will be unable to safeguard his Torah learning.

Since Parsha Nasso is close to the giving of the Torah, all the great principles of the Torah depend on it. The Sages, who counted all the letters of the Torah, found that this parsha is the longest in the entire Torah. This tells us that it is essential and that we must start from it. A person who takes upon himself the yoke of Torah study during the festival, and who studies it immediately afterwards, even if just a little, is promised that his Torah learning will endure.

How G-d Loves the Jewish People

Our Sages have said, "*When Moshe ascended on high, the ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the universe! What business has one born of woman among us?' He answered them, 'He has come to receive the Torah.' They said to Him, 'That secret treasure…You wish to give to flesh and blood? "What is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You visit him?*" [Tehillim 8:5]. "*Hashem our G-d, how mighty is Your Name throughout the earth, [You] Who places Your majesty in the heavens*" [ibid. 8:2].' The Holy One, blessed be He, said

to Moshe, 'Respond to them.' He replied, 'Sovereign of the universe, I fear lest they consume me with the breath of their mouths.' He said to him, 'Take hold of the Throne of Glory and respond to them' " (*Shabbat 88b*).

Let us think about this for a moment: Did the angels not know why Moshe had ascended to Heaven, such that they had to ask what one born of women was doing among them? The angels had returned the Children of Israel's souls when they retreated 12 mil (*Shabbat 88b*)! Furthermore, the Seraphim did not say "*Holy, Holy*" (*Shemot Rabba 29:9*). Can we possibly claim that they did not know that Moshe had ascended to receive the Torah?

Furthermore, what good did it do for Moshe to take hold of the Throne of Glory? Could he not have responded to the angels without doing so? Since G-d told Moshe to take hold of the Throne of Glory and respond to them, He would in any case have protected him against the angels, as it is written: "*He makes him take hold of the face of his Throne, and spreads out His cloud over him*" (*Job 26:9*). Rabbi Tanchuma (*Sukkah 5a*) understands this to mean that G-d extended His glory and Shechinah upon Moshe.

We therefore need to understand why G-d told him, "*Take hold of the Throne of Glory,*" since in any case He had extended His cloud over him.

Greater than the Ministering Angels

The Sages have said, "*The Children of Israel are called servants, and the ministering angels are called servants. We do not know who are more beloved, but the verse states: 'For the Children of Israel are servants to Me. They are My servants, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt' [Vayikra 25:55]. This means, 'You are dearer to Me than the ministering angels.' The Children of Israel are called sons, and the ministering angels are called sons. We do not know who are more beloved, but the verse states: 'My firstborn son is Israel' [Shemot 4:22]. This means, 'They are more beloved to Me than the ministering angels.' The Children of Israel are called kings, and the ministering angels are called kings. We do not know who are more honored, but it says: 'You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests' [ibid. 19:6]. This means, 'You are more honored to Me than the ministering angels.' The Children of Israel are called hosts, and the ministering angels are called hosts. We do not know who are greater, but it says: 'I shall take out My hosts, My people the Children of Israel' [ibid. 7:4]. This means, 'You are greater to Me than the ministering angels.' The Children of Israel are called holy and the ministering angels are called holy. We do not know who are holier, but it is said: 'Israel is holy to Hashem' [Jeremiah 2:3]. This means, 'You are holier to Me than the ministering angels'*" (*Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan 44*).

What is the reason for all this? How can man, who possesses a material body, be greater than angels, who are made entirely of fire? The answer is that the souls of the Children of Israel are hidden and engraved beneath the Throne of Glory, and furthermore the soul of a Jew is a divine spark, as it is written: "*For Hashem's portion is His people*" (*Devarim 32:9*), and "*He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*" (*Bereshith 2:7*). Now the Sages have explained that "*he who breathes into the nostrils of another*

gives him something from his own soul." Angels do not possess a divine spark, and they are not as holy as the Children of Israel, whose soul is a divine spark. Hence the Children of Israel are greater than the ministering angels, having the ability to elevate themselves above the ministering angels.

The Holy One, blessed be He, breathed a holy soul only into the Children of Israel. He did not give it to other beings, but only to those who were called upon to receive the Torah. Since He knew that the angels would not receive it, He did not breathe into them a soul which is a divine spark.

Take Hold of the Throne of Glory

The ministering angels were not aware of this extraordinary secret. They did not realize that every Jew has the ability to rise above the level of angels, which is why they said to G-d: "*What business has one born of women among us?*" How did Moshe elevate himself to such a level that it is said: "*You have made him but slightly less than divine beings*" (*Tehillim 8:6*), above the level of angels? He answered them, "*He has come to receive the Torah. Since the Children of Israel will receive the Torah, their holiness is greater than yours, and moreover the man who receives the Torah and studies it through adversity is able to elevate himself to such a level that he becomes greater than angels.*" This is because all the power of a Jewish soul resides in the fact that it is a divine spark, a part of G-d Himself. When a Jew cleaves to the Torah, he becomes greater than angels.

This is why our Sages said that when Moshe ascended to Heaven, meaning that when he elevated himself to a celestial level – superior to that of angels – the angels were stunned and said: "*How can a man, created from the dust of the earth, arrive at this level through Torah?*" Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "*Take hold of the Throne of Glory and respond to them.*" This reply has two aspects: The first is that the souls of the Children of Israel are engraved beneath the Throne of Glory, which allows them to take hold of the Throne of Glory without fear, since they are one and the same with it because their souls emanate from there. The second is that since their souls come from beneath the Throne of Glory and are a divine spark, they can take hold of the Throne of Glory and elevate themselves through Torah to reach levels even greater than that of angels.

Learning Torah in Joy While Changing for the Better

Parsha Nasso deals with the families of the tribe of Levi (*Bamidbar 4:21-49*). The tribe of Levi was composed of three families: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. During the 40 years that the Children of Israel journeyed in the desert, they encamped sometimes here and sometimes there, and one of the tasks of the Levites was to unload and set up the Sanctuary wherever the Children of Israel encamped.

In the Sanctuary, as well as in the Temple, the primary work of the Levites consisted of singing when offerings were being made, meaning to be joyful. From

here we learn the great importance of joy for all men. Someone who is not cheerful is simply unhappy, and if he is unhappy, he has no desire to live. Such a person can be a billionaire, owning vast possessions, but will be unhappy because he is not cheerful.

In reality, how can we acquire joy? Some non-Jews may say that they acquire it by going out at night to enjoy themselves. However this is a grave mistake, for who can be certain of returning happy after such a night? Others say that tremendous wealth brings joy, but this is also a mistake, for very wealthy people in particular are unhappy. In fact the Sages have said, "*The more possessions, the more worries*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:7*). That said, where can we find happiness?

Happiness and joy are found within the family. However even within the family, we need things that lead to joy, or that prevent joy from departing. Anyone with some experience in life knows that the world is filled with problems. However it is precisely under difficult circumstances that we find joy.

In Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, among families that have 10 or 12 children – where people live restricted lives, with no chance to breathe – that is where we find joy. Look at how they spend Shabbat, at how they are always happy, always with a smile on their faces! And when asked how they are, their response is always: Baruch Hashem, very well!

With whom can we find such joy, such happiness? Only with those who possess Torah. King David said, "*The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul*" (*Tehillim 19:8*). There are some people who take medication for illnesses of the soul, but King David said: "*The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart*" (*v.9*). The Torah infuses man with joy, reviving his soul.

Furthermore, "*the testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise*" (*v.8*) The Torah is true, and brings such joy that it can transform even the greatest of fools into sensible men. We learn this from the Levites, who were always joyful.

This is what the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe: Nasso [which, among other things, means to count] – count and divide the families of the Levites in such a way that each family has its own task in the Sanctuary. The first are the Gershonites [Hebrew: Gershoni]. What does the term Gershoni [Bamidbar 4:24] contain? If we divide it, we obtain ger [a convert] and shoni. Now the term shoni evokes shinui [change] or shoneh [studying] halachot, studying the entire day, as it is said: "*Whoever shoneh [studies] halachot every day is assured of life in the World to Come*" (*Megillah 28b*).

We may say that it is not only a convert who changes, but anyone who was previously a stranger to Torah, who used to scorn the Torah's words, but now begins to study it. Since he has understood the results of doing so, as well as what eventually results from it, *nasso* – he elevates himself. Yesterday he was far from Torah, while today *nasso*, meaning neshev (let us sit down to learn): He takes heart and sits down to learn, just like a convert who yesterday was far from Torah but today has drawn closer to it.

Even within the Jewish people, we see how many gerim [converts] have elevated themselves. Targum Onkelos on the Torah was written by Onkelos the convert, a nephew of the Roman Emperor Titus (*Gittin 56b*). He nevertheless converted to Judaism and translated the entire Torah into Aramaic. The great Tanna Rabbi Akiva descended from a convert, as well as Rabbi Meir Baal Haness, who descended from Emperor Nero (*ibid. 56a*). Shemaya and Avtalyon, the teachers of Hillel and Shammai, were also converts who descended from Sennacherib.

This is what the Torah is telling us by the term Gershoni: Learn from this ger [convert], who has now come closer to Torah. Likewise you – who were far from Torah but have now come closer – you can also change, for the study of Torah effects a change in man, transforming him in a radical way.

Now that you have changed for the better, you can emulate "*Nasso et rosh [Raise the head]…to serve and to carry [the Sanctuary]*" – you can raise the banner of the Torah, the torch that illuminates. The Torah needs us to raise and carry it, without which it would remain buried in libraries.

However if we study and observe mitzvot, we thereby elevate the Torah, and then those who study it will no longer be gerim, strangers, for they will have effected a radical change in themselves and be transformed into completely different people.

Furthermore, the term ger (when we include the term itself) has the same numerical value as dar (*to dwell*). This means that when we change and begin to study Torah, we dwell within it. The Torah then becomes our home, as it is written: "*Your Torah is in my innards*" (*Tehillim 40:9*). The Sages have said, "*With the beginning of Adar, rejoicing increases*" (*Taanith 29a*), which means that when a person enters a *dira* (dwelling) – a word that evokes Adar – which is the Beit HaMidrash, he is filled with joy, for the Torah rejoices man when he enters its "*dwelling*" to study it.

This is the lesson that we must draw from Parsha Nasso after the holiday of Shavuot: To change and elevate ourselves, and to grow in the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvot amid joy and inner spiritual happiness. This is because the Torah brings joy to man, and we will find ourselves in its dwelling if we study it, as it is written: "*Your Torah is in my innards.*"

Pride, the Study of Torah, and Ethics

The Zohar states that Parsha Nasso is the longest of the Torah, containing 176 verses, more than any other. Why is this so?

The commentators have offered an explanation: Parsha Nasso always falls around the time of Shavuot, and in general after it. We are therefore being taught that after the giving of the Torah, we should not be content with this event, but must commit ourselves to learning even more Torah.

The situation may be compared to a man who becomes a doctor. What does he do at that point? He opens a medical practice. A lawyer as well, after passing the bar, also

goes into practice. The same applies to the Torah: After having received it on Shavuot, everyone is obligated to engage in studying it.

Hence this week's parsha is the longest of the Torah. It teaches us that it is not by choosing the easy path and cutting back on our learning that we actually invest ourselves in Torah. On the contrary, we must increase our learning and not constantly check the time to see that it is finally over! This is the lesson that we learn from the length of this week's parsha. Nevertheless, our Sages have declared that we must teach Torah to our students in a concise way! Actually, this does not mean reducing the amount of Torah that we learn, but to finding a simple and brief method for these teachings to be more easily absorbed.

The parsha is called Nasso, a root that designates elevation. In fact the goal of Torah is to teach man how to elevate himself. Our Sages have said, "*[The Torah] makes him great and elevates him*" (*Pirkei Avoth 6:1*). Regrettably, we know that when Hitler (may his name be blotted out) decided to annihilate the Jewish people, he sent his generals a well-known letter (one seen by others) in which he explained why he sought to destroy the Jewish people. What follows is an extract from that letter:

"*The Jewish people possess ethics, and if Jews have ethics, then they have a different objective in the world. Therefore they present an obstacle for us, which is why we must wipe them out.*" Sadly, this is one of the reasons for what Hitler did, but thank G-d he did not succeed, for ethics have always been rooted in us. We were, and we will remain, whether he wanted it or not.

That is why the Torah wants us to study it and perform mitzvot, so that we may progress and elevate ourselves. Nevertheless, there is one other point to understand in regards to ethics: When a Jew wears a kippah on his head and spits or screams in the street, people's first reaction will be: "*Look at that Jew!*" The same behavior by a non-Jew will not arouse such a response.

When someone smokes on Shabbat, or does not eat kosher, Hashem can forgive him. On the other hand, if he causes a desecration of Hashem's Name, such as by bothering his neighbors, forgiveness becomes impossible because his actions are unethical. It is like when we see a youngster misbehaving in the street, and we immediately ask about his father, his teacher, where he grew up, and where he studied. The same goes for Jews: Everyone knows that we are the children of G-d, and therefore they will immediately say: "*Look at how that Jew is behaving!*"

This is the moral lesson that we learn from Parsha Nasso. The term Nasso designates elevation, and clearly it does not mean elevating oneself above others by claiming to be superior to them. Rather, it means elevating oneself by being an ethical person, by acting properly, and by working on oneself so as to progress in the service of G-d, as we have already said: "*It makes him great and elevates him.*"

We may add that this is also the connection between Parshiot Nasso and Beha'alotcha. At the start of the former we read, "*Raise the head of the sons of Gershon*" (*Bamidbar 4:22*).

Instead of "*the head,*" why doesn't it say: "*Raise the family of Gershon*"? This is to teach us that if we want to raise the head, where the brain resides, then we must banish from the brain all tendencies for evil and all other desires that disrupt it in serving Hashem. This is how we elevate ourselves in spirituality, through ethics. Hence the verse means that if we want to raise the head, then we must *garish* (chase away) what are called "*sons,*" meaning whatever is secondary and unnecessary.

Therefore if we want to dislodge the evil inclination that sits in the brain, we must elevate ourselves in the service of G-d by the study of ethics. This is the only way to fight it.

That is precisely what Parsha Beha'alotcha comes to teach us. In fact the lighting of the lamps of the Menorah alludes to the fact that "*a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light*" (*Mishlei 6:23*). This parsha speaks of the lighting of the Menorah with olive oil. Now the lamp alludes to the soul, as it is written: "*A man's soul is the lamp of Hashem*" (*ibid. 20:27*). It is only by studying ethics and Torah that the body is sanctified, and that the soul becomes content with living in such a sanctified body.

There is more. In Parsha Nasso, the Torah speaks to anyone who wishes to advance in learning and wants to attain great heights, whoever thirsts after the study of Torah. For this, he must aspire to climb higher and higher, for there are no limits in elevating oneself in the service of G-d. Hence the Torah demands that we raise the head, for aspiration must start with the head. This means that if we elevate the head with lofty aspirations, we will then arrive at "*lighting the lamp*" and we will grow more and more.

In reflecting upon this, we realize that such an outcome is what differentiates man from animal. The latter has no goal in life, for no animal has ever been seen punching a train ticket or walking with suitcase in hand. Even if we tamed it, it would still remain an animal, since all its desires are instinctive, such as eating and drinking, until the day it dies.

However man has greater aspirations in life. He possesses the ability to improve his natural tendencies, meaning that he can also change his human nature into something savage. Hence the Torah teaches every individual to become worthy of being called a human, to be an ethical being, not to act like a savage. As such, the Torah will come and help man to elevate himself, to lift himself very high.

A person must not forget, however, that he cannot grow proud over others, for the Torah can only be acquired by the humble (*Pirkei Avoth 6:6; Taanith 7a*). Its main objective is to teach man to act with humility, to speak gently, to be discreet. Hence it helps him in two ways: It elevates him by breaking his negative tendencies, and it enables him to remain humane, ethical, and humble.

Prior to Receiving the Torah

It is written, "*This is the work of the Gershonite families: To work and to carry*" (*Bamidbar 4:24*).

As we know, every person constitutes a miniature Sanctuary. Now just as the mission of the Levites in the Sanctuary was "*to work and to carry,*" likewise anyone who wants to acquire the Torah and wear its crown must assume the service of the Levites. "*To work*" designates the sacred service, whereas "*to carry*" (*massa*) refers to carrying the yoke with others (*nassa be'ol*). In reality, these are not two separate things, for the mitzvot governing our relationship with G-d are intimately connected to those governing our relationship with others.

We all realize that to acquire the Torah, prior preparation and work are necessary. Nevertheless, performing superficial and light work is not enough. We need "*to work and to carry,*" meaning that we must make a real effort; we must carry the yoke and yield before the Creator during our sacred service. This is how we succeed in understanding that we are subservient to our Master, that Hashem is our King, our Father, and our Shepherd, and that we are His servants. This requires a great deal of work on our part, as well as commitment and deep reflection on this subject.

During a visit to New York, I met a man who was highly respected, the Rosh Yeshiva of a renowned yeshiva. He asked me a very surprising question: "*How do we grow in serving G-d?*" I was perplexed for an instant before asking him, "*Is this a serious question?*" He said that it was, and then added: "*I immerse myself in Torah study, I can recite numerous pages of Gemara by heart, and during my lectures I explain many Mussar concepts to my students. Yet unfortunately, I don't sense any spiritual growth on my part.*" I then realized that this Rosh Yeshiva was raising a very serious issue. In fact if we find ourselves eating food that we can't taste, this failure should make us ask questions. Likewise if we are surrounded by people who are speaking words of Torah, and yet we are not moved by them, we also need to ask questions because it means that we are not internalizing these words. However the problem is even worse for someone who studies Torah, for someone who invests himself into learning it, but still fails to benefit from the beauty of his learning and senses no spiritual growth. And here was this Rav, aware of his difficulty, coming to seek my advice and help!

I responded that just like the Children of Israel, who had to prepare themselves before receiving the Torah, we must also prepare ourselves to undertake sacred tasks. This preparation must be similar to 'working and carrying' – tasks that demand effort and exertion. It is only after this kind of preparation that we can sense an elevation in Torah and the fear of G-d. I then asked him a question: "*When you recite, for example, the blessing after a meal, are you paying attention to the meaning of the words that you're saying? Are you concerned with Whom you are speaking to, before Whom you are standing, and Whom you are thanking for having satiated you? It's true that concentrating on each blessing is not easy. It demands great effort. However if you*

adopt this practice, a powerful change will come over you, and you will sense an improvement in your spiritual condition. However if you recite these blessings only as an automatic reflex that is devoid of all intention and concentration – if it represents a mitzvah that is done purely out of habit – then it serves no purpose and will not help you grow or progress."

Let us examine the way that we address G-d. We speak to Him in the second person by saying, "*Blessed are You, Hashem.*" Do we use the same language when speaking to an important figure? No, clearly not. With an important figure, we use the third person. Yet Hashem, Who is our Father and our Shepherd, wants us to sense that He is very close to us, and He allows us to address Him in the second person. However if we pray without focus and do not sense that He is near, and if we fail to consider the immense merit that we have in being considered as the King's sons, then after 120 years on earth He will rebuke us for having treated Him casually, something not justified by our attitude. He will rebuke us for not having addressed Him with the respect befitting royalty. We will have spoken to Him like a friend, not like the King of kings. We will then be ashamed and have no answer to give. I think that in order to have this sentiment, we must "*work and…carry*" in serving Hashem. This is not superficial and light work, but a task that requires real effort, one in which we carry the yoke of the kingdom of G-d and sense His dominion, for He is our Father and our King.

How do we reach such a level? By yearning to acquire Torah and fulfill mitzvot. A person who ardently wishes to go learn at the Beit HaMidrash, impatiently awaiting the precious moment when he can study, will be a symbol of the fear of Heaven and a love of Torah. For example, a person who is eager for a certain type of food will savor the aroma that emanates from it even before tasting it. The same applies to a person who desires Torah: As soon as he approaches the Gemara, he will sense the pleasant spiritual aroma emanating from it, and his soul will rejoice. That is the level we should hope to reach.

This is the meaning of the expression "*to work and to carry.*" It refers to a heavy load – to learning Torah in depth, praying with great concentration, and perfecting ourselves in the performance of mitzvot and yearning to fulfill them. May we wisely use these days of preparing to receive the Torah in order to acquire a fear of Heaven, to fulfill mitzvot, and to learn Torah. Amen.

Beha'alotcha

The Duty to Promptly Perform Mitzvot

It is written, "*Speak to Aaron… 'When you light the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.' Aaron did so*" (*Numbers 8:2-3*). Rashi cites the Sifrei in stating, "*This demonstrates Aaron's virtue, in that he did not deviate.*"

The book Otzarot HaChida states, "*We may raise the question: Why would he want to modify anything? Furthermore, why did Scripture congratulate Aaron here for not having changed anything? Did he change something elsewhere?*"

Rabbeinu Shlomo Astruc states concerning our parsha, "*This means that even if the lamps could be arranged and lit by a simple priest – as we read in Parsha Tetzaveh: 'Aaron and his sons shall arrange it' [Exodus 27:21], and also here: Beha'alotcha [literally, 'when you cause to light'] not behalotcha ['when you light'], meaning that he can order others to light it – he nevertheless performed the mitzvah himself.*"

Furthermore, no order is given to light the lamps in this passage. We are only told that when they are lit, the seven lamps must cast light towards the face of the Menorah, meaning that the lamps were lit on their own. Despite all this, Aaron hastened to perform the mitzvah himself. Even if the idea is correct, however, the expression "*he did not deviate*" is inaccurate. That is what the Chida stated.

Let us first try and explain the Chida's statement on the expression "*he did not deviate.*" To do so, we shall begin with another concept, namely serving Hashem. There are two ways in which to serve Hashem when given the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that can only be done by one person, not two. The first way is that as soon as we see an opportunity to perform it, we jump at it much like someone who discovers a valuable object. In that case we will perform the mitzvah immediately. Even if others also try to seize the opportunity, we will prove ourselves to be stronger and the merit will be ours. The second way of serving Hashem consists of looking for other people to perform a mitzvah when the opportunity presents itself, in order to confer merit upon them. That is, we do not perform the mitzvah itself, but not because we don't value it. Rather, it is because we want other people to benefit from it. The first way is more precious to Hashem, for the Mechilta states: "*If it [a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately*" (*cited by Rashi on Exodus 12:17*). That being the case, it is obvious that when the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, we should hasten to do it. We should not leave it for others to do. This is pleasing to Hashem, for it demonstrates that we are strongly connected to performing mitzvot.

Now that we have established this point, let us return to the subject of lighting the Menorah. At the beginning of Parsha Beha'alotcha, Rashi cites the Sages in stating: "*Why is the portion dealing with the Menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with*

the leaders? For when Aaron saw the dedication [offerings] of the leaders, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication, neither he nor his tribe. Therefore G-d said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps'" (*see Bamidbar Rabba 15:6; Sifrei ibid.*). Actually, why did this cause Aaron so much distress? The answer is that there are many lofty concepts pertaining to the offerings of the tribal leaders, as the Midrash states (*Bamidbar Rabba 13*), and it was something that was done only once for all the generations. Therefore when Aaron realized that he lost the opportunity to perform this mitzvah, he was very upset. Hence to calm and console him, Hashem gave him the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, for in this way he could elevate himself more and more each day. That being the case, his mitzvah was greater than theirs, for they could only perform it once, whereas Aaron had it as a constant and eternal mitzvah, one that was performed each day. Although the obligation to light the lights did not fall on Aaron specifically (since his sons, ordinary priests, could also light them), Aaron learned that he alone should light them, for it was a mitzvah that presented itself to him, and he couldn't pass it up. Hence Aaron is praised for not having deviated (*shina*, which can also mean "learn"), for not telling himself that another person could do it. He himself hastened to seize the opportunity to perform this mitzvah, and it is to his glory that he modified nothing about it.

What we learn here must be applied to other mitzvot, such as the mitzvah of tzeddakah. Sometimes we have an opportunity to perform this mitzvah, but decide to send money in the mail or through another person. We may even think that since other people are richer than ourselves, yet they have not given tzeddakah, we should refrain as well, supposedly to give them the opportunity to give. From this week's parsha we must learn to jump at such an opportunity and quickly give. We must realize that if we hurry and do it ourselves, Hashem will greatly appreciate it.

The same applies when someone sees a holy book lying on the floor, and other people have also seen it. In that case, merit is bestowed upon the first person who hurries to pick it up. We shouldn't think that we can leave it up to others, especially when we are the first to notice and point it out. Tremendous merit is conferred upon a person in this case, since his actions can encourage other people to do the same, meaning that he will accrue the merit of having awakened people to this mitzvah.

The same applies to promptly going to synagogue. We shouldn't say, "*There'll be a minyan in any case, so why should I hurry to be among the first ten men there?*" On the contrary, it is because of the one who hurries that there is a minyan. It is very important to cherish this mitzvah and not to count on others to fulfill it. Instead, a person should hurry to be among the first ten men in synagogue.

The verse, "*The leaders brought the Shoham stones*" (*Exodus 35:27*) confirms that hastening to perform mitzvot without hesitation is important to Hashem. The Sages have said that the letter yud is missing in the word "*leaders*" because they demonstrated idleness with regards to the work of the Sanctuary, since they did not hasten to bring their offerings (*Yalkut Shimoni, Nasso 612*). From here we learn that the leaders did not value

this attitude. In fact they should have demonstrated an example to all the Children of Israel, since they were their leaders. They should have immediately brought their offerings without delay.

From here we must also learn a lesson with regards to the construction of a yeshiva or synagogue. When we donate money for this mitzvah and there are people who jump at the chance to give a large donation, others will also feel like giving, and these donations will be due primarily to those who gave first.

The Greatness of Aaron

On the verse, "*Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you kindle the lamps…'*" (*Numbers 8:2*), the Sages say: "*Why is the passage on the Menorah juxtaposed to the passage on the leaders? It is because when Aaron saw the dedication of the leaders, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication, neither he nor his tribe. Therefore G-d said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps.'*"

This means that Aaron was distressed over the fact that all the other tribes brought offerings, which drew them closer to the Holy One, blessed be He, whereas Aaron and his tribe were not called upon to bring offerings and come closer to Hashem. He therefore consoled Aaron with the responsibility of kindling the lamps (*"yours is greater than theirs"*). This raises three questions that need to be explained: (*1*) Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not inform Aaron from the outset that his tribe would kindle the lamps? In that case, neither he nor his tribe would have been hurt by not having been invited, along with the other tribes, to bring offerings! (*2*) The book Beit Av also asks why Aaron waited for an invitation from Hashem. Why did he not have a desire to go and bring offerings for his tribe, since he was the leader of the tribe of Levi? In that case, he would not have been distressed. (*3*) How was Aaron consoled by the fact that Hashem gave him the order to prepare and kindle the lamps, since his distress was caused by the fact that all the other tribes brought offerings, whereas he and his tribe were not? How would kindling the lamps be better than bringing an offering?

To explain, let us first cite the words of the Sages on the verse, "*Moses was pasturing the flocks of Jethro*" (*Exodus 3:1*). They ask why this verse needs to tell us what Moses did before attaining greatness. The answer is that it is simply an introduction to tell us exactly how Moses deserved to become the deliverer of Israel (*Zohar II:20b-21a*). The reason that Hashem chose him above all others is obviously because of his deeds. In fact when Moses was pasturing the flocks of his father-in-law in the desert, a small lamb escaped, and he went looking for it until he arrived at a place with a pond. The lamb drank its fill, and Moses said to himself: "*I didn't know that it fled because it was thirsty. It must certainly be tired.*" He then carried it on his shoulders and brought it back to the flock. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "*Since he shows compassion to animals, he is worthy of pasturing My people Israel.*" We also find that the Holy

One, blessed be He, did not appoint David as king until He saw how he acted with the flock (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot 169; Zohar II:21a*). Likewise, before the Holy One, blessed be He, accords greatness to any tzaddik, He first tests him to see if he can resist the trials of this world, as it is written: "*The L-RD tests the righteous*" (*Psalms 11:5*).

This may be why the tribe of Levi was not invited along with the other tribes to bring offerings, namely that Hashem wanted to test Aaron and his tribe in order to see if they would complain to Him or not. In Aaron, Hashem found a vessel that was filled with the fear of G-d, which is what earned him a love greater than that of the other tribes, for not only did he not protest, he was even afraid that he was somehow to blame! Aaron thought that this was why Hashem considered all the other tribes to have attained perfection, and in his mind that was why they were chosen by Hashem to bring Him offerings. Similarly, the members of the tribe of Levi were afraid that they would have to repent for having killed people (during the incident of the golden calf) who were not worthy of death. Hence they thought that they had lost the right to bring Hashem offerings. With such thoughts in mind, Aaron and his tribe demonstrated that they were more worthy of greatness than the other tribes.

This is why the tribe of Levi deserved to be the only tribe to constantly serve Hashem in the Sanctuary and bring Him offerings. Furthermore, great teachers of Israel emerged from the tribe of Levi (*Pesikta Zutah, Vayechi 49:7*), for the Torah only enters the heart of the humble (*Taanith 7a*). It was for this reason that a desire did not arise in Aaron's heart to take the initiative of bringing offerings on his own, even though he was the leader of the tribe of Levi. He believed that if he had not been invited to bring offerings to Hashem, it was a sure sign that he was not worthy of doing so (*see Berachot 60a*). Due to his modesty, as well as the extreme humility required to have said, "*And what are we*" (*Exodus 16:7*), he merited the task of kindling the lamps. In other words, by kindling the lamps he would enable a divine influence to descend upon all lights – upon all the souls of the Children of Israel, as it is written: "*A man's soul is the lamp of the L-RD*" (*Proverbs 20:27*) – and upon all the mitzvot, which are also lights, as it is written: "*For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light*" (*ibid. 6:23*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron, "*Yours is greater than theirs*." Actually, the fact of not having been invited by Hashem to bring an offering was solely meant to put him to the test before choosing him for such a lofty task. When Aaron overcame this test, it turned out that the last was the most beloved, and that the kindling of the lamps was certainly more valuable than bringing an offering, for in this way he would have an influence on all the worlds.

Hashem therefore told Aaron that he certainly possessed good deeds, for he would prepare and kindle the lamps. This meant that he had always been a tzaddik and performed mitzvot to perfection. Furthermore, in the future "*the seven lamps shall light*" (*Numbers 8:2*), for by Aaron's merit a miracle would take place in the era of the Hasmoneans, when a flask of oil would be discovered that could burn for only a single day, yet by his merit it will burn for seven days more.

From all that has been said, we must realize that a person does not have the right to protest against Hashem or complain about His deeds, despite not understanding them and feeling that he is suffering unjustly. In his anguish, a person should instead see a sign that he must reflect upon his conduct to see whether he can somehow better himself. Maybe, in proportion to his level, there is something lacking in how he serves the Creator, something that is bringing this suffering upon him, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is very strict with the tzaddikim. The Sages have said, "*If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct*" (*Berachot 5a*). This means that if a person thinks that his suffering is unjustified, since his conduct appears to be flawless, he should still examine his ways. He must look into the smallest details of his conduct, for although his actions may be correct, perhaps Hashem sees some fault in them. A person must therefore examine his ways very carefully, for in doing so he may find something that will be to his advantage to improve. As a follow up to the words of the Sages, if a person has reflected upon his deeds but finds nothing for which to attribute his suffering, he should attribute them to a negligence in Torah study. This is because Torah study has no fixed limit (*Peah 1:1*), as it is written: "*You shall meditate on it day and night*" (*Joshua 1:8*). It may be that a person has neglected his Torah study for a brief moment, which is what led to his suffering. As such, we may explain the statement of the Sages on the Torah: "*Behold, it is rolled up and lying in the corner. Whoever wishes to study, let him go and study*" (*Kiddushin 66a*). This is because the Torah is light, as the Sages have said: "*Light means Torah*" (*Megillah 16b*). It lies in a corner, and no vessel contains it. Thus anyone who wants to study and forge a vessel for it can do so, meaning that by studying Torah he can fulfill mitzvot, lights that will enable the Torah to shine.

The Way is Bared to the Evil Inclination

It is written, "*When you kindle the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light*" (*Bamidbar 8:2*). Here Rashi explains, "*Towards the face of the Menorah. Towards the middle lamp, which is not on the branches, but on the Menorah itself. Shall…cast light. The six on the six branches: The three eastern ones – that is, their wicks – facing towards the center one, and likewise the three western ones, the tops of their wicks facing towards the center one. Why? So that it should not be said that He needs the light.*" The commentators (*Rabbeinu Bechaye and others*) object to this, saying that if the central stem is described as the "*Menorah,*" it follows that there are only six lamps projecting light towards it, not seven. Therefore why does the verse state, "*Towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light*"?

To answer this question, let us begin by discussing another issue that will enable us to better understand this passage. We must ask ourselves why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moshe when he ascended the mountain and stayed there for 40 days and 40 nights, without eating or drinking. Should He not have given it to him when he was on earth, since it is written: "*It [the Torah] is not in Heaven*" (*Devarim 30:12*)?

May My Soul be as Dust to All

Let us see what the Sages have said on this subject: "*If a man allows himself to be treated as the desert, upon which everybody treads, the Torah will be given to him as a gift. … [H]is learning will be preserved by him, otherwise it will not*" (*Eruvin 54a*). This means that a person must be humble, for the Torah does not endure with one who is proud. Elsewhere the Torah is compared to water, for just as water that is placed on an uneven surface will flow from high to low, the Torah forsakes those who rise up and grow proud, and it descends to those who act with humility. It is with the humble that the Torah endures.

We need to understand why the Sages compared humility to the desert. Is it because they wanted to say that a person must become like dust that people step upon, as we say in our daily prayers: "*May my soul be as dust to all*" (*Berachot 17a*)? In that case, the Sages could have said that if a person becomes like the dust which everyone steps upon with their feet, their learning will endure. Yet here they wanted to teach us an additional characteristic of Torah study, namely that just as the desert is far from inhabited regions, and just as few people pass through the desert, a person who wants his learning to endure must have, when he studies Torah, views that are far from those in vogue among inhabited places. Furthermore, such a person must not pay attention to the vanities of this world, but should instead depart from them. All his work must already seem finished to him, to the point that he no longer feels the need to work more. When a person distances himself from all the cares of this world, he is promised that his Torah will endure.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moshe in Heaven, a place far removed from all inhabited regions and this world. In fact there is no eating or drinking in the World to Come, and therefore when Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, the ministering angels asked Hashem: "*What business has one born of woman among us?*" (*Shabbat 88b*). In other words: Just who is this son of a woman, such that he wants to resemble us and be like us, among whom there is no eating or drinking? Since he is the son of a woman, a being of flesh and blood, entirely physical, how can he endure in a world which has no such things, which are indispensable for living?

It is a basic principle that a person only savors the Torah when he studies it, when he is fully engaged in it and distances himself from the vanities of this world in order to cleave to its words, like a desert that is far from inhabited places. How can a person achieve this? It is by studying Torah in a Beit HaMidrash or a yeshiva. If he studies it in another place, a place that is relatively close to his everyday life, his mind will not be free to devote itself exclusively to Torah.

Drag it to the Beit HaMidrash

We can now understand the words of the Sages when they said, "*Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva…. In the wilderness they had a yeshiva*" (*Yoma 28b*). This seems surprising, for why did they need a yeshiva?

Could they not have studied Torah by themselves? The Sages have also said in regards to Jacob: "*He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to teach [Bereshith 46:28]. What is implied by 'to teach'? Rabbi Nehemiah said, 'To prepare a yeshiva for him there, where he would teach Torah and where the tribal ancestors would read Torah'*" (*Bereshith Rabba 95:3*). This is also astonishing, for was Jacob unable to study Torah with them at home or in another place, such that he needed a yeshiva?

The answer is that our forefathers did not act in this way. They wanted to teach their children that a person will only retain his learning when he studies in a place that is far removed from the cares of this world, in a Beit HaMidrash or yeshiva. In fact the present world is material, and the Torah is spiritual, so when a person still focuses on the cares of this world, the Torah cannot endure with him, for he negates it.

However if he distances his heart from the cares of this world and enters the Beit HaMidrash or yeshiva to study Torah, it can immediately endure in him. This is why the Sages said, "*If this wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit HaMidrash*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). Since the Beit HaMidrash is isolated and far from the vanities of this world, the evil inclination no longer has any control over a person who is there.

Moshe also did not receive the Torah before having been far removed from this world – on a high mountain separated from the earth, in a desert far from inhabited places – in order to teach us that the Torah is only acquired when we isolate and distance ourselves from the vanities of this world. Furthermore, he could not receive the Torah here below, on earth, in a material place. Since the Torah is completely holy and spiritual, it could not be absorbed into the heart of Moshe in a mundane place. Once he received it at the top of the mountain, he could take the Torah with him into a physical place, into this lowly world, for he had obtained it in a holy world, the World to Come.

The Lights of the Menorah Will Never be Annulled

In regards to Rashi's comments, who states that the expression "*towards the face of the Menorah*" (*Bamidbar 8:2*) means "*towards the middle lamp, which is not on the branches, but on the Menorah itself,*" the commentators have objected that if such is the case, it would seem that there were only six lights that cast light "*towards the face of the Menorah,*" meaning the central stem, not seven. Why, in that case, does the verse say seven rather than six, since there were only six lamps?

The Things of this World

I would like to explain this according to what our Sages have said in the Gemara: "*If a man allows himself to be treated as a desert, upon which everybody treads, his learning will endure. Otherwise it will not*" (*Eruvin 54a*). This means that a person must be humble. The Torah only endures with one who does not grow proud, and elsewhere the Torah is compared to water (*Taanith 7a*). Just as water flows from a higher to a lower level, the Torah departs from those who rise up and grow proud, and it descends towards those who act with humility. With them, it endures.

We need to understand why the Sages compared humility to the desert. Is it because they wanted to say that a man must make himself like dust, which people tread upon with their feet, as we read in the prayer: "*Let my soul be as dust to all*" (*Berachot 17a*)? In that case, they could have said that if a man makes himself as the dust that everyone treads upon with their feet, his study will endure. Yet here, they wanted to teach us another aspect of Torah study, namely that just as a desert is far from inhabited regions and few people pass through it, a person who wants his learning to endure must have, when he studies Torah, views that are far removed from the standard views found in inhabited places. Such a person must also not pay attention to the vanities of this world, but should instead depart from them. All his mundane work must already seem finished to him, to the point that he no longer feels the need to work any further. When a person wholeheartedly distances himself from the concerns of this world, he is promised that his learning will endure.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moshe in Heaven, which is far removed from inhabited places and from this world. In fact there is no eating or drinking in the World to Come, and therefore when Moshe ascended to Heaven in order to receive the Torah, the ministering angels asked Hashem: "*What business has one born of woman among us?*" (*Shabbat 88b*). This means: Just who is this son of a woman, such that he wants to resemble us and be like us, among whom there is no eating or drinking? Since he is the son of a woman, a being of flesh and blood, entirely physical, how can he endure in a world without such things, which are indispensable for life?

It is a basic principle that a person only perceives the taste of Torah when he studies it, when he is fully engaged in it and distances himself from the vanities of this world in order to cleave to its words, like a desert that is far removed from inhabited places. How can he achieve this? By studying Torah in a Beit HaMidrash or a yeshiva. If he studies it in another place, a place that is relatively close to his everyday life, his mind will not be free to devote itself exclusively to Torah.

Far from this World

Moshe also did not receive the Torah before having been far removed from this world – on a high mountain separated from the earth, in a desert far removed from inhabited places – thereby teaching us that it is only acquired when we isolate ourselves and flee the vanities of this world. Furthermore, he could not receive the Torah here on earth, in a material place, for it is completely holy and spiritual, and it could not be absorbed into Moshe's heart in a mundane place. Once he received the Torah at the top of the mountain, he could take it with him into a physical place, into this lowly world, for he had obtained it in a sacred world, the World to Come.

Thus it is written, "*When you kindle the lamps*" – these lamps are the Torah and mitzvot, as it is written: "*For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light*" (*Mishlei 6:23*). We can only elevate ourselves in the study of Torah and perceive its taste when we learn in a Beit HaMidrash; at that point, the flame ascends of its own accord.

Concerning those who learn in a Beit HaMidrash, the Sages have said: "*Every talmid chacham who studies Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before him and studies with him*" (*Eliya Rabba 18*). This is alluded to in the verse, "*When you kindle the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light*" (*Bamidbar 8:2*). The term "*seven*" alludes to Shabbat, the seventh day, for just as a person cannot perceive the taste of Shabbat without observing it, he also cannot perceive the taste of the Torah's words without going to the Beit HaMidrash and distancing himself from this world. Hence it is written that the seven lights shall cast light, telling us that Torah study – which is as important as Shabbat, a foretaste of the World to Come – casts light towards the face of the Menorah. This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, sits in front of a person who studies Torah. The Menorah symbolizes Him.

This is why the Sages have said, "*Aaron did not bring an offering with the other leaders, and so he thought: 'Woe is me! Perhaps it is on my account that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not accept the tribe of Levi?' The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore said to Moshe: 'Go and tell Aaron: Do not be afraid! You have in store for you an honor greater than this! The offerings shall remain in force only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps shall always cast light before the Menorah, and all the blessings with which I have given you to bless My children shall never be abolished'*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 15:6*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, told Aaron that the offerings are valid only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps are for all time. This means that Moshe, who heard this from G-d's mouth, repeated it to Aaron, who in turn repeated it to the elders, and so on until all Israel heard. Now since Moshe had ascended towards G-d, he was the only one who perceived the taste of these words. Yet Aaron also – since he heard it from the mouth of Moshe, who had heard it from the mouth of G-d – perceived the taste more than all the others.

How Can We Taste the Flavor of Torah?

It is written, "*When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast light toward the face of the Menorah*" (*Bamidbar 8:2*), as it is written: "*For a mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is light*" (*Mishlei 6:23*). Only a person who learns at the Beit HaMidrash can elevate himself in the study of Torah and taste its flavor. There, the flame ascends on its own. Parsha Beha'alotcha begins with the letter beit, which alludes to the Beit HaMidrash and yeshiva, telling us that a person can only taste the flavor of Torah when he sits down to study at the Beit HaMidrash. One who learns Torah elsewhere cannot be compared to one who learns Torah at the Beit HaMidrash.

The Sages have said that when a talmid chacham sits down to study Torah at the Beit HaMidrash, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before him and studies with him. This is alluded to in the verse, "*the seven lamps shall cast light toward the face of the Menorah.*" In fact the term "*seven*" alludes to Shabbat, which is the seventh day. Just

as no one can taste the flavor of Shabbat before having properly observed it, likewise no one can find flavor in words of Torah before having entered the Beit HaMidrash and distanced himself from this world. Hence it is written, "*the seven lamps shall cast light*" in order to teach us that the Torah – comparable to Shabbat, which is a foretaste of the World to Come – casts light before the face of the Menorah. In other words, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before one who learns Torah, Hashem being designated by the Menorah.

This is why the Sages have said, "*Now Aaron did not bring an offering with the other princes, and so he thought: 'Woe is me! Perhaps it is on my account that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not accept the tribe of Levi?' The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore said to Moshe, 'Go and tell Aaron: Do not be afraid! You have in store an honor greater than this!' ... The offerings shall remain in force only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps shall always cast light toward the face of the Menorah*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 15:6*). When Moshe Rabbeinu heard G-d's command, he transmitted it to Aaron, and Aaron transmitted it to the Elders, until all the Children of Israel heard it. However since Moshe alone had ascended towards G-d, he was the only one to hear this command. Aaron too, since he heard it from Moshe, who heard it from G-d, felt it more intensely than everyone else.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron: "*You have in store for you an honor greater than this,*" for the lamps shall always exist. As we have said, these lamps allude to the Torah, which will exist forever.

The Foundation of the Entire Torah

According to what has been said, I will attempt to explain the teaching of the Sages which states that the mitzvah of Shabbat is unlike the other mitzvot. Moshe heard all the other mitzvot from G-d and transmitted them to Aaron, who transmitted them to the Elders, who transmitted them to all Israel. As for the mitzvah of Shabbat, Moshe did not transmit it to Aaron. Rather, he explained it before Aaron, the Elders, and the entire Jewish people so everyone would hear it directly from him. In other words, since all of Shabbat is a foretaste of the World to Come, only Moshe himself could explain it to Israel, for he had been on the mountain without food or water, nourishing himself only from the splendor of the Shechinah. It was Moshe who had a foretaste of the World to Come, for in the World to Come there is neither food nor drink, and the tzaddikim sit with crowns upon their head and rejoice in the splendor of the Shechinah. Since Moshe tasted the flavor of the World to Come, he could therefore transmit the mitzvah of Shabbat to the Children of Israel, since Shabbat is a foretaste of the World to Come. As for Aaron and the Elders, who had not been on the mountain or had a foretaste of the World to Come, they could not transmit the mitzvah of Shabbat to the Children of Israel.

To what can this be compared? It is like two people before whom a dish is presented. The first tastes the dish, while the second does not. The second person says to the first, "*What does it taste like?*" Since the first person has tasted the dish, he can describe its

taste. Although the second person has not tasted the dish, nor has it entered his mouth (*since only the first person tasted the dish and can describe its flavor*), the second person can understand what it is like only to a certain degree. However when a third person joins them, and the third asks the second what the dish is like, although the second will repeat what the first person told him, the third person will not be able to understand, since the second never tasted the dish. How can he describe to others what he himself did not taste? Likewise for Shabbat, which is a foretaste of the World to Come, only Moshe could transmit it to the Children of Israel, for he had tasted of the World to Come upon receiving the Torah.

Let us say that Shabbat is the foundation of the entire Torah. Whoever observes Shabbat and enjoys a foretaste of the World to Come can fulfill the entire Torah, which was given in the World to Come. When a person desecrates Shabbat, however, it is a sign that he does not fulfill the other mitzvot, and he has the same status as a non-Jew, for he renders wine forbidden. In fact it is written, "*Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever*" (*Shemot 31:17*), on which the Sages have explained: "*Between Me and the Children of Israel – not between Me and the nations of the world*" (*Mechilta, Shabbata 1*). They also say, "*A non-Jew who observes Shabbat is liable to death*" (*Sanhedrin 58b*).

Why? It is because whoever has not tasted of the World to Come does not have the right to fulfill mitzvot, and a man can only taste the flavor of the World to Come through Shabbat. Just as all a man's work must, in his eyes, already be done prior to Shabbat, likewise he must feel the same when he studies Torah and fulfills mitzvot. When someone desecrates Shabbat, it is a sign that he cannot sense this, and therefore he does not have the right to fulfill Torah. Hence the Sages said, "*Shabbat is equivalent to all mitzvot*" (*Shemot Rabba 25:12*), because a man who observes Shabbat has a foretaste of the World to Come and realizes that he must view his work as having already been completed. He can then learn Torah, and his learning will endure.

The Importance of Hastening to Perform Mitzvot

It is written, "*Speak to Aaron… 'When you light the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.' Aaron did so*" (*Bamidbar 8:2-3*). Rashi cites the Sifri in stating, "*This demonstrates Aaron's virtue – that he did not deviate.*"

The book Otzarot HaChida states, "We may raise the question: Why would he want to deviate from anything? Furthermore, why is it precisely here that Scripture mentions the greatness of Aaron, who did not deviate from anything? Did he deviate from anything elsewhere?

"*Rabbeinu Shlomo Astruc states in regards to our parsha that this means that although the lamps could be arranged and lit by a simple kohen – as it is said in Parsha Tetzaveh: 'Aaron and his sons shall arrange it' [Shemot 27:21], and here as well it is said: beha'alotcha [when you cause to light], not bealotcha [when you light], an expression*

which indicates that he can order others to light it – he nevertheless performed the mitzvah himself. Furthermore, no order is given to light the lamps in this passage. We are only told that when they are lit, the seven lamps must cast light towards the face of the Menorah, meaning that the lamps were lit on their own. Nevertheless, Aaron hastened to perform the mitzvah himself. Although this idea is accurate, it still does not correspond to the expression used: 'he did not deviate.'"

We may explain the Chida's question concerning the expression "*he did not deviate*" by first recalling something else, namely that there are two ways of serving Hashem. If someone has the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that only one person can perform, not two, this is one way. As soon as he sees that he has the opportunity to perform this mitzvah, he jumps at the opportunity like one who has found a treasure. Even if others try to seize this opportunity, he will demonstrate greater zeal and obtain this mitzvah for himself. The second way of serving Hashem consists of looking for other people to perform a mitzvah when the opportunity presents itself, in order to confer merit upon them, not to take it for himself. Not because he doesn't love mitzvot, but because he wants to confer merit upon others.

Hashem values the first way more, for as the Mechilta states: "*If it [a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately*" (*cited by Rashi on Shemot 12:17*). That being the case, it is obvious that when the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, a person should hasten to do it; he should not pass it up or neglect it. He will thus be appreciated by Hashem, for it demonstrates that the performance of mitzvot is very important to him.

Let us return to the subject of lighting the Menorah. At the beginning of Parsha Beha'alotcha, Rashi cites the Sages in stating: "*Why is the portion dealing with the Menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the leaders? For when Aaron saw the dedication [offerings] of the leaders, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication, neither he nor his tribe. Therefore G-d said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps'*" (*see Bamidbar Rabba 15:6; Sifri ibid.*).

Why, in fact, did this trouble Aaron so greatly? It is because there were many elevated concepts pertaining to the offerings of the tribal leaders, as the Midrash states (*Bamidbar Rabba 13*): It was something that was done only once for all the generations. Therefore when Aaron realized that he lost the opportunity to perform this mitzvah, he was very upset. Hence to calm and console him, Hashem gave him the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, for in this way he could elevate himself more and more each day. Thus the offering of each tribal leader was only made once, but Aaron's contribution was something permanent and eternal, for all the days.

Although the obligation to light the lamps did not fall specifically on Aaron (since his sons, ordinary kohanim, could also light them), he still took it upon himself to light them. This is because a mitzvah presented itself to Aaron, and a person must not pass up an opportunity to perform a mitzvah. Hence Aaron is praised for not having deviated, and instead he hastened to seize the opportunity to perform this mitzvah and to merit it.

We must draw a lesson from this in regards to other mitzvot, such as the mitzvah of tzeddakah. Sometimes we have an opportunity to give tzeddakah and to send money through the mail or by a third person, or to skirt the issue by telling ourselves that there are people who are wealthier than ourselves, and that they can give tzeddakah, thus "*giving them*" (as it were) the merit of this mitzvah. From this week's parsha, we must learn to jump at such an opportunity and hasten to give tzeddakah, telling ourselves that if we hurry and do it ourselves, Hashem will greatly appreciate us.

Likewise when someone sees a sefer lying on the floor, and other people also see it, the first who hastens to pick it up receives merit. He should not think that he can leave it for others to pick up, especially when he is the first to see it. Tremendous merit is conferred upon a person in such a case, since others have seen him and understood that what he did was a mitzvah. He also has the merit for having awakened people to this mitzvah.

The same applies to promptly going to synagogue. We shouldn't say, "*There'll be a minyan in any case, so why should I hurry to be among the first ten men there?*" It is very important that we hasten to go and a minyan forms on our account, for it demonstrates that we love the mitzvah and do not rely on others to do it for us. Instead, we ourselves have hastened to go and merited to be among the first ten there.

We find support for this idea, namely that hastening to perform a mitzvah is important to Hashem, from the verse: "*And the leaders brought the shoham stones*" (*Shemot 35:27*). Rashi cites the Sages in stating that the letter yud is missing in the word *vehanesi'im* ("and the leaders"), for they were lax in the work for the Sanctuary by suggesting that others make the offering which they wanted, and that they would complete what was lacking.

According to what we have said, we can fully understand why G-d was not pleased with this. In fact the leaders should have provided an example for all the Children of Israel, not to mention the fact that the first to perform a mitzvah earns merit. Furthermore, these men were leaders in Israel, and it was important that they be the first to give, for it would have provided an example to all Israel, and thanks to them people would have willingly desired to give. Yet that is not what they did, which is why it was considered a deficiency on their part.

On the other hand, we see the opposite with Moshe Rabbeinu, for regarding him we read: "*On the day that Moshe finished erecting the Sanctuary*" (*Bamidbar 7:1*). Here the Sages ask, "*Was it Moshe who built it? It was Betzalel and all the wise-hearted men who built it! Yet since Moshe completely devoted himself to fulfilling the mitzvah of the Sanctuary, in learning and teaching others about all its details, in overseeing the work, and by arousing the zeal of the Children of Israel, he is considered to have done all the work, and the entire mitzvah carries his name*" (*Pesikta Rabbati 5*).

From here we learn how to build a yeshiva or synagogue: When we donate money for this mitzvah and there are people who hasten to be the first to give a large donation, they will draw others into wanting to give as well. The people who hasten to be the first

to give thus have a double merit, as the Sages have said: "*One who makes others act is greater than one who acts.*" In fact since they led others into giving, their merit is greater than those who gave afterwards. Hence the first ones to give towards a mitzvah, and who lead others into giving with them, have the merit of those who act and those who cause others to act. Happy are they for having acted properly!

Hastening to Fulfill Mitzvot

It is written, "*Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps case light.' Aaron did so*" (*Bamidbar 8:2-3*).

Here Rashi cites the Sifrei in stating that "*Aaron did so*" is mentioned in order to demonstrate "*Aaron's virtue, insofar as he did not deviate [from G-d's command].*" However the book Otzrot HaChida asks why he would have deviated from anything! Furthermore, why was Aaron praised for this? Did he ever deviate from a given command?

Our teacher Rabbi Shlomo Astruc writes that the reason for this praise is the following: Although a simple kohen could have arranged the lamps and lit the Menorah (as we read in Parsha Tetzaveh*: "Aaron and his sons shall arrange it" [Shemot 27:21]*) and although G-d said *beha'alotcha* (*"when you cause to kindle"*) – not *be'alotcha* (*"when you kindle"*), Aaron committed himself to fulfilling this mitzvah himself. Furthermore, this verse does not give the order to kindle the lamps. It only serves to specify that at the time of the lighting, the seven lamps together must cast light towards the Menorah, meaning that the lamps were lit on their own. Now despite this, Aaron hastened to perform this mitzvah and personally light the lamps. Yet the Chida has a reservation: Even if this idea is well-understood, it does not explain how "*Aaron did not deviate [from G-d's command]*"!

In order to resolve the Chida's question, let us first examine another subject. There are two ways to act when an opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself. A person can hasten to do it himself, meaning that even if others want to perform it as well, he will gain the upper hand and merit to accomplish it. The other approach consists of not taking advantage of the mitzvah himself, but finding volunteers to perform it – and not because he doesn't love mitzvot, but because he wants to confer merit upon others.

The first approach is more precious in G-d's eyes. As the Mechilta states in Parsha Bo (*see Rashi on Shemot 12:17*), "*If it [the opportunity to perform a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately!*" Indeed, we must fulfill it immediately and not forgo such an opportunity! We will then be worthy of praise before G-d, for we will have demonstrated just how important the performance of mitzvot is to us.

Let us return to the issue of kindling the lamps. At the beginning of Parsha Beha'alotcha, Rashi states: "*Why is the portion dealing with the Menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the leaders? For when Aaron saw the dedication [offerings] of the leaders, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication – neither he*

nor his tribe. G-d therefore said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps.'"

In reality, why was Aaron so sad? The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba 13*) explains that the offerings brought by the leaders at that time contained many lofty concepts. Furthermore, this inauguration was a unique event. To find himself excluded from it had a profound effect on Aaron. Thus in order to calm and console Aaron, Hashem assured him that the lighting of the Menorah was a greater mitzvah than theirs, for he could elevate himself each day through this mitzvah. In fact the leaders brought their offering just once, whereas Aaron's actions would occur on a regular and perpetual basis.

Now although Aaron wasn't personally obligated to light the Menorah every day – for his sons (regular kohanim) were also authorized to take care of it – he still committed himself to this task in light of the principle: "*If it [the opportunity to perform a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately!*" That is why Aaron was praised insofar as he "*did not deviate.*" In fact he always hastened to fulfill a mitzvah himself, thereby meriting its performance.

We can derive a lesson for other mitzvot from this, such as the mitzvah of tzeddakah. When the opportunity to give tzeddakah presents itself, we can either send money by mail or through an envoy, or we can sidestep it by saying that other people are wealthier and more capable of performing this mitzvah, and that we want to leave them the merit (so to speak) of performing it. Yet from this parsha, we learn that we must fervently seize the opportunity to give tzeddakah and realize that such an attitude makes us worthy of praise before the Creator.

Likewise, when someone sees a Torah book on the floor, he should hasten to bend down and pick it up, even if other people are present. Wanting to give this merit to others is unnecessary! Furthermore, those who see us doing this, acting with fervor for the sake of a mitzvah, will also derive more incentive to fulfill mitzvot themselves. This also procures merit for us before G-d.

This principle also applies to the fervor with which we go to synagogue: We must not tell ourselves, "*There'll be a minyan there in any case, so why should I hurry to be among the first ten?*" On the contrary, a person who hastens to synagogue, and on whose account a minyan is formed, demonstrates how precious this mitzvah is to him. He does not count on others to fulfill it, but makes certain that he is among the first ten.

In noting that the behavior of the tribal leaders displeased Hashem, we learn that a person who fulfills mitzvot without hesitation, but instead with fervor, is greatly cherished by G-d. In fact it is written, "*Vehanesi'im [And the leaders] brought the shoham stones*" (*Shemot 35:27*), and here the term vehanesi'im is lacking the letter yud. Rashi explains that for the inauguration of the Sanctuary, the leaders demonstrated a lack of fervor by declaring: "*Let the community donate what they will donate, and we will complete what they are missing.*"

We can now understand why this approach, which consisted of delaying to bring their offerings to the Sanctuary, was displeasing to Hashem. Besides the fact that hastening to fulfill a mitzvah confers merit upon a person, these men were the leaders of Israel and should have served as an example for the people. They should have been the first to bring their offerings, thereby setting an example and arousing a desire among the people to willingly give. Yet regrettably, they did not act in this way, which was considered a failure on their part.

On the other hand, we find a completely different approach with Moshe, as it is written: "*On the day that Moshe finished erecting the Sanctuary*" (*Bamidbar 7:1*). Our Sages ask, "*Was it Moshe who built it? It was Betzalel and all the wise-hearted men who built it!*" However they added, "*Yet since Moshe completely devoted himself to fulfilling the mitzvah of the Sanctuary, in learning and teaching others about all its details, in overseeing the work, and by arousing the fervor of the Children of Israel, he is considered to have done all the work.*" We may expand upon this subject and learn how to build a yeshiva or synagogue: When we collect funds to fulfill this mitzvah, some hasten to give a significant contribution and others follow their example. However the first to give earns a double merit, as our Sages have taught: "*One who makes others act is greater than one who acts.*" A person who leads others into making a donation has greater merit than the donor. Thus the first to make their contribution to a mitzvah have, as a result, incited others to emulate them. Hence they have the merit of their own actions as well as the merit of others. Happy are those who have consideration for mitzvot!

Prolonging His Nazirite Vow

It is written, "*He shall bring his offering to Hashem: One unblemished sheep in its first year as a burnt-offering, one unblemished ewe in its first year as a sin-offering, and one unblemished ram as a peace-offering*" (*Bamidbar 6:14*).

The Ramban raises an objection here, for a sin-offering is brought for a sin. Yet what sin did the Nazir commit? He explains that until now the Nazir has been, on account of his Nazirite vow, holy and pure, not ceasing to grow in holiness. In fact he has been a crown of sanctity, as the verse states: "*For the crown of his G-d is upon his head*" (*Bamidbar 6:7*). Yet now that his Nazirite vow has ended, he descends, so to speak, from the spiritual level that he achieved, which is why he must bring an offering to atone for this spiritual fall. Yet this remains difficult to understand, for he has not committed the slightest sin. That being the case, why must he bring a sin-offering?

To answer this, let us mention what the Sages have said in regards to pride, which is a bitter source of all kinds of sin. The Holy One, blessed be He, says of the proud: "*I and he cannot both dwell in the world*" (*Sotah 5a*). The proud repels the Shechinah and is abhorrent to Hashem, as it is written: "*Every proud heart is an abomination to Hashem*" (*Mishlei 16:5*).

The Sages also teach, "*Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive man out of the world*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:21*). This does not mean that these vile defects drive a man out of the World to Come alone; they also drive him out of this world, for a proud person is never inclined to recognize his error and admit fault. Even when he sees the rope tightening around his neck, he will remain firm in his rebellion and make every effort to cleanse the unclean insect in his hand by saying, "*I haven't sinned.*" It is likely that this character fault is what lies behind the conduct of the *sotah* (a woman suspected of infidelity). Her pride prevents her from recognizing her wicked deeds, and she is not prepared to admit that she has done any wrong. In fact even when she sees death approaching and realizes that in a few moments she must drink the bitter waters that will cause her death, she continues to proclaim her innocence, brazenly claiming: "*I'm pure!*" In fact this is how the proud behave: They are ready to give up both this world and the World to Come in order not to admit they are wrong.

Hence this week's parsha is read immediately after the festival of Shavuot, the festival of the giving of the Torah, in order to declare the vileness of pride, a character flaw that drives a person to the depths of the abyss. Even the Torah does not endure with a person imbued with pride, as the Sages have said: "*Why are the words of the Torah compared to water…? To teach you that just as water flows from a higher to a lower level, likewise words of Torah endure only with one who is humble*" (*Ta'anit 7a*). This is why the passage on the sotah is juxtaposed to the giving of the Torah, in order for people to guard against pride, to distance themselves from it as much as possible, and to acquire humility – the source of all virtues and by which we merit the very presence of Torah in perpetuity.

We can now understand why, at the end of his Nazirite vow, a Nazir must bring a sin-offering. It is because his main goal was to abstain from wine in order to improve his conduct. In fact, having seen the sotah in her disgrace proved to the Nazir that he was suffering from a lack of modesty and the fear of G-d, and the Torah commanded him to avoid wine in order to sanctify himself. Now that his Nazirite vow is over, he must again examine his conduct and ensure that he has absolutely rid himself of his past errors, that he has freed himself of the evil that previously cleaved to him.

Who will guarantee that he has managed to eliminate the spiritual plague that dwelled in him, such that he can now free himself of the yoke of his Nazirite vow and start drinking wine again? Hence his conduct includes, in a manner of speaking, a sin, which is why he must bring a sin-offering to atone for it. In fact he should have continued on the path of the Nazirite vow and increased his holiness. After the sanctity from the festival of the giving of the Torah, we must strengthen ourselves in the spiritual realm and constantly progress, not being content with the holiness and purity that we have already obtained.

Hence after the festival of Shavuot, we read Parshiot Nasso and Beha'alotcha, the names of which evoke the concept of constant spiritual growth. There are in fact two

growths that we experience here: The preparation for receiving the Torah, and the giving of the Torah. During the counting of the Omer, we prepare ourselves to be a vessel worthy of receiving the Torah, which will reside in us. Then the moment that we have waited for so long – Shavuot – finally arrives. We must preserve this spiritual growth and not stop adding to it.

I had the very great pleasure, on the night of Shavuot, to see the Jewish people in all its beauty and glory. I walked all along the Eleventh district [of Paris] during that entire sacred evening, and I saw how synagogues were packed with the young and not-so-young learning Torah side by side. I saw hundreds of youngsters, a portion of whom seemed completely non-religious, gathering around my sons and avidly listening to and drinking in words of Torah. I gave them a course in Mussar and then asked them, "*What are you doing here in the middle of the night? Why don't you go home and sleep?*" They responded with warmth and honesty: "*We came to receive the Torah.*" I was very moved at that point, and I felt great affection for them. It is certain that the Holy One, blessed be He, also rejoices in them and deeply loves them.

A great spiritual revolution is occurring in the world before the coming of Mashiach, a spirit of purity is manifesting itself and everyone thirsts for the word of G-d. As the Prophet Amos said, "*Not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Hashem*" (*Amos 8:11*). Let us all continue with this same motivation and wisely use this spirit of purity that we received on the festival of Shavuot. As we know, "*If one comes to purify himself, he is helped*" (*Shabbat 104a*). Amen, Amen.

Shelach

How Can We Survive in This Bitter Exile?

On the verse, "*Send for yourself men and let them spy out the land of Canaan*" (*Numbers 13:2*), Rashi cites the Sages in stating: "*Send for yourself. According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send*" (*Tanhuma, Shelach 5*). In other words, Hashem did not want to send spies to explore the land, and it was only because the Children of Israel requested spies that He permitted Moses to send them. That being the case, it is certain that Moses did not want to send them either, since it was not Hashem's will. Moses sent them only because the Children of Israel wanted it. As a result, how can we interpret the expression, "*Send for yourself*" according to the view of the Midrash, which states that the decision to send the spies came from Moses? Furthermore, "*Send for yourself*" means "*for your own benefit, for your own good,*" yet Moses wanted none of this. Even if we say that Moses somehow benefited from it, should the Children of Israel have been punished because Hashem wanted to reward Moses (since doing so gave them an opportunity to err)?

This in itself is very difficult to understand. How could Moses receive any benefit whatsoever, if it was at the expense of the Children of Israel, who as a result would suffer for 40 years in the desert and be condemned to a day of weeping for the generations to come (*Taanith 29a*)? How can this be termed beneficial or good? Moses was a faithful shepherd who only wanted to help the Children of Israel, not harm them. Therefore how could he benefit at their expense?

Let us try and explain. We know that the Jewish people survive in exile only by the merit of Torah (*Torat Kohanim, Vayikra 26:3*), meaning by investing their efforts into its study and analysis. Now all the Torah that Jews have ever studied has been due to the Torah that Moses learned from Hashem, as it is written: "*Remember the Torah of My servant Moses*" (*Malachi 3:22*). In fact Moses ascended upon Mount Sinai and studied Torah for 40 days and 40 nights (*Shemot Rabba 47:5*), neither eating nor drinking (*Exodus 34:28*). He remained there and learned everything from the mouth of Hashem, "*Even what a faithful disciple would say in the future*" (*Vayikra Rabba 22:1*).

When the Children of Israel raised the issue of the spies, Hashem said to Moses: "*What will happen is revealed to Me. The Children of Israel want to send spies to explore the land of Israel, and as a result they will be condemned to dwelling in the desert for 40 years, as well as going into exile and weeping for the generations to come.*" Why all this? It is because, as the Sages have said, punishment comes through a person of guilt (*Shabbat 32a*). Hence the Children of Israel were condemned to be exiled because of the spies, who were guilty. They were the leaders and great figures among the Children of Israel, men who should have guided the people.

Since that was the case, Hashem gave Moses the remedy for the exile before it happened by teaching him the entire Torah. As such the Children of Israel could survive in exile by laboring in the study of Torah, as well as by all the explanations that had been given to Moses on Sinai. Due to Moses' strength, they would be saved from all their enemies.

We can now understand why Hashem told Moses, "*Send for yourself.*" In other words: This is for your own benefit and your own good, since it is already too late to prevent the Children of Israel from sending out spies. Since they no longer have faith in Me, they would revolt against Me and you, and thus their punishment would be very severe. I will therefore give them an opportunity to err, for on account of the wickedness of the spies, they will become guilty. Therefore send for yourself, "*for your own benefit,*" for you will benefit greatly from this. What benefit will you derive? When they are exiled, they will study the Torah that you heard from My mouth, and they will put an effort into learning it and providing explanations that you have already given, and thus your lips will move in the grave (*Yebamot 97a*). In this way your merit will protect them, giving them the strength to survive in exile and be saved from all who would harm them.

This is truly the great benefit derived by Moses, the faithful shepherd. The Children of Israel would endure in all their exiles by his merit and by the merit of his Torah, which would not have been the case if he did not send the spies. Would this have been possible if they did not deserve to be exiled? What would have happened to the entire Torah that Moses learned from Hashem and all the explanations he gave? This is what constitutes *shelach* ("send"), which is formed from the letters of the word *chalash* ("weak"): If you do not send the spies, you will be weak. Yet if you send them, you will be strong, for they will survive in exile by your merit and by the merit of your Torah. This is why Moses agreed to send them. Furthermore, during the entire 40 years that the Children of Israel were in the desert, they certainly reviewed all the Torah that Moses learned with Hashem. Thus the merit of Moses' Torah protected Israel in all the generations, as well as in the exiles they endured and the destruction that was brought upon them. This is precisely what was beneficial and good for Moses, namely that the Torah would never be forgotten in exile, and that in every generation people would give new explanations and laws that deal with their particular era. All this was possible only by the merit of Moses' Torah.

The Holy One, blessed be He, demonstrated great benevolence and kindness to us by having taught Moses the entire Torah, as well as all the teachings that would ever be derived by the tzaddikim and all who devote themselves to study. If Hashem had taught Moses only the Torah that concerned his own generation, where would we have received the strength to study the holy Torah and derive new teachings from it? Where would we have found the strength to survive in our long exile and be saved from our enemies, if not for Moses' influence on all the generations, an influence that is awakened by the diligent study of Torah? Yet if the Children of Israel had

been unwavering in their faith that the land was good, they would not have sinned by speaking Lashon Harah. Hence they would not have incurred death, the destruction of the Temple, or even exile. In that case the Torah would have renewed itself for them, and even Moses would have entered the land. From here we learn that we must pay great attention to the sin of Lashon Harah, for our words must only contain good.

Jealousy and Honor-Seeking Drive a Person from the World

It is written, "*They were all men, heads of the Children of Israel*" (*Numbers 13:3*). Here Rashi explains, "*At that time, they were virtuous.*" That being said, how could such virtuous men disparage the land of Israel? Is it because the spies wanted to remain as leaders that they tried to prevent the Children of Israel from entering the Holy Land? There is something else that we need to understand. As we know, when the spies were in the camp, they were surrounded by the seven clouds of glory. Therefore how could they not have feared Hashem's anger and dreaded the prospect of Hashem expelling them from the clouds? How could the spies not have feared the Ruach HaKodesh of Moses, who knew that they were lying to the Children of Israel? Above all, we need to ask ourselves why Moses did not add a letter to the names of all the spies, just as he added the letter yud to the name of Joshua, as he prayed for Hashem to protect him from the counsel of the spies (*Bamidbar Rabba 16:9*), thereby preventing all of them from disparaging the land.

Before explaining all this, let us first ask another question. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, "*Lech lecha [Go for yourself]…*" (*Genesis 12:1*), which Rashi explains as: "*Lech lecha. Go for yourself, for your own benefit and your own good.*" We therefore see that the word lecha signifies "*for your own benefit and the good that will ensue.*" Yet here in Parsha Shelach, on the verse, "*Send for yourself [lecha] men*" (*Numbers 13:2*), Rashi cites the Sages as saying: "*Send for yourself. According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send.*" We may therefore ask how sending the spies was beneficial and good for Moses, since the word lecha implies this. In other words, how would Moses benefit from it? The answer is that Eretz Israel can only be acquired when the Children of Israel are united. When there are divisions and conflicts among the people, the land vomits out its inhabitants, as it is written: "*That the land should not vomit you out when you defile it*" (*Leviticus 18:28*). In fact each person disparages the other when divisions exist among the people, resulting in the Temple and the land being destroyed on account of Lashon Harah and baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b; Arachin 15b*). In the time of Achav, although the people were idolaters (*Vayikra Rabba 26:2*), they were victorious in war because none of them spoke Lashon Harah or acted as informers. When does Lashon Harah rear its head? When someone has only self-interest at heart, in which case he is bothered by the success of others.

These concepts allow us to better understand the situation with Moses, who served as a symbol and shining example for the Children of Israel on how to rid themselves of all selfish interests. Despite all the great qualities that Moses exhibited before Hashem,

he never grew proud. Instead he constantly made everything depend on the merit of the Children of Israel. Furthermore, he was the most humble man on the face of the earth, a paragon of humility and self-effacement, and he never felt offended. Therefore when he was told, "*Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp*" (*Numbers 11:27*) – their prophesy being that "*Moses will die and Joshua will bring Israel into the land*" (*Sanhedrin 17a*) – not only did Moses not get angry, he even said: "*If only all the people of the L-RD could be prophets*" (*Numbers 11:29*)! In other words: May everyone prophesize, for then I will no longer be needed! Thus we see that Moses was a paragon of humility, and that he always annulled his own personal interests as if they were nothing.

All the Children of Israel could learn from Moses' example in terms of how to act with their fellowman. If someone saw that another person was a sage, or that he was becoming greater, or that he was becoming wealthier, he would annul his own selfish interests and rejoice in the success of that person. Such an attitude protects one from Lashon Harah and all other faults associated with it.

Hence with regards to the spies, we clearly see how Moses elevated himself and sent them lecha – for himself, according to his own understanding – even if he derived no benefit or profit from it, since Moses himself was not to enter Eretz Israel. Furthermore, Hashem promised that the land was very good, but Moses sent spies according to the desire of the Children of Israel, to show them that even if he had no profit or benefit to gain from it, no personal interest whatsoever, he was still pleased that others were going into Eretz Israel and benefiting from it themselves. Above all, Moses knew that Joshua would bring the people into the land (as Eldad and Medad had prophesied), and he prayed for Hashem to save Joshua because he would be the one to bring the people into the land, and Moses wanted the prophecy to be fulfilled. From here we see the greatness of Moses, who had prayed so greatly to enter Eretz Israel – 515 prayers, according to the numerical value of the term va'etchanan (*Devarim Rabba 11:10*) – in order to fulfill the mitzvot that are dependant on the land. Yet when Moses realized that he would not enter it, he immediately prayed for the success of Joshua, in order for him to fulfill the prophesy of Eldad and Medad by bringing the people into the land, and for Hashem to protect him from the spies. As for the spies themselves, although they were virtuous and upright at that point in time (since they did not need a letter added to their names), they nevertheless descended from their lofty spiritual level, sinned and were punished as a result. This happened because they did not learn from what Moses had commanded them, and they did not rid themselves of selfish interests. These interests blinded them, and far from seeing the good of the land, they perceived only evil, as it is written: "*Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:21*). Hence they were chased from this world and died. They were not even close to Hashem, for a person who desires honor – even if he is close to Hashem – does not sense His glory.

We find something similar with King Yanai, who killed the Sages of Israel because they did not allow him to wear priestly garments (*Kiddushin 66a*). He could not abandon

his own selfish interests, and the Sages have said: "*Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:4*). In fact Yochanan served as High Priest for 80 years, but in the end he became a Sadducee and perished, for he did not annul his selfish interests. Although he served as High Priest, pride was concealed in him, and he desired nothing but glory. His heart was not right with Hashem, and he became a Sadducee. It is frightening to realize just how far selfish interests and pride can take a person!

The spies, although virtuous and upright, were infused with pride in the depths of their beings. They desired honor and did not annul their self-interests. Hence their sin was revealed and they were punished. Moses therefore prayed for Joshua to be saved by Y–H, since this Name has the same numerical value as *ga'avah* ("pride"). Moses prayed for Hashem to save Joshua from pride, from self-interest and a love of honor. Now Joshua had no selfish interests, for when Eldad and Medad prophesied, "*Moses will die and Joshua will bring Israel into the land,*" Joshua did not rejoice in being the one to bring the Children of Israel into Eretz Israel. On the contrary, he became angry and said to Moses, "*My lord Moses, forbid them!*" (*Numbers 11:28*). He was on Moses' side and had no selfish interests. That being said, we must ask why Moses had to pray for Hashem to protect Joshua, since he was humble. The answer is that a person only knows his true worth when he finds himself in familiar surroundings. In yeshiva, for example, a person benefits from his teacher's good influence. However when he leaves the walls of the yeshiva, he is likely to endure harmful influences from the outside, and he must fight against the evil inclination with his own strength, meaning without the help of his teacher. It was in this way that Moses acted towards his disciple Joshua. As long as he was close to him, Moses knew that Joshua was humble and had no self-interests, since he jealously guarded his teacher's honor. However Moses was afraid that Joshua would be influenced by the spies. As long as they were within the camp of the Shechinah, they were surrounded by the seven clouds of glory and remained upright. However who knew what would happen upon leaving it, for how would they act in that case? Hence it was at that precise moment that Moses prayed for Joshua.

Different Kinds of Effort

It is written, "*Send for yourself men, that they may explore the land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel. One man, each from his father's tribe, shall you send; every one a leader among them*" (*Bamidbar 13:2*). Why does the verse start in the singular with *shelach lecha* ("send for yourself"), but ends in the plural with *tishlachu* ("shall you send")? We also need to ask why the Children of Israel wanted these men to spy out the land, since the Holy One, blessed be He, had promised them that it was a good and spacious land. Can we even think that they did not believe Him? After all, the Torah explicitly states, "*The people believed*" (*Shemot 4:31*) as well as: "*They believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe*" (*ibid. 14:31*).

The answer is that the Children of Israel thought that although it is a mitzvah to have faith in Hashem – as it is written: "*Cast your burden upon Hashem and He will*

sustain you" (*Tehillim 55:23*) – it is also a mitzvah to do something for yourself. We obtain Hashem's help at that point, as the Sages have said: " *'For Hashem your G-d has blessed you in all your handiwork' [Devarim 2:7]. Could this occur even if one does nothing? It is written, 'in all your handiwork' – if a man does something, there will be a blessing; otherwise there will not*" (*Midrash Tehillim 23:3*).

The sea did not split for the Children of Israel until they made an effort in that direction. Our Sages say, "*Nachshon the son of Amminadav jumped in and descended into the sea first…. At the time, Moshe was engaged in prayer for a long time, and so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'My beloved ones are drowning in the sea, and you are lingering in prayer before Me? … Speak to the Children of Israel, that they go forward'*" (*Sotah 37a*). This teaches us that G-d directed Moshe to tell the Children of Israel to put an effort into moving towards the sea, at which point He would open it for them. Since that is what they did, the sea immediately split before them. We find this idea mentioned in the Midrash: "*Let their feet step forward from the dry land into the sea, and you will see the miracles that I will perform for them*" (*Shemot Rabba 21:8*).

The process is the same in regards to the relationship between man and G-d. The Holy One, blessed be He, will only help a person once he himself takes the first step, as it is written: "*My sons, present to Me an opening of repentance no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages can pass*" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 5:3*).

They Committed a Grave Error

In any case, the Children of Israel committed a grave error here. Although it is a person's duty to make an effort in everything, he is still forbidden to rely on his efforts, as stated by our teacher Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri Zatzal (*Tehillim 128*): "*When making an effort to do something, a person must always remember that he must not have faith in his effort, even if he does everything that is required of him.*"

There are different ways of making an effort. We must always make an effort not to seek out miracles, and we must always do what we can so that our livelihood comes to us through natural means. The Gemara recounts, "*It once happened that a man's wife died and left a child to be nursed, but he could not afford to pay for a wet-nurse. At that point a miracle was performed for him, and his nipples opened like the two nipples of a woman, and he nursed his son. Rabbi Yosef observed, 'Come and see how great this man was, such that a miracle was performed on his account!' Said Abaye to him, 'On the contrary – how lowly was this man, that the order of Creation was changed on his account'*" (*Shabbat 53b*). It also states, "*A man should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be performed for him, lest it is not. If a miracle is done for him, it is deducted from his merits*" (*ibid. 32a*).

That said, even if a person puts an effort into lessening a miracle, he should not put his faith in his own deeds, but only in Hashem, as Jacob did. Although G-d said to him, "*I will guard you wherever you go*" (*Bereshith 28:15*), when the angels told him, "*We came to your brother, to Esau, and he is coming to meet you and 400 men are with*

him" (*ibid. 32:7*), he readied himself for three things: Prayer, gifts, and war. However he did not place his trust in gift-giving and waging war, for he had faith in Hashem, as it is written: "*I am too small for all the mercies and all the truth that You have done with Your servant…. Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau*" (*ibid. 32:11-12*). This teaches us that he did not rely on the natural effects of his efforts to be saved from his brother Esau, but solely on the Holy One, blessed be He.

Such was the error committed by the Children of Israel in the desert. Although G-d had promised them that Eretz Israel was a land flowing with milk and honey, they still wanted to make an effort to minimize any miracles when they entered the land. Hence they asked Moshe to send men to spy out the land, to find routes leading into and out of the land in order to conquer it in a natural way.

This complicated matters, however, for the Children of Israel placed their trust in their own efforts and in the spies, to the point of becoming evildoers and unbelievers. They even insulted Heaven by saying, "*They are stronger than us*" (*Bamidbar 13:31*). The Sages explain that by saying this, the spies were implying something much worse: "*Do not read mimenu [than us], but rather mimeno [than Him]*" (*Sotah 35a*). That is, they meant that even the Holy One, blessed be He, could not defeat the peoples living in Eretz Israel.

Bad Intentions Behind Their Efforts

This is why the Sages said, "*Just as the return [of the spies] was with an evil intention, likewise the leaving [of the spies] was with an evil intention*" (*Sotah 35a*). This is difficult to understand, for the spies were tzaddikim when they left, not evildoers! Yet since the Children of Israel forgot Hashem by placing their trust solely in their own efforts, they were in a negative state of mind, so much so that they became evildoers.

Let us say that they only became evildoers because there were bad intentions behind their efforts. If they had only put an effort into minimizing miracles, all while placing their trust in Hashem – just as Jacob had done – they would have succeeded. Since they failed to do so, they became corrupt. Our Sages say that Caleb distanced himself from the views of the spies in order to pray by the tomb of the Patriarchs. He said to them, "*My fathers, pray on my behalf that I may be delivered from the plan of the spies*" (*Sotah 34b*). Why did Caleb go and pray by the tomb of the Patriarchs? It is because the Patriarchs, even when they put an effort into doing something for themselves, still placed their complete trust in Hashem. Caleb wanted to do the same, which is why he asked for Divine mercy by their tomb.

Tzaddikim at the Outset

The Sages ask, "*What reason did Scripture have for saying, after the incident of Miriam, 'Send forth men'? The fact is that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that the spies would speak Lashon Harah about the land. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'They shall not say, "We did not know the penalty for Lashon Harah.*" ' The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore placed this section next to the other" (*Bamidbar Rabba 16:6*).

This explanation does not seem entirely satisfactory, for the Lashon Harah that Miriam spoke about Moshe was not similar to that which the spies spoke about Eretz Israel. Miriam spoke about her brother, whereas the spies were not speaking about a man. They spoke derisively about the land of Israel, so how could they have known that this also constituted Lashon Harah?

Our Sages have also said, "*Come and see how great the power of Lashon Harah is! From where do we learn this? From the spies, for if such things happened to those who spoke evil of wood and stones, how much more will it happen to one who speaks evil of his neighbor!*" (*Arachin 15a*). Yet how could the spies have known the punishment of one who speaks evil of wood and stones? We cannot say that they learned it from Miriam, for she did not speak about inanimate objects. Furthermore, if we want to say that a person who speaks derisively about inanimate objects is speaking Lashon Harah, then why did Hashem send them a punishment that was different than Miriam's? In fact Miriam became leprous, whereas the spies died in a plague, and a plague is not the punishment of one who speaks Lashon Harah. For the latter, the punishment is leprosy, as the Sages have said: "*Whoever speaks Lashon Harah is struck by leprosy*" (*Tanchuma, Metzora 1*).

Moreover, Scripture also testifies that the spies were also great tzaddikim, as it is written: "*Send forth anashim [men]*" (*Bamidbar 13:2*). In the Midrash our Sages say, "*In every instance where the expression anashim is used, it implies tzaddikim…. They had been chosen out of all Israel by the command of G-d and by that of Moshe, as it is written: 'The idea was good in my eyes, and so I took from you twelve anashim [men]' [Devarim 1:23]. From here you may infer that they were tzaddikim both in the eyes of Israel and Moshe. Yet even Moshe did not want to send them on his own initiative, so he consulted G-d about each individual, mentioning the name and tribe of each, and G-d said to him: 'They are worthy'*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 16:5*). That said, why did Moshe choose to implore Hashem to have mercy on Joshua, since they were all tzaddikim at that point?

We are forced to say that the spies were tzaddikim at the outset, but that afterwards they went astray. This is quite surprising, for how could these tzaddikim have committed such a serious sin, to the point of turning the Jewish people away from Hashem and speaking evil of Eretz Israel? Because of them, Hashem became angry with His people, condemning them to exile and death. In fact they were the source of tears for all the generations. The Gemara teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring evil through the intermediary of the tzaddikim (*Yebamot 99b*). Therefore how could the spies have been an exception?

We may explain all this according to what the Sages say in the Midrash: "*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: 'Although it is to the Patriarchs that I made a promise to give them the land, and they are dead, I will not retract'*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 16:3*). Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Eretz Israel as a gift to Avraham – to him and his descendants after him – because he dedicated himself to Hashem's

mitzvot in this land, made His Name reign, and brought people under the wings of the Shechinah. As our Sages say in the Midrash, "*Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women*" (*Bereshith Rabba 39:14*). By the merit of the holy Patriarchs, Hashem granted tremendous sanctity to the land, making Eretz Israel different from all other lands. For all other lands, He appointed guardian angels to govern them, whereas Eretz Israel is not under the direction of any angel. It is solely under G-d's control, as the Zohar states (*II:151b*). We also read, "*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*" (*Devarim 11:11*).

Therefore why did the Children of Israel want to explore the land and see if it was indeed good? It is true that their intentions were entirely pure, meaning that they wanted to discover where all the Canaanites who lived in the land had hidden their treasures, so that all of Hashem's promises would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, how can a person explore a country if Hashem has already promised that it will contain houses filled with wealth? Although their intentions were pure, they all became wicked because they went to explore the land without regard for the honor of their Creator.

How profound are the words of our Sages, who said: "*One transgression brings about another*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:2*)! Rabbeinu Yona explains this as follows: Once a person has committed a sin and distances himself from the ways of Hashem, he will commit another sin. Although his desire to sin is not as strong as at first, he will sin all the same, for he is pushed by this desire. If one is not powerfully pushed, but sins all the same, he will commit all kinds of sins, for he has conditioned himself to doing everything that Hashem abhors.

Thus although these spies had been tzaddikim, because of the fact that they doubted G-d's word and wanted to explore the land, they ended up committing an even graver sin, that of uttering unseemly words to G-d. They sinned with their mouths, saying: "*For it is too strong mimenu [for us]*" (*Bamidbar 13:31*), which our Sages have explained to mean: "*Do not read mimenu [for us], but mimeno [for Him]*" (*Sotah 35a*).

The Sin of the Spies and the Greatness of Joshua

It is written, "*Send for yourself men, and let them spy out the land of Canaan*" (*Bamidbar 13:2*).

The Ba'al HaTurim states that the last letters in the expression *Shelach lecha anashim* ("Send for yourself men") form the term *chacham* (wise man), meaning that these men had to be wise and righteous. We may raise a certain number of questions in regards to the spies, questions that we shall examine one by one to see how they can be answered.

First of all, why did Moshe receive the order to send wise and righteous men in particular? Did wisdom have anything to do with their mission? Furthermore, despite being wise men, their mission was a disaster because they spoke ill of the land. In

addition, how is it possible for such bad things to have occurred on account of such wise men?

We also need to examine the verse, "*Let us appoint a head, and let us return to Egypt*" (*Bamidbar 14:4*). Here Rashi cites the Sages (*Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael*) in stating that this is the language of idolatry, meaning that they wanted to return to Egypt with an idol at their head. Had they forgotten what had happened to them during the sin of the golden calf, when they were almost wiped out? Yet now they wanted to do the same thing?

Another question: How is it possible that the generation of the desert – which was a generation of knowledge (*Vayikra Rabba 9:1*), having witnessed the greatest revelation in history, having the clouds of glory surrounding them and the manna descending for them – could say, "*For they are stronger than we*" (*Bamidbar 13:31*), on which our Sages state: "*Do not read 'we' but 'He' [i.e., Hashem]*" (*Sotah 35a*)?

In addition, the Sages said in regards to the spies: "*They were all righteous, but were misled by false reasoning. They said: 'If Israel enters the land, we will be superseded, since it is only in the desert that we are considered to be worthy leaders'*" (*Zohar III:158a*). This is surprising, for did they speak ill of Eretz Israel and Hashem simply because they sought personal glory?

Furthermore, how would remaining in the desert help them to retain power? After all, nobody holds on to power forever!

To explain all this, we shall first examine certain issues. On the verse, "*Send for yourself men*" (*Bamidbar 13:2*), the Sages cite Resh Lakish as interpreting this to mean: "*Of your own initiative*" (*Sotah 34b*). We also find that G-d clearly did not want the spies to be sent (*Bamidbar Rabba 16:7*), for He had previously described the goodness of Eretz Israel to them (*Shemot 3:8*). As a result, was there any reason to doubt His words, especially since, up until that point, they were living in the desert like in the Garden of Eden? Therefore why the desire to send spies at this point in time?

At first, there was certainly reason to view the spies in a favorable light, for the Children of Israel had told Moshe: "*It is true that we are experiencing miracles in the desert, but we will have to live according to natural laws when we enter the land.*" Hence they wanted to send spies into the land to see how the Canaanites lived, in order to easily conquer the land and defeat its inhabitants.

As a result of the Children of Israel's request, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "*Send for yourself wise men,*" and we know that a wise man is superior to a prophet (*Bava Batra 12a*). He wanted their wisdom and righteousness to enable them to quickly understand how to conquer the land and defeat the Canaanites by natural means, even though the Canaanites were strong and possessed fortified cities – and despite the fact this was all unnecessary, since G-d would fight for them and the conquest of the land would occur in a miraculous way. In regards to these very same men, who were righteous while in the camp, as mentioned in the Gemara (*Chagigah 14*)

and Rashi (*Bamidbar 13:3*), in reality the Holy One, blessed be He, demanded that they not explore the land. Instead, as tribal heads and leaders of the Children of Israel, they should have explained to the people that there was no reason to undertake this mission, since G-d had promised them that the land was good and that the Canaanites would be easily defeated.

As a result, at the very instant Hashem asked Moshe to send wise men, it was with the intention that they should be wise enough to understand – before proceeding to explore the land – that it made no sense to go.

Instead of doing Hashem's will and finding an ingenious way of not going, these wise men – who could understand that there was no reason to explore the land – not only failed to look for such a way, but on the contrary, they found a way of doing evil when they went! All this happened because they were only looking for an excuse to go. In reality, they had no reason to go and explore the land, which was very good.

Since they were looking for an excuse, Hashem provided them with one so they could be punished measure for measure (*Shabbat 105b*). In fact a person is allowed to follow the path that he wishes to pursue (*Makkot 10b*), which is why Scripture established a relationship between the departure of the spies and their return: Just as their return was with an evil intention, likewise their departure was with an evil intention (*Sotah 35a*).

This is why the Torah states, "*And they went and they came*" (*Bamidbar 13:26*), which prompted Rashi to say: "*This compares their going with their coming. Just as their coming was with an evil intention, so was their going with an evil intention.*" Now this demands an explanation, since the spies were righteous when they departed! We can understand this, however, according to what we have said, namely that the Holy One, blessed be He, knew that since they were wise and righteous men, they should have convinced the Children of Israel that there was no need for them to explore the land. It was only when they actually departed that we can see they did so with an evil intention.

We may say that they provoked this disaster because they had just been nominated as tribal leaders, and they may have grown so proud that they did not want to give up this honorable position when the people would enter Eretz Israel. Even if we say that their intentions were possibly good, for they knew that community leaders merit an outpouring of sanctity from Heaven to lead the Children of Israel, they still committed a sin vis-à-vis G-d's will, for He said that He was making the Children of Israel leave the poverty of Egypt in order to bring them into a land of abundance.

From here we also understand how they could have said, "*For they are stronger than [Hashem].*" We find in tractate Sotah that whoever is filled with pride, it is as if he practiced idolatry. We mentioned that they sinned because they were filled with pride, to the point that G-d and them could not live together in this world, for pride resembles an idolatrous belief.

In regards to sending Joshua along with them, Moshe wanted someone who could reprimand the other spies if they went astray, someone who could defend the honor of Heaven and openly proclaim that Hashem's word is true and unchanging.

We find this idea alluded to in the letter yud, which Moshe added to his name and which has a numerical value (when spelled out in full) of 20. This is equal to the numerical value of the initials of *eretz zavat chalav u'devash* (*"a land flowing with milk and honey" – Shemot 3:8*).

May the Holy One, blessed be He, help us to sanctify His Name in this world and make Him loved by man in joy and peace. Amen.

Moshe's Prayer

It is written, "*Moshe sent them from the desert of Paran at Hashem's command. All of them were men of distinction; they were the heads of the Children of Israel*" (*Bamidbar 13:3*).

Our Sages discuss this verse in the holy Zohar: "*They were all virtuous, but they were misled by bad reasoning. They said: 'If Israel enters the land, we will be superseded, since it is only in the desert that we are considered worthy of being leaders'*" (*Zohar III:158a*).

It was for this reason that Moshe prayed for Joshua, as our Sages have said: "*May Y-H save you from the plot of the spies*" (*Sotah 34b*). Now the letters forming the Name "*Y-H*" have the same numerical value as the term *ga'avah* ("pride"). In other words, Moshe prayed for Joshua not to be led astray by the pride of the tribal leaders, nor should he try and keep his position as a tribal leader. This would have meant a long journey for the Children of Israel in the desert, as well as the land being disparaged.

We need to understand this subject more clearly.

For what reason would Joshua have disparaged the land just to maintain his position? After all, by bringing the Children of Israel into the land, Joshua would become the leader of the entire people. He would succeed Moshe (*Devarim 3:28*) and not remain a simple leader of the tribe of Ephraim, as he was in the desert!

Therefore why was Moshe afraid of the spies' detrimental influence on Joshua? In fact, what fool would have preferred to lead a single tribe as opposed to the entire people, especially if he was commanded to by G-d?

In reality, Moshe prayed for Joshua not to be influenced by the pride of the leaders. They would obviously encourage him to disparage the land, claiming that it was better for him to remain as the leader of the tribe of Ephraim in the desert, rather than give a positive report of the land and lead the Children of Israel into it, thus provoking the death of his teacher Moshe.

This is what Moshe told Joshua, "*May Y-H save you from the plot of the spies*" – meaning: "*Do not allow yourself to be misled just to remain as the leader of the tribe*

of Ephraim. Also, do not allow yourself to be infused with their pride! On the contrary, you have a vested interest in speaking positively of the land. By doing so, you will acquire your place as a leader in Israel, since you are the one who will lead the people at G-d's command. And lastly, but of no less importance, do not become infused with pride over being a leader."

As I reflected upon this subject, a few questions came to mind. Why did Moshe send Joshua along with the spies? After all, Joshua was Moshe's servant, so who would assist Moshe during Joshua's 40-day absence? Furthermore, if Moshe was so concerned that he prayed for him (*"May Y-H save you from the plot of the spies"*), why even send him on this mission? He could have sent someone else, rather than put Joshua to the test by telling him not to be led astray!

Here is what I believe: Everyone knew that Joshua bin Nun was destined to become the future leader of the Children of Israel. He was Moshe's servant, his representative and right-hand man. It was precisely for this reason that Moshe forced him to join the spies, and it is why Moshe prayed that he distance himself from their plot.

In fact if Joshua had not joined the spies, the Children of Israel would have criticized him. They would have said, "*If you had gone with them, you would allowed yourself to disparage the land, and you would have been punished like them. Therefore you're no better than they are, and you have no reason to govern us or become our leader.*"

This is why Moshe obligated him to go, willing to forgo Joshua's help for 40 days. Moshe then beseeched Hashem to not let him be swayed by the advice of his companions, all so that everyone could see that Joshua had not followed the spies and was fit to become the leader of the entire people. This was the meaning of Moshe's prayer, namely: "*Since you annul yourself before G-d, He will always be by your side. You will constantly see His greatness and power, and only Him will you fear. He will protect you from pride, which is repugnant to Him.*"

In light of all that we have said, I would like to cite what my son Rabbi Raphael said to me concerning the verse: "*He [Caleb] arrived at Hebron*" (*Bamidbar 13:22*). Rashi cites the Sages (*Sotah 34b*) in stating, "*Caleb went there alone to prostrate himself at the graves of the Patriarchs, that he should not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel.*"

This is quite surprising, for why did Caleb do this? After all, it was certain that he would not disparage the promised land. Why was Caleb afraid of yielding to the counsel of the spies, since he did not subscribe to their views in any case?

My son explained that when the spies began to disparage the land, Caleb silenced them. At that point the other spies criticized him: "*If you speak positively of the land, it's because you probably have a vested interest in doing so. Since you belong to the tribe of Judah, from which kings will arise, you want to enter the land of Israel so that a member of your tribe will reign over the entire people. Yet deep down, you know that we are right.*"

Caleb therefore went to pray at the tomb of the Patriarchs, searching for their help. He sought a way for his positive description of the land to be sincere, even if it would cost him his position as a leader in the desert. In fact he was convinced that it was "*an exceedingly good land*" (*Bamidbar 14:7*), and his words were neither hypocritical nor motivated by the fact that members of his tribe would rule as kings.

Korach

Strife is the Mother of All Sins

This week's parsha begins with the grave dispute of Korach and his followers against Moses and Aaron. In his great wisdom, Korach had seen that a dynasty would emerge from him, one that would culminate with the prophet Samuel. What Korach didn't know, however, was that he himself would be the impure baggage that Samuel carried behind him. What was Korach's fate? He was swallowed by the earth along with 250 men. Not only that, but the Sages have said that even babies were swallowed by the earth and died, so grave is the sin of strife, which has many faces. When involved in a dispute, some people claim to be fighting for *Da'at Torah* ("the Torah view"), as each party tries to prove that they are right. This is the sense of the verse, "*You shall not ascend My altar vema'alot [with steps]*" (*Exodus 20:23*), meaning that one must be careful not to bring offerings that are suspected of ma'alot (i.e., virtues that a person thinks he possesses) or personal bias. Thus people will sometimes quarrel among themselves, and to strengthen their position they will say that they are, as it were, fighting for the Torah view, as each side claims that all they care about is the Torah. In reality, however, personal interest is the only cause of their dispute, and they are using the Torah to strengthen their position.

It is not difficult to understand when a dispute over the Torah view is real, or when it stems from personal interest. In fact someone whose intentions are good will act calmly and win people over through his righteousness. He will not offend or harm anyone, for that would be contrary to the Torah view, as it is written: "*The words of wise men are heard in quiet*" (*Ecclesiastes 9:17*). However when a dispute is waged at the expense of others, and when the parties involved have a financial or other interest at stake, this indicates that their dispute is not for the sake of Heaven. On several occasions I have become personally involved in disputes in order to calm people down, situations in which each side was using the Torah to make money in his own little way. This certainly does not correspond to "*the Torah view,*" and Hashem does not forgive Lashon Harah. Thus the Sages have said, "*Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will have an enduring result, and that which is not for the sake of Heaven will not have an enduring result. Which is a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. Which is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his followers*" (*Perkei Avoth 5:17*). Our Sages have given us this sign so we can determine whether a dispute is for the sake of Heaven or not. In fact if the parties involved in a dispute remain good friends, then it is like "*the dispute between Hillel and Shammai,*" who loved and respected one another, an indication that their dispute is for the sake of Heaven.

However if the parties involved are not friendly with one another, and the dispute stirs up hatred between them, then it is like "*the dispute of Korach and all his followers.*"

Such a dispute was filled with hatred and hostility, as Moses said: "*A little more and they will stone me*" (*Exodus 17:4*). This dispute was definitely not for the sake of Heaven, for the Satan was motivating them. This is what we must look for in any dispute to see if it is for the sake of Heaven or not. In the dispute of Korach and his followers against Moses and Aaron, Korach was not fighting for the sake of Heaven, for he knew that the priesthood was not his because Hashem had not appointed him to it.

A person who avoids honor, conquers his faults and the evil inclination (which is made of fire), and overcomes every obstacle in the service of Hashem – doing everything with humility through the selfless study of Torah, especially by yielding before the tzaddik of the generation – will not try to oppose the tzaddik, but instead will obey him. These things are not easy, nor are they achieved without great effort. Hence a person who has managed to achieve all this is worthy of having miracles performed for him. As for Korach, who did not act in this way, he experienced a miracle in reverse, for he did not die in a normal way.

When we consider these things, we will understand just how important unity is and how much we must strive to achieve it. It is on account of unity that the Shechinah dwells among us, enabling us to avoid all kinds of disasters, as well as hastening our deliverance. True, this is not easy, for the evil inclination (which is the *kelipah* of strife and disagreement) cannot tolerate seeing Jews studying Torah together in unity and harmony while the Holy One, blessed be He, joins with them and makes His Shechinah dwell among them. Hence by introducing strife into the situation, the evil inclination is doing all that it can to upset this. As such the Shechinah will depart, for it only remains under conditions of unity. This is why we must be extremely vigilant with regards to the evil inclination, which is the Satan, and to run from a dispute as if from a burning building. Simply put, we must put an effort into achieving unity.

We learn the great value of unity from what Rabbi Akiva said on the verse, "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Leviticus 19:18*), namely that it is a great principle of the Torah (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4*). The Torah does not state, "*You shall love chaverecha [your friend],*" but "*You shall love re'acha [your fellow].*" The word *re'acha* can be interpreted by its root *rah* ("evil"), meaning that even if your friend acts wickedly with you, you must still love him. However the evil inclination will not allow this, and it sows seeds of strife, as was the case with the dispute involving Korach and his followers against Moses.

Yet as we know, everyone can improve his conduct and way of life, and even Korach could have ventured back onto the right path. In fact the Arizal is cited as saying that in the future, Korach will return and become a High Priest, for the name Korach is formed from the last letters in the words *tzaddik katamar yifrach* (*"the righteous will flourish like a palm tree"*). In fact all of Korach's sins will be forgiven in the future, for someone who constantly renews himself and flourishes in the service of Hashem automatically rectifies the 288 *rapach* (fragments) of holiness, doing so until the arrival of Mashiach. Amen, may it be so.

The Inner or Outer Aspect of Torah?

This week's parsha states, "*The sons of Korach did not die*" (*Numbers 26:11*), and the Sages state that they considered repenting during Korach's rebellion, and a place was reserved for them in Gehinnom (*Sanhedrin 110a*). The Sages also state that the sons of Korach were among those who carried the Ark. They were with their father at the time of his rebellion, and since they were likes roses, they were picked from among thorns (*Midrash Shocher Tov 45:1*).

Even On the son of Pelet was spared from being swallowed alive by the earth. The Sages say that his wife was the one who saved him, for she made him fall asleep in their tent. She then untied her hair so that Korach's messengers, when they came to get her husband, went right back when they saw her. They were thus unable to make On the son of Pelet join them in Korach's rebellion against Moses. We need to understand this. The sons of Korach repented and did not follow their father when he sinned, which is why they merited what they did, for in the end they yielded to Moses. Yet with regards to On the son of Pelet, we do not find that he repented! Not only that, but as we know, when he arose and tried to quickly return to Korach, his wife prevented him from leaving, telling him that Korach and his followers were no longer alive. Thus we see that he did not repent. He remained opposed to Moses, so why did he deserve to live?

We also know the question posed by the Sages: "*What did Korach, who was wise, see in this foolishness?*" What motivated Korach to make such a bad deal for himself by rebelling against Moses? Is it possible for a disciple to suddenly decide that he will be the teacher, and that his teacher will be the disciple?

We will try to explain this as best possible. Even a great man who studies Torah can make a mistake when he does not delve into the inner aspect of the Torah and cleave to it. In fact a person can grow in Torah, but if he fails to penetrate its inner meaning, danger lies in store for him, and he is liable to fall at any time. A person must realize that the Torah elevates him, but only when he yields to it and becomes infused with it, as King David said: "*Your Torah is in my innards*" (*Psalms 40:9*). If a person's intentions in studying Torah are completely superficial – if he is trying to make himself important on its account – then he is turning the Torah into a shovel with which to dig. This is indicated by the fact that the Torah is not found within him, for his desire is solely to become great and boast. In that case the words of the Sages will be fulfilled: "*From him who seeks greatness, greatness flees*" (*Eruvin 13b*). This was Korach's error. He was among those who carried the Ark (*Tanhuma, Korach 2*), but from the outside. Although carrying the Ark required a person to be at a great level, it nevertheless does not protect him from sin if he fails to carry the inner aspect of the Torah in his heart. This is why Korach reached that point. In fact it is not enough just to carry the Ark. One must carry the inner aspect of the Ark. In that case a person is assured that the Torah will protect and save him from all sin. However Korach, who only saw the superficial aspect of the Torah, without seeing its inner meaning, erred. If he had also seen the inner aspect of

Moses, he would not have opposed him. Since he only saw what was on the outside, he became jealous, and that is what drove him from this world, as the Tanna says: "*Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:21*). In fact the Sages explain the verse, "*Korach took*" (*Numbers 16:1*) to mean: He made a bad deal for himself (*Sanhedrin 109b*). A good deal would have been the Torah, which is called "*good*" (*Proverbs 4:2*). A tzaddik is also called "*good*" (*Yoma 38b*). However Korach did not take the inner aspect of the Torah along with its outer aspect, and he did not yield before the tzaddik. That was the bad deal that he made for himself. He took only the external, and he ended up where he did and everyone was punished along with him.

At first Korach's sons thought that their father was right, which is why they joined him in opposing Moses. They believed that the main thing was to carry the Ark, but then they realized that superficiality was not enough, that they had to carry the inside of the Ark as well. Hence they changed their minds. They followed Moses and were saved; they did not die. How did they come to the realization that the inner aspect is essential? It is because they had difficulty understanding how it was possible for a man to want to be a leader, while at the same time scorning the two leaders of the generation and Hashem's chosen ones. It was then that they realized that the main thing is not the outer aspect, that the superficial is not enough, for in that case a person may fall. One must carry the inside of the Torah, and an instant before the earth opened its mouth, they denied their father and followed their rav, Moses. We know what the Sages said about a rav, namely that a person's rav has precedence over his father, for a rav leads him to life in the World to Come.

From here we learn that a person must verify, in everything he does, that he is acting properly and doing so with inner devotion, as the sons of Korach did, who knew that inner devotion was the key. According to this, we can understand what the Sages meant when they said that Korach asked Moses whether or not a tallit made entirely of techelet had to possess tzitzit. We need to understand what Korach meant by this question. According to what we have said, the explanation is that Korach only saw the outer aspect of things, not the inner aspect. He saw the techelet of the tzitzit from an outside perspective, without contemplating its inner meaning, and therefore he asked such a question. In reality, he should have known that the entire nature of the tzitzit resides in its inner aspect, namely to recall the Creator of the world, as it is written: "*You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of the L-RD*" (*Numbers 15:39*). The techelet resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, the sky resembles a sapphire, and a sapphire resembles the Throne of Glory. In other words, the importance of the tzitzit resides in its inner aspect. Since Korach failed to see this, he asked his question and reached such a low point that he was swallowed by the earth. This is because he failed to grow in the ways of Heaven.

How can a person attain the inner aspect of the Torah? It is by studying it. Even the greatest of the generation, if he fails to study Torah, can degenerate to such a point that he will fall to the lowest levels, which is what happened to Korach. Hence he engaged

in a dispute that was not for the sake of Heaven (*Pirkei Avoth 5:17*). He was preoccupied with his own honor, not that of his teacher and the Shechinah. Such was not the case with his sons, who yielded before Moses (like descending spiritually in order to ascend to a higher level) and attained knowledge of the Creator and did not die.

The End of a Delusion

It is written, "*Korach the son of Itzhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi*" (*Bamidbar 16:1*). Kabbalists have stated that Korach will be very important in the future, serving as Kohen Gadol in the Third Temple (*see the Arizal's Likutei Torah on Parsha Ki Tisa and Sha'ar HaPessukim on Ezekiel 20*). They base themselves on the verse, *Tzaddik katamar yifrach* (*"A righteous man will flourish like a palm tree" – Tehillim 92:13*), the last letters of which form the word korach. This teaches us that this tzaddik will again flourish like a palm tree. Since the Sages have also said that Korach was a clever man (*Bamidbar Rabba 18:8*), we need to understand why he pursued the folly of contesting Moshe and the priesthood. We cannot say that he was a rasha, since he will flourish in the future.

Furthermore, all the Children of Israel saw that Miriam was punished because she had spoken Lashon Harah about Moshe. The Holy One, blessed be He, testified: "*Not so is My servant Moshe. In My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles, and the image of Hashem does he behold. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?*" (*Bamidbar 12:7-8*). That said, why was Korach not afraid of contesting Moshe and the priesthood?

He Did Not Control His Eyes

We may explain this according to what the Sages have said about Korach: "*His mind's eye misled him. He foresaw that a long and distinguished progeny would emanate from him, particularly Samuel, whose importance would equal that of Moshe and Aaron…and that from among his descendants 24 Levitical divisions would be formed, all of whom would prophesy under the influence of the Holy Spirit…. He argued: 'Is it reasonable, since such greatness is destined to emanate from me, that I should remain silent?'*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 18:8*). In other words, Korach logically inferred that if his descendants would be as important as Moshe and Aaron, how much more is he! Hence Korach believed that he should serve as Kohen Gadol, not Aaron.

We may therefore ask what prompted Korach to be swallowed by the earth, him and all his followers. The answer is that he did not control his eyes when he saw the kind of descendants that he would have, and he brought evil upon himself. Our Sages have given us a great principle: "*The disciples of the wicked Bilam possess an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul*" (*Pirkei Avoth 5:19*). They descend to Gehinnom, as it is written: "*And You, O G-d, You will lower them into the well of destruction; men of bloodshed and deceit shall not live out half their days. But as for me, I will trust in You*" (*Tehillim 55:24*). The Sages of the Talmud have testified, "*Ninety-nine [die] through an evil eye, and one through natural causes*" (*Bava Metzia 107b*). This teaches us that a

person sometimes descends to Gehinnom on account of his eyes, and when he looks at others with an evil eye, he brings evil upon himself and them as well.

The verse, "*And You, O G-d, You will lower them into the well of destruction*" was also fulfilled in Korach, for he was swallowed by the earth. Although he knew that his descendants would be as great and important as Moshe and Aaron, he did not remain silent, but instead contested the priesthood and sought glory for himself. In truth, the words of Korach's followers also led them astray when they told Moshe: "*Even if you were to gouge out the eyes of these men, we shall not go up*" (*Bamidbar 16:14*). This is difficult to understand, for could they not have told him something else to affirm their unwillingness to go, even if those men were to be blinded? The answer is that they opposed Moshe only because they followed their eyes. Hence their words led them astray and they said, "*Even if you were to gouge out the eyes of these men.*"

He Did Not Look to the Tzitzit

According to what we have said, we may explain why the passage on Korach is juxtaposed to the passage on the tzitzit: "*You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem and fulfill them*" (*Bamidbar 15:39*). Korach did not look to the tzitzit, but instead envisioned the dynasty that would descend from him. Korach even ridiculed the mitzvah of tzitzit, as our Sages cite him arguing: "*A tallit that is entirely composed of blue cannot exempt itself from the obligation, but four blue threads can exempt it?!*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 18:3*).

Since Korach renounced the mitzvah of tzitzit, it was as if he had renounced the entire Torah, for the Sages have said: "*The mitzvah of tzitzit is equal to all the mitzvot of the Torah*" (*Nedarim 25a*). Since Korach and his band of followers cried out from Gehinnom, "*Moshe and his Torah are truth*" (*Bava Batra 74a*), we see that they had renounced Moshe's Torah. They did not properly fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit, for they did not look to them, but instead used their eyes for evil. Hence they ended up descending into Gehinnom.

This is a great principle: Whoever merits the Holy Spirit and sees what others cannot see, such a person must ask himself if what he sees can help the Jewish community. If his vision comprises something good for the community, he has the right to use it. Otherwise he does not, since a person is only shown things for a valid reason, things that are good for the Jewish community. This is what happened with Korach: He saw that a great dynasty would emerge from him, and he used this vision for his own personal needs by contesting the priesthood. As for Moshe, he acted only for the good of the Jewish people throughout his life. As the Sages have said (*Mechilta, Yitro*), Moshe did not deal with his own affairs after speaking with G-d, but went directly from the mountain to the people.

Korach did not conduct himself like Moshe. When Moshe merited the revelation of the Shechinah, he did not occupy himself with his own affairs. Yet when the greatness of his descendants was revealed to Korach, he used this vision for his own ends and contested the priesthood. This teaches us that Korach did not contest the

priesthood because of wickedness or jealousy, but because of the evil eye. Since he possessed an evil eye, he thought that he was greater than Moshe and Aaron, for he believed that his descendants would be greater than them. Yet in the end, Korach lost on all counts.

Moshe's Humility

I wonder: How could Korach have drawn so many Jews to fight with him against Moshe, to speak Lashon Harah about him, and to slander him by saying that he had invented the mitzvot? Could it be that all of Israel forget what had happened to Miriam, who was struck with leprosy for having spoken ill of her brother Moshe by saying that he had married a Cushite? At that point, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Aaron and Miriam: "*Not so is My servant Moshe. In My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles. At the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?*" (*Bamidbar 12:7-8*). Furthermore, Ruach Hakodesh said: "*Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth*" (*v.3*)! I would like to explain this by first citing a statement of the Sages: "*The reverence for your Rav [should be] as the fear of Heaven*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:12*), which teaches us that it is forbidden for a person to have a light-hearted attitude towards his Rav. He must not joke with him like with anyone else, but should stand before him with reverence and respect. Just as a person must respect G-d, he must also respect his Rav. Since we often find ourselves in our Rav's home, the Sages have taught that even under such circumstances, we must reflect upon the fact that our Rav leads us to eternal life, and we must be careful not to do anything that would diminish his honor.

They have warned us with the following teaching: "*Whoever quarrels with his Rav, it is as if he has quarreled with the Shechinah…. Whoever expresses resentment against his Rav, it is as if he has expressed it against the Shechinah…. He who imputes [evil] to his Rav, it is as if he has imputed [it] to the Shechinah*" (*Sanhedrin 110a*).

Furthermore, a Rav will sometimes draw closer to his students in order for them to learn from him. In fact a Rav who is stern with his students is not a like a Rav who demonstrates kindness towards them, for students will learn from one but not the other. This is why the Sages warned us concerning the respect that a Rav deserves, and that if he draws closer to his students, it is not for them to grow accustomed to him and become proud. In their eyes, he should seem as if he were far from them. He is only drawing closer to them for their good, in order for them to learn from him, not so that his proximity becomes detrimental to them and they end up becoming insolent.

We may object by pointing out that the Sages said that when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was on his deathbed, he called for his firstborn Rabbi Gamliel and said to him: "*My son, conduct your rule with men of high standing, and cast bile among the students*" (*Ketubot 103b*). The Rambam explains this to mean that a student must not be ashamed

if his friends can understand something after studying it once or twice, whereas he needs more times to understand it, for if he is ashamed of that, he will enter the Beit HaMidrash and leave without learning anything (*Hilchot Talmud Torah 2:4*). Hence the early Sages said, "*A timid person cannot learn, neither can the short-tempered teach*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:5*). To what does this apply? It applies to situations in which students do not understand something because it is too intricate, or because they are not intelligent enough. If a Rav realizes that they do not understand a subject because they are being lazy, he should be upset with them and shame them. It is in this spirit that the Sages have said that a Rav must be stern with his students. It is therefore not fitting for a Rav to act casually before his students, nor to laugh before them or eat and drink with them, so that they may revere him and quickly learn from him.

He Was Not Stern

The Torah testifies that Moshe was the humblest man on the earth. This teaches us that he was never stern with the Children of Israel, even though they deserved it. This is why all the people learned the Torah from Moshe at first, for he did not appoint judges over them, as we read: "*It was on the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moshe from morning till evening. Moshe's father-in-law saw everything he was doing to the people, and he said, '...You will surely become worn out, you as well as this people who are with you'*" (*Shemot 18:13-18*). The Aggadah says in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: "*They will exhaust you and make you give up. Rabbi Elazar of Modin said, 'They will make you waste away and wither you like a fig whose leaves wither'*" (*Mechilta, Amalek 2*).

In fact Moshe tended not to be stern with the Children of Israel, with the result being that they treated him without respect. That is how Korach managed to attract so many Jews to him against Moshe, to the point that they treated him in a shameful way. Furthermore, it is written (*Sermons of the Ketav Sofer, Tevet 8*) that Moshe was only punished at the waters of Meriva, and G-d did not allow him to enter Eretz Israel, because he had said: "*Listen na, O rebels*" (*Bamidbar 20:10*). Now the term na always indicates a supplication (*Berachot 9a*). Since Moshe did not speak to them harshly or sternly when he should have, he was punished for it.

Aaron's humility was also great, as the Sages have said: "*I bestowed greatness… upon Moshe and Aaron, yet they said: 'We are nothing' [Shemot 16:8]*" (*Chullin 89a*). The Sages also teach us how Aaron made peace among the people: He would go to the two opposing parties and speak good of one to the other, until peace reigned among them (*Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan 12*). This is why Korach and his followers erred in regards to Moshe and Aaron; it is why they became used to them and failed to treat them with the same respect as Hashem. They did not fulfill the teaching, "*The reverence for your Rav [should be] as the fear of Heaven,*" for his humility was too great.

We therefore find that Rashi states, "*Korach took [Bamidbar 16:1]: He took himself to one side to dissociate himself from the congregation in order to contest the priesthood.*" We need to understand what the expression "*to one side*" means. Were

there two sides, such that he took one? Rather, Korach compared himself to Moshe and Aaron, as if Moshe and Aaron were on one side and he was on another – equal to them – and that Moshe and Aaron were not greater than him and he was not greater than them. Since that was what Korach thought, he denied the Torah and Hashem, as our Sages have said: "*Korach was an unbeliever who said, 'The Torah does not come from Heaven'*" (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:1*). Why did he say this? It was because whoever denies his Rav will eventually deny G-d, and whoever ridicules his Rav will eventually ridicule Hashem.

The Grave Power of Scorn

It is written, "*Korach, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, separated himself with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliav, and On son of Peleth, the sons of Reuven. They stood before Moshe with 250 men from the Children of Israel, leaders of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown*" (*Bamidbar 16:1-2*). The Midrash says, "*When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe: 'Take the Levites from among the Children of Israel and purify them' [Bamidbar 8:6], Moshe immediately did so to Korach, but he was no longer recognizable. He was asked, 'Who did this to you?' He replied, 'Moshe did this to me, and not only that, but he took hold of my hands and feet, and I was waved. He then said to me, "Behold, you are clean!*" ' Immediately, Moshe's enemies began to incite Israel against him" (*Tanchuma, Korach 3*).

This is absolutely astounding. How could Korach and his followers have possibly thought of challenging Moshe Rabbeinu over Israel's leadership and priesthood, to the point of saying: "*Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem*" (*Bamidbar 16:3*)? All the Children of Israel had seen Moshe ascending to Heaven and receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, and from among all Israel, only Aaron and his sons the kohanim went up the mountain. The verse states, "*Then you shall ascend, and Aaron with you*" (*Shemot 19:24*) – Moshe was a division by himself and the others were a division by themselves (*Mechilta D'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Shemot 19:24*). If Korach had been worthy, why did he not immediately say at that point: "*How are these men different from all the other sons of Levi, to go up the mountain?*" Yet that did not enter his mind, for everyone knew that G-d had told Moshe: "*Behold, I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever*" (*Shemot 19:9*). G-d did not speak to Korach in any way, and if he had wanted to say something and oppose Moshe at that point, the Children of Israel would not have listened to him. So why did they listen to him afterwards?

Furthermore, all the Children of Israel had seen, when Miriam spoke against her brother Moshe by criticizing him for having separated himself from his wife, that G-d punished her and defended Moshe at that point, having explained the difference between Moshe and the other prophets: "*If there shall be a prophet among you, in a vision shall I, Hashem, make Myself known to him. In a dream shall I speak with him. Not so is my servant Moshe. In My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth*

do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles. At the image of Hashem does he gaze" (*Bamidbar 12:6-8*). Hashem revealed that Moshe was the only one who spoke with Him mouth to mouth, and even if they had other prophets, they would not reach the same level as Moshe. Therefore how could Korach have led the people so astray that he could ask how Moshe felt superior to everyone? Did he not realize that they did not elevate themselves on their own, but that it was G-d Who had elevated them?

We Must Always Flee From Scorn

From here we learn just how grave scorn is. We must always avoid it, for it is as disastrous as death. The Sages have said, "*Scorn is very grave, for it begins with suffering and ends with destruction*" (*Yerushalmi, Berachot 2:8*). They also compare the Torah to oil: "*Just as when you hold a full cup of oil in your hand and a drop of water falls in, a corresponding drop of oil comes out, likewise when a word of Torah enters the heart, a word of scorn comes out. And if a word of scorn goes in, a word of Torah comes out*" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:21*).

Korach only began to challenge Moshe's leadership by scorning him, deriding the fact that Moshe had shaved and waved him. On the verse, "*nor sits in the seat of scorners*" (*Tehillim 1:1*), the Aggadah says that it was Korach who scorned Moshe and Aaron, for he began to mock them, saying: "*There was a widow in our neighborhood….*" Korach also said to them, "*Moshe Rabbeinu! A tallit that is entirely of techelet, does it require tzitzit?*" He said yes. "*A house that is completely filled with Torah scrolls, does it require a mezuzah?*" He said yes. Still again: "*A wound that is [half an inch] in diameter, is it pure?*" He said that it is impure. "*And if it entirely covers a man?*" He said, "*Then it is pure.*" At that point Korach said, "*The Torah does not come from Heaven, Moshe is not a prophet, and Aaron is not a Kohen Gadol*" (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:2*).

With the Thoughts of the Heart

As a result, we see that Korach began by scorning and mocking the mitzvot given by Hashem. He should have handled his differences of opinion as talmidei chachamim do: When they argue a point of Halachah, each one explains his viewpoint, seeks to understand the other's reasoning, and goes to the heart of the matter by studying it from all angles. Korach did not do this, but scorned the mitzvot and Moshe's words. In no way did he try to understand the Halachah, which is why he eventually spoke sacrilegiously, to the point of saying: "*The Torah does not come from Heaven, Moshe is not a prophet, and Aaron is not a Kohen Gadol.*"

Since Korach had started to scorn them, words of Torah left his heart and he abandoned the essence of his argument. At first he wanted to verify the halachot, but since he started arguing in a spirit of scorn, he forgot his core arguments and started to challenge Moshe's authority without trying to understand the Halachah. The Sages teach, "*The first step in transgression is evil thought, the second is scorn*" (*Derech Eretz Zutah*). Since Korach began to challenge Moshe's authority and leadership, we immediately see that his intentions were not pure, for when the Sages of Israel discuss Halachah, nobody seeks to humiliate the other, for all they want is to understand the Halachah.

Korach's Scornful Remarks to Moshe

According to what the Sages state in several places (*Bamidbar Rabba 18; Tanchuma 2*), Korach raised several objections against Moshe in regards to various laws. I would like to explain some of these objections, and why Korach was mistaken.

Korach wanted to serve as Kohen Gadol, but he knew that simple speeches would not convince Moshe to appoint him as such. That is why he also wanted to prove to Moshe that he was a talmid chacham, hoping to convince him in this way. Hence Korach objected to Moshe by stating: "*You have said that it is written in the Torah. 'They shall put a thread of techelet upon the tzitzit of every corner' [Bamidbar 15:38]*."

He also asked him, "*Does a house that is entirely filled with Torah scrolls require a mezuzah, or is it exempt?*" Moshe replied that it required one. Korach began to laugh and said, "*All the Torah scrolls in a house do not exempt it, but two passages in the mezuzah do?*" We also find that Korach sought to raise objections about the red heifer (*Midrash Pliyah*).

We need to understand something: Korach was intelligent (*Bamidbar Rabba 18:2*), so what was the meaning behind all these objections? What was Korach's objective in saying such things?

We know that the entire objective of the tzitzit, and the techelet which they contain, is to remember Hashem, as the Sages have said: "*Techelet resembles the color of the sea, and the sea resembles the color of the sky, and the sky resembles the color of a sapphire, and a sapphire resembles the color of the Throne of Glory*" (*Chullin 89a; Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:2*). Thus Korach believed that if a single thread dyed techelet enabled a man to remember G-d and the Throne of Glory, how much more would an entire tallit dyed techelet bring Him to mind, enabling a person to be even more scrupulous in all the mitzvot!

Likewise a house filled with Torah scrolls would lead a man to cleaving to Hashem, so what was the need for a mezuzah? As for the red heifer, we know that Korach was aware of the reasons behind it, and so he claimed that he was more important than Aaron, who was not aware of all its reasons.

Yet Korach was gravely mistaken in this regard, for there is no need for an entire tallit dyed techelet in order to recall G-d's existence, since all of Creation itself leads to the knowledge of the Creator, as King David said: "*When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers*" (*Tehillim 8:4*). Hence there was no need for an entire tallit dyed techelet. A single thread is all that's needed to recall the existence of the Creator, and more than this would infringe upon the prohibition against adding to the mitzvot (*Sanhedrin 29a*).

The same applies to a house completely filled with Torah scrolls: Only a mezuzah guards the house and the Torah scrolls within it, as well as any mezuzot that may be on a table inside.

Furthermore, Korach erred in regards to the red heifer, for had he been aware of the reasons behind it, he would have also been aware that its ashes alluded to humility. Yet humility was found with Moshe, as it is written: "*Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth*" (*Bamidbar 12:3*).

As a result, Korach should have acted with humility in practice, not just calling for it externally, for actions are more important than explanations (*Pirkei Avoth 1:17; Zohar III:218a*). That said, why did Korach persist in his pride?

Above all, Korach committed a huge error by suspecting Moshe of adultery. He had doubts because Moshe left his wife Tziporah, having separated from her (*Shabbat 87a*). Korach thought, "*How could he do this? Aaron, who is the Kohen Gadol, did not separate from his wife. It's certainly because of another woman!*"

However Korach was mistaken. He did not know that Moshe had separated from his wife because the Shechinah could speak to him at any moment, not at a definite time (*Shabbat ibid.*), as Hashem had told him: "*And you, stand here with Me*" (*Devarim 5:28*).

This is why Miriam as well, who had spoken Lashon Harah about Moshe concerning the very same subject, was punished and afflicted with leprosy (*Bamidbar 12:10*). Although Korach saw what happened to her, he did not learn anything because he did not understand what it was about. Although he saw what happened to the spies – who also failed to learn anything from what had happened to Miriam, and who were punished – Korach did not regret anything, for he committed the very same mistake and did nothing to properly reflect on things. All this happened because Korach believed that his Torah would allow him to succeed.

That, however, was not the case. Since Korach sought conflict, he ruined everything and damaged the very foundations of Creation, for he did not draw any lessons from the past or reflect upon Moshe's greatness. Hence he arrived at where he was. Evil took hold of him, he separated himself from the entire community and provoked a terrible plague.

All these things are alluded to in the numerical value of Korach's name. The tzitzit dyed entirely techelet are found in his name, for the name Korach ben Yitzhar has the same numerical value as the expression *chutei tzitzit* ("threads of fringes").

The mezuzah is also alluded to in his name, for Korach has the same numerical value as the Name *Sh-dai*, which is found in the mezuzot that guard the homes of Israel.

The red heifer as well is alluded to in his name, for the expression *parah adumah* ("red heifer") has the same numerical value, in adding the words themselves to the value of its letters, to the expression *zeh hu Korach* ("this is Korach") when adding the four letters of the name Korach.

The suspicion that Korach had of Moshe is also alluded to in his name, for it is written: *Vayikach Korach* ("Korach took"). This can be read as *vai lakach* ("woe, he took"), and *vai* ("woe") has the same numerical value as the letters *chet beit vav*, the

initials of the verse *chayil bala vayekiyenu* (*"he devoured wealth, but will disgorge it" – Job 20:15*). This alludes to the middah of yesod, circumcision.

If Korach suspected Moshe of having had forbidden relations, he took vai for himself, without rectifying it, for he spoke Lashon Harah and sought conflict. Since he created division in the world, he was swallowed by the earth in a supernatural way and perished from the world.

But Korach was Wise!

It is written, "*Korach the son of Itzhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, took…*" (*Bamidbar 16:1*).

We need to understand the underlying reason for Korach's rebellion against Moshe and the Shechinah. After all, Korach wasn't a simple man, having been among the tribe of Levi, which was chosen to carry the Ark of the Covenant. Now the Sages have said that the Ark carried those who carried it, and since Korach had an opportunity to carry the Ark, it signified that he was a great individual. That being the case, how did he come to have such a vile attitude?

Whom did he dare attack? Moshe, the "*faithful servant*" – the one who had completely devoted his entire life to the Jewish people! With a motion of his hand, Moshe had brought the terrible plagues upon Egypt. Indeed, he split the sea, raised his hands to defeat Amalek, and brought water out of a rock by striking it with his staff. Korach knew all this, and he also knew that he was nothing compared to Moshe. Therefore how could have rushed into a war against Moshe and Aaron, the results of which were known beforehand?

Kabbalists cite the Arizal in stating that the last letters of the words *tzaddik katamar yifrach* (*"a righteous man will flourish like a date palm" – Tehillim 92:13*), form the name Korach. This tells us that in the future, Korach will arise and serve in the Temple as the Kohen Gadol. Now if he merits such a position, this proves that he was a very lofty individual at the outset. Yet how could he not have feared the dreadful results of such antagonism, and how did he manage to rally 250 men, leaders of the assembly, just by speaking Lashon Harah and slandering Moshe Rabbeinu, Hashem's servant, and Aaron the kohen? The verse states, "*Moshe heard and fell upon his face*" (*Bamidbar 16:4*), which the Gemara explains as meaning that they suspected him of adultery (*Sanhedrin 110a*). It is therefore appalling to see just how crude these people were, and it only reinforces the question of what pushed Korach to act in this way.

On the verse, "*You have taken too much upon yourselves, O sons of Levi*" (*Bamidbar 16:7*), Rashi writes: "*What did Korach, who was wise, see [to commit] this folly? His vision deceived him. He saw [prophetically] a chain of great people descending from him: Samuel, who is equal to Moshe and Aaron. [Korach] said, 'For his sake I will be spared.' [He also saw] 24 watches [of Levites] emanating from his grandsons, all prophesying through Ruach Hakodesh…. He said, 'Is it possible that all this greatness*

is destined to emanate from me, and I should remain silent?' He therefore plotted in order to attain this privilege."

We need to think deeply about the lesson that Rashi is giving us by saying, "*His vision deceived him.*" Someone who has become corrupt due to the pride that dwells within him, as well as the self-centered love implanted in his heart, may twist the things he sees, transforming truth into falsehood and yet believing it to be the truth. How great is the power of such corruption, the strength of these detestable flaws, such that it can push a person to fight against the greatest of men, Hashem's chosen ones, and to even feel that such a fight is a mitzvah being waged for the sake of Heaven! And why? Because "*his vision deceived him*" – Korach saw the prophet Samuel emerging from him, and Samuel was equal to Moshe and Aaron combined.

If we think about this honestly and logically, it seems that, quite to the contrary, if a person values Samuel's honor, then the more he increases and glorifies the honor of Moshe and Aaron, the more that Samuel's honor and greatness will also increase. This is because Korach saw by Ruach Hakodesh that Samuel was equal to Moshe and Aaron combined. Alternatively, the more that a person harms their greatness by diminishing them, the more he diminishes the honor of Samuel. However "*his vision deceived him,*" meaning that the pride and vanity that existed in Korach is what prevented him from seeing the truth about the honor of Samuel, who would emerge from him. Instead, Korach focused on his own honor, thinking that "*if Samuel must emerge from me, then I should be gloried and honored.*"

Why Are You Exalting Yourselves?

Bad character traits have the power to push the heart from positive to negative, and therein lay Korach's weakness. Jealousy and the pursuit of honor pushed him to seek glory for himself, and to fight against Moshe and Aaron.

The same applied to this entire dispute. Indeed, we see that "*his vision deceived him,*" meaning that he did not have a clear view of things.

Korach told Moshe, "*The entire assembly – all of them – are holy…why are you exalting yourselves?*" (*Bamidbar 16:3*). Korach wanted everyone to be a leader, for everyone was worthy of leadership. Hence he asked, "*Why have you, Aaron and Moshe, set yourselves up as leaders?*"

This seems like a completely foolish question. Everyone fully realizes that in order for discipline and order to reign among the Jewish people, there must necessarily be some authority in charge. Otherwise, everyone would do whatever comes to mind. As the Sages tell us, when Eliyahu HaNavi and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went into a synagogue frequented by the wealthy, and they were not treated with respect, Eliyahu gave them the blessing: "*May it be G-d's will that you all be leaders,*" which is the worst curse that can be given to a community. That is precisely what Korach wanted to do among the Children of Israel. This happened solely because his vision deceived him, for jealously and a love for honor blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

Moreover, we see the firmness and courage of Moshe, concerning whom the Torah states: "*Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any man on the face of the earth*" (*Bamidbar 12:3*). Although he was suspected of adultery, and although 250 men, leaders of the assembly, rose up against him, he still tried to calm the situation and usher in peace, as it is written: "*Moshe sent forth to summon Dathan and Abiram*" (*ibid. 16:12*). Here Rashi cites the Gemara (*Sanhedrin 110*), which learns from this passage that we must not maintain disputes, for it was Moshe who summoned them in order to placate them with conciliatory words. What's more is that Aaron, Hashem holy one, was with Moshe in trying to make peace reign, and of Aaron it is said that "*he loved peace and pursued peace.*" Such was the immense difference between Moshe and Aaron on the one hand, and Korach and his followers on the other. Of Korach we read, "*Korach…took*" – he took himself to one side. Here the Targum states *vaitpaleg Korach* ("Korach separated himself"): He separated himself from the tribes of Israel and provoked a rift within Israel.

See the great punishment that Korach brought upon himself and his entire band of followers! The Holy One, blessed be He, created a mouth within the earth during the six days of Creation: "*The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, along with all the people who were with Korach and all their goods*" (*Bamidbar 16:32*). Our Sages state that even an object that originally belonged to Korach, and which happened to be in some other person's pocket, was swallowed by the earth, even if that person was not a follower of Korach. The earth would open its mouth next to that person, who did not understand what it wanted of him, since he was not among Korach's followers. Tremendous fear then seized him, until he remembered that he had something in his pocket which he had received from Korach (for in order to assemble the community against Moshe and Aaron, Korach had distributed all kinds of objects in order to elect leaders). That person would immediately remove the object from his pocket, and the earth would swallow it up. Indeed, nothing remained of Korach or his possessions! Our Sages said, "*See the power of disputes! The Celestial Court punishes only from the age of 20 years, but in this dispute even babies were swallowed by the earth, as it is written: 'Their women, their children, and their babies.' They were all swallowed up, such that absolutely nothing of theirs remained.*"

We are familiar with the Sages' statement that even today, Korach cries out and says: "*Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth.*" I thought I would explain that from his throat – which once raised a voice that sowed discord and raised doubts about Moshe, Aaron, and the community of Hashem – that very same voice is now repenting from the depths of Gehinnom, as the Sages have said: "*Those who were swallowed up with Korach cry out from the depths of the earth: 'Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth, but we are liars.'*" Measure for measure, Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth. However with the exception of this voice, everything that emerged from his mouth was destroyed, thus teaching us the gravity of dissension.

A Lesson from Korach's Wealth

It is written, "*Korach, the son of Itzhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, separated himself*" (*Bamidbar 16:1*).

It is not a coincidence that Parsha Korach is found between the passage of the tzitzit and Parsha Chukat in the Torah. In regards to the tzitzit we read, "*You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem and fulfill them*" (*Bamidbar 15:39*), and Parsha Chukat states: "*This is the Torah: When a man dies in a tent*" (*ibid. 19:14*). Our Sages explain that the Torah cannot be acquired unless a person sacrifices himself for it. What follows are two fundamental and essential conditions for meriting the crown of Torah.

First, "*You shall look upon*" – we must recognize G-d, be aware of His greatness, know Him, and remember all His commandments.

But this is not enough. In fact we look at our tzitzit each day, but without sensing that it affects and influences us. Therefore how are we to understand the rest of the verse: "*You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem and fulfill them*"? Hence Parsha Chukat adds an additional condition for receiving the Torah: "*When a man dies in a tent.*" That is, we are obligated to sacrifice ourselves for the Torah, to yield before it, and to annul our desires for its glory. We must recognize our insignificance compared to it, and we must demonstrate tremendous humility.

The mitzvah of tzitzit certainly allows us to remember the greatness of G-d and recognize His superiority. However we must also learn not to grow proud, and to rid ourselves of negative character traits. In fact if we are mindful of G-d's greatness, yet filled with pride – considering ourselves to be honorable – then we will not try to fulfill His commandments. Hence recognizing the supremacy of the Shechinah must go hand-in-hand with submitting ourselves before the Torah and those who study it.

This was Korach's mistake: He was among those who carried the Holy Ark, and therefore he was aware of G-d's greatness. Yet on the other hand, he did not know how to humble himself and recognize man's frail state. He did not want to fulfill the verse, "*When a man dies in a tent,*" for it was difficult for him to kill his own desires before the Torah and Moshe, the leader of all Israel. Korach was filled with pride and said, "*Why should Moshe lead us, rather than I?*" Since he lacked humility and failed to submit himself to the Torah and the Sages, he ended up rebelling against the Torah and even denying G-d. This happened because anyone who rebels against the tzaddikim and despises them is considered to be rebelling against G-d Himself.

Rashi says the following: "*But what did Korach, who was intelligent, see [that pushed him to commit] this folly? His vision deceived him*" (*Rashi on Bamidbar 16:7*). We have been given two eyes: One to recognize the greatness of G-d, and the other to recognize our own insignificance and lowliness. Korach properly used one eye, for he even recognized G-d's glory. However he did not properly use his other eye, since he failed to recognize his own insignificance. He was not wise enough to yield to the

holy Torah and the Sages of Israel. It was therefore pride that led to his fall. This is the meaning of the expression, "*His vision deceived him.*" He became arrogant, mainly because of his many possessions. The verse, "*Yerushun became fat and kicked*" (*Devarim 32:15*) was fulfilled in Korach, for he was blinded by wealth, which he attributed to his own efforts.

Regrettably, there are many people today who act just like Korach. When we are going through a rough patch or a misfortune strikes us, we usually turn to Hashem and beseech Him for help. Only then does faith awaken in us. Yet when all is going well – when G-d provides us with food in abundance – that is when we forget G-d and turn our backs on Him, for we attribute our successes to our own efforts. This is precisely what the Torah warns us against: "*Lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep and goats increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves…and your heart will grow proud and you will forget Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 8:12-14*). This is why the Torah commands us, "*You shall remember Hashem your G-d – that it was He Who gave you the strength to make wealth*" (*v.18*).

During one of the worst aviation disasters in history, an airplane carrying about 280 passengers, including three Israeli Jews, crashed into the middle of the ocean. The state of Israel therefore made every effort to find traces of the airplane and recover the bodies of the victims. But it was useless. The sister of one of these Jews contacted me, and in the depths of her despair she tearfully asked me: "*What do you think? Is my brother still alive?*" I said to her, "*What are you hoping to hear me say? Rational people all understand that there's no hope of finding survivors at this point, since the plane crashed into the middle of the ocean.*" However she replied with faith, "*But Rabbi, as a Jew I've always had hope and faith that my brother is still alive!*"

Her response stunned me, and I realized that this is what the faith of every Jew should resemble: We must believe in G-d; we must believe that nothing can prevent Him from saving us. Our Sages have affirmed this by saying, "*Even if a sharp sword rests upon a man's neck, he should not desist from prayer*" (*Berachot 10a*). However we have to ask ourselves: Do we only demonstrate such faith when confronted by worries and misfortunes that make us look to G-d and depend on Him? Yet when things are good, do we recognize that everything comes from Him, that we have an abundance of things, and that we are in good health? Otherwise (*G-d forbid*), in times of success we may distance ourselves from faith in G-d and declare, "*My strength and the might of my hand has made me all this wealth*" (*Devarim 8:17*). Whoever we may be, we are obligated to heed this warning and reflect on it.

Chukat

The Study of Torah Purifies Man

Our parsha discusses the impurity resulting from contact with a corpse, and how it can be rectified. When we think about it, this mitzvah leads to many restrictions. A person who became impure through contact with a corpse should separate himself from people who are not impure, lest he render them impure by touch. He should also not touch utensils or objects that are not impure, lest he render them impure as well. If someone were to extend his hand to greet him, he would have to say: "*So as not to become impure, don't touch me.*"

Several questions arise when we think about this mitzvah, questions that we will now examine. Why does the Torah decree that a person becomes impure upon touching a dead body, since there is a mitzvah to care for a corpse and bury it? If impurity is decreed on someone who cares for a corpse, it may lead him to avoid this responsibility, for he may not want to isolate himself from people and things for seven days.

We may also ask why it is precisely the ashes of the red heifer that purify a person. That being said, since we no longer have these ashes today, and since we are constantly in a state of impurity due to contact with the dead (despite all the tevilot and netilat yadayim), we remain impure. Therefore how can we become holy in our time? We also have to understand why the Sages said, "*Even as the red heifer procured atonement, so does the death of the tzaddikim procure atonement*" (*Moed Katan 28a*). What connection is there between the atonement procured by the ashes of the red heifer and the death of the tzaddikim? We shall try to explain everything as best we can.

When Hashem created the first man, He created him in a state of perfection and with great wisdom. He put everything in the mind of the first man, to the point that he understood all the secrets of Creation and gave each creature a name whose root reflected its essence. He also gave a Name to the Holy One, blessed be He. The first man was called Adam, for he was taken from the earth (*adama*), and he was wise enough to name Chaya, the mother of all the living (*Genesis 3:20*).

Furthermore, the tzaddik and kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Petaya Zatzal stated that the first man was a great sage, for he was wise enough to understand what death was, even though nothing had yet died. When Hashem told him that he would die if he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, how could he have been afraid of death if he didn't understand what it meant? This signifies that in his immense wisdom, Adam knew enough to fear death, even before understanding its exact nature. Thus Hashem placed him in the Garden of Eden to work and keep it (*Genesis 2:15*), and He commanded him not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. In fact Hashem wanted man to use the great wisdom that

He endowed him with, not to seek answers from the Tree of Knowledge. It was not meant to make him wise, for Hashem did not want him to possess that kind of wisdom. Therefore He prohibited him from partaking of it. However the man did not stop there, and he brought death and disaster upon humanity. What happened to the first man also contains a lesson for every Jew today: The Holy One, blessed be He, gave us His Torah (the written Torah and the oral Torah), and the Sages prohibited us from studying the wisdom of the Greeks and other philosophies (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei 937*), for we must content ourselves with the wisdom of the Torah, which contains everything and all means to perfection, as it is written: "*The Torah of the L-RD is perfect*" (*Psalms 19:8*).

Since we have reached this point, we shall explain the meaning of the ashes of the red heifer. This week's parsha begins with the declaration, "*This is the decree of the Torah*" (*Numbers 19:2*), an allusion to the fact that a person must cleave solely to the decrees of the Torah, not to other kinds of wisdom, for in this way he will form a bond with Hashem. This is also what the parsha alludes to further on: "*When a man dies in a tent*" (*v.14*), concerning which the Sages have said: "*Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it*" (*Berachot 63b*). This refers to the tent of Torah, meaning that a person must give himself entirely to the wisdom of Torah, not to try and have it both ways by absorbing, in addition to the Torah, foreign wisdom. Our entire focus should be on the holy Torah, as it is written: "*Go over it again and again, for everything is in it*" (*Perkei Avoth 5:22*).

As for the ashes of the red heifer, which procure atonement, this tells us by allusion that in sanctifying and purifying ourselves, we become as pure and upright as the first man before the sin. The Holy One, blessed be He, created him from dust, which is also called ash, as it is written: "*They shall take for the unclean person some of the ash*" (*Numbers 19:17*). Similarly, the word *adam* ("*man*") is formed from the initials of *efer* ("ash"), *dam* ("blood"), and *mara* ("gall"), as the Sages have said (*Sotah 5a*). This teaches us that the degree to which a person fulfills all the laws related to the impurity of the dead and to his purification – without arguing over the mitzvah – is the degree to which he is purified.

Yet today, when we no longer have the ashes of the red heifer, we still have a way to purify body and soul, namely through the study of Torah. This is because the Torah cannot contract impurity, as the Sages have said: "*Words of Torah are not susceptible to impurity*" (*Berachot 22a*). On the contrary, the Torah elevates a person from the level of liability to the level of gain. As the Sages have said, "*Why are 'tents' mentioned alongside of 'streams,' as it states: '[How goodly are your tents, O Jacob…] as streams stretched out, as gardens by the river side, as aloes planted…' [Numbers 24:5-6]? To tell you that just as streams bring a man up from a state of uncleanness to one of cleanness, so do tents bring a man up from the scale of guilt to the scale of merit*" (*Berachot 15a-16b*). Rashi explains that tents refer to houses of study.

From here we learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that both Temples would be destroyed and that there would be neither altar, nor priest, nor ashes of the red

heifer. Hence at the beginning of the parsha He states, "*This is the decree of the Torah.*" Actually, if a person has strayed by going off to study other wisdom, he can rectify this situation by abandoning that wisdom and devoting himself solely to the study of Torah. Conversely, if he neglects the study of Torah, he will eventually stumble and become impure by a corpse. In other words, when he demonstrates a weakness in Torah study, it will lead to impurity. His purification consists of putting an effort into studying Torah and performing mitzvot, by the ashes of the red heifer, so he can return to the state of a newborn baby.

The Song of the Well: Wells that the Princes Dug

It is written, "*Then Israel sang this song: Come up, O well, announce it…*" (*Bamidbar 21:17*). The commentators ask why Moshe's name is not mentioned in this song. They also ask why the Children of Israel sang a song for the well, but not for the manna or the clouds of glory. We should also be surprised by the fact that they felt the need to sing about a well after 40 years had passed, as they were about to enter Eretz Israel, since they knew that it would dry up as soon as they entered the land, where they would have bread and water.

In fact why did the Children of Israel not sing this song at the very beginning, when they merited such things? All these things were outside the laws of nature, for the Holy One, blessed be He, gave them food and water in a place of serpents and scorpions.

There is something else that we need to understand. In the book of Devarim, we do not see Moshe mentioning the song of the sea, whereas he mentioned the Ten Commandments as well as other things that happened to the Children of Israel. For example, he mentioned the subject of the spies and Korach, but not the sea and the miracles that happened there, nor did he mention the song of the sea. We do not see that Moshe mentioned any of these subjects.

The Song of the Well Came Through Effort

I would like to explain why Moshe avoided singing the song of the well with the Children of Israel at the end of their 40-year journey in the desert. He avoided singing this song, despite having sung the song of the sea with them, as it is written: "*Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang*" (*Shemot 15:1*). Our Sages have said (*Shemot Rabba 23:9*) that when the Children of Israel left Egypt and were standing by the sea, Moshe wanted to teach them the ways of Hashem. He wanted to constantly thank the Holy One, blessed be He, for the miracles that He had performed for them, which is why he began to sing the song of the sea, and the Children of Israel repeated it after him. They did not put an effort into singing it, but simply repeated after Moshe. Furthermore, they were all influenced by the Holy Spirit that rested on Moshe. Since Moshe had taught them this song as soon as they left Egypt, he does not begin to sing it here, for he wanted the Children of Israel to put an effort into it. Henceforth, they should be the ones who spontaneously start to sing, for a song that we do not put an effort into cannot

be compared to a song in which we do. The former is merited through others, instead of being merited by ourselves.

The Patriarchs are Called "Princes"

Be that as it may, although Moshe did not begin the song of the well, all the Children of Israel knew that they had reached a level of prophesy – a level that allowed them to sing the song of the well – only by the power of Moshe. They could only sing now because Moshe had sung for them at the sea and started that song for them, as it is written: "*Then Moshe sang.*" In this way, the Children of Israel had merited for the Holy Spirit to rest upon them by the well, and they began singing on their own, as it is written: "*Then Israel sang this song.*" What did they say? "*Wells that the princes dug.*" Our Sages say (*Tanchuma, Chukat 21*) that this refers to the merit of the Patriarchs, who are called "*princes,*" thereby teaching us that they attributed the song to the merit of the Patriarchs and the merit of Moshe, as it is written: " *'When you have rested upon the lawgiver' – the lawgiver is Moshe*" (*Zohar Chadash, Chukat 83a*).

This is why the Children of Israel only sang the song of the well after 40 years, for "*it may take a person 40 years to know the mind of his teacher*" (*Avodah Zarah 5b*). Since 40 years had passed, the Children of Israel recognized that they only merited all these miracles because of Moshe, and they could only sing this song by his strength. Just as he had taught them to sing and express their gratitude for they miracle of the sea, they again sang after 40 years out of gratitude for the miracle of the sea and the well.

Prophesying Without Knowing Why

Here we should ask: Was the well dug by men? They had a stone, not a hole in the ground! Therefore what is the meaning of, "*Wells that the princes dug*"?

By saying this, the Children of Israel were alluding to the fact that they only merited prophesy because of Moshe, who had taught them to put an effort into attaining it. Now Moshe had already dug and prepared the well. When did he do this? At the time when the Children of Israel encountered their first well, near the sea.

Why did Moshe not mention the song of the sea in the book of Devarim? It is because the song contains the statement, "*You will bring them in and implant them on the mount of Your heritage*" (*Shemot 15:17*). Now since there was a decree preventing Moshe from entering Eretz Israel, he was afraid that the Children of Israel would lose hope by thinking, "*Just as Moshe did not enter the land, how much more will we not enter it?*" Hence he did not repeat this verse, in order not to disturb them.

In reality, no falsehood escaped Moshe's lips, as the Gemara states: "*It is not written, 'You will bring us in,' but 'You will bring them in.' This teaches that they prophesied, but did not know what they prophesied*" (*Bava Batra 119b*).

Nevertheless, Moshe gave them this song as an allusion, using enigmatic language. He said, "*I implored Hashem at that time, saying…*" (*Devarim 3:23*). We need to understand this, for nowhere do we find that Moshe implored Hashem at that point in time. In fact he wanted to say the same thing as in the song of the sea: "*You will bring them in and*

implant them." Since there was a decree preventing Moshe from entering Eretz Israel, G-d said to him: "*Enough! Speak to Me no more of this*" (*Devarim 3:26*). Hence in order not to disobey the Holy One, blessed be He, Moshe did not repeat this song. He only mentioned it by allusion, for the term *va'etchanan* ("I implored") has the same numerical value as *shira* ("song"), because in the song of the sea Moshe implored Hashem to let him enter Eretz Israel.

This is the Decree of Those Who Study Torah

The Midrash has King Solomon saying, "*I studied the passage on the red heifer. I asked questions, I reflected, and I said: 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me [Kohelet 7:23]*" (*Tanchuma, Chukat 6*). The Midrash also says, "*It is not the dead that defiles, nor water that purifies. The Holy One, blessed be He, merely says: 'I have laid down a decree, I have issued a law. You are not allowed to transgress My law,' as it is written: 'This is the decree of the Torah' [Bamidbar 19:2]*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 19:8*).

It is also written, "*From where do we learn that words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for them? Because it says, 'This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent' [Bamidbar 19:14]*" (*Berachot 63b*). Now can a dead man study Torah? This teaches us that a man must feel as if dead when learning Torah. Just as the dead do not perceive the sweetness of honey or the taste of salt, one must study Torah and fulfill mitzvot without any thought of a reward. He must also do so without any ulterior motives, and without calculating which reward will be greater or less. A person must not be content on just fulfilling the mitzvot whose reasons he understands; he must also fulfill those whose reasons he does not understand, for we fulfill them only to bring satisfaction to the Creator.

What is the reward of one who acts in this way? The Holy One, blessed be He, does good for him even if he is not worthy of it! Although the attribute of strict justice says before Him: "*Sovereign of the universe, why have You given him wealth, since he does not deserve it?*" He answers: I have written in My Torah, "*According to its measure, He contended against her*" (*Isaiah 27:8*), teaching us that in the measure with which a man measures, it is meted out to him (*Sotah 8b*). In the same way that he does what I have decided for him, although he gains nothing from it, I too will do for him what he asks of Me, although there is nothing to gain from it and although it is not just. This is the sense of the verse, "*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy*" (*Shemot 33:19*), concerning which our Sages have said: "*He may not deserve it*" (*Berachot 7a*).

No Right to Grow Proud

Why is it said that the Torah only endures with one who kills himself for it? Just as the dead do not grow proud, one who wants to conserve what he has learned has no right to grow proud. The Sages have said, "*Why are words of Torah likened to water…? This is to teach you that just as water flows from a higher to lower level, likewise words of Torah endure only with one who is humble*" (*Taanith 7a*).

Whoever is humble fulfills each mitzvah even if he does not understand the reason for it. However one who is arrogant only acts when he understands the reason, which is why his Torah learning will not endure. Now King Solomon was very humble despite being very wise, as it is written: "*G-d gave wisdom and considerable understanding to Solomon, and breadth of heart as the sand on the seashore*" (*I Kings 5:9*). The Sages have explained that the wisdom of King Solomon was as great as that of all Israel, and he knew the reason behind every mitzvah (*Tanchuma, Chukat 6*). Yet when he came to the mitzvah of the red heifer, he did not understand the reason for it, and he annulled himself before the sanctity of the Torah and declared: "*I said: 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me.*" In other words: "*I thought that I would be able to understand the reasons for the mitzvot, but since I do not understand the reason for this one, it means that I am far from understanding the Torah and I have not yet understood its deep mysteries. Even the mitzvot whose reasons I thought I understood, these are clearly not their true reasons, the proof being that I have not been able to understand the reason for this one.*"

An arrogant person, however, will not annul himself before the Torah. He will say: "*Since I don't understand the reason for this mitzvah, it certainly does not contain anything true, and it is impossible to perform.*" It is in this sense that the Sages say that Torah only endures with someone who renders himself as if dead for it, meaning with someone who does not grow proud, but instead annuls himself before it. As for an arrogant person, he says of all the mitzvot: "*They don't please me and I do not fulfill them.*" Hence the Torah will not endure in him.

Misinterpreting Torah

Furthermore, from the fact that a person fulfills all the mitzvot, he thereby demonstrates that everything he does is for the sake of Heaven. In fact if it were otherwise, he would only perform those mitzvot whose reasons he understood. Yet since he does them for the sake of Heaven, his heart immediately inclines before Hashem, Who commanded him to do certain things.

Rabbeinu Yona wrote, "*What misinterpreting Torah refers to is being audacious enough to say things about the Torah that are not true. He says things such as, 'These verses and stories in the Torah serve no purpose,' simply because he is arrogant and proud, and he cannot interpret the point being made, and because 'it is not an empty thing for you' [Devarim 32:47]. Here our Sages have said: 'If it is empty, it is from you' [Yerushalmi, Ketubot 8:11], in that you cannot explain the point being made. The same holds true if you abandon one aspect of Torah and do not acknowledge it. You would be misinterpreting Torah in that case as well. An example would be if you say, 'What good does it do us to have Torah scholars? For if they learn anything at all, they learn it all for themselves, and we gain nothing from the merit they amass.' You would thus be rejecting the declaration in the Torah that '[G-d] will spare the entire place for their sake' [Bereshith 18:26]*" (*Shaarei Teshuvah 3:145*).

Who Knows the Reward for Performing Mitzvot?

It is written, "*Hashem said to Moshe, 'Do not fear him, for into your hand have I given him, his entire people, and his land. You shall do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who dwelled in Heshbon'*" (*Bamidbar 21:34*). The Gemara states that Moshe thought, "*Perhaps the merit of our father Abraham will support him,*" for it is said: "*There came one who escaped, and he told Abram the Hebrew*" (*Bereshith 14:13*). Here Rabbi Yochanan said, "*This refers to Og, who escaped the fate of the generation of the flood*" (*Niddah 61a*). Hence Moshe was afraid of fighting against him, until finally Hashem said: "*You shall do to him as you did to Sihon.*"

We must examine this carefully, and even be surprised by it. Og the king of Bashan was an evildoer, and he wanted to wipe out the entire camp of Israel with a single blow. He went out to fight them, as our Sages say in the Gemara: "*He went and uprooted a mountain the size of three parasangs [roughly eight miles] and carried it on his head*" (*Berachot 54b*), his goal being to throw it upon the camp of Israel and bury them under it. Thus Og despised the Children of Israel and wanted to wipe them out. He only did a favor for Abraham because he knew that Hashem would reward him for it. Furthermore, his intentions were selfish, for he hoped that Abraham would die in this war so that he could marry Sarah. Therefore why did Moshe fear that Abraham's merit would support Og? Can we possibly imagine that the Patriarch's merit would enable his descendants to be wiped out? If Og, who had done only a small thing, possessed a certain degree of merit, then certainly the Children of Israel, who followed in the footsteps of their fathers, would benefit that much more from his merit and be saved from this evildoer!

Furthermore, Og saw what G-d had done for the Children of Israel. He heard about the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek, and although he had grown corrupt through his evil ways and wanted to kill the Children of Israel, was it possible that Abraham's merit would help him to wipe out all the Children of Israel?

We are forced to say that Moshe knew that Abraham's merit would not protect Og to such a degree that he could wipe out the Children of Israel. Moshe knew that the merit of Israel was greater than that of the single mitzvah performed by Og. Yet because Og had told Abraham that Lot was a prisoner, Abraham immediately went out to fight against kings until Lot was freed, and in the end Ruth and Naamah emerged from him. These two beautiful doves arose to save Israel, and they gave rise to King David and Mashiach, the saviors of Israel. That was the merit which Moshe feared.

G-d did not prevent Moshe from fighting against Ammon and Moab because of this, as our Sages have said: "*Two doves have I to bring forth from them: Ruth the Moabite and Naamah the Ammonite*" (*Bava Kama 38b*). Along the same lines, Moshe feared that because Og now possessed the merit of having saved Lot – for those doves could not arise without him, given that he was instrumental in saving their ancestor Lot – Og could perhaps benefit from this merit.

The Reward is Reserved for the World to Come

From all this, we learn that it is possible to perform a single mitzvah whose merit lasts for numerous generations. There is no one who knows the reward for performing mitzvot, for we can perform a single, easy mitzvah and receive a great reward. For example, Og the king of Bashan simply went to tell Abraham that Lot had been taken captive, and the merit of this mitzvah protected him to such a degree that Moshe Rabbeinu feared him.

Along the same lines, Ishmael fathered twelve tribes and was given a portion in Eretz Israel solely by the merit of performing a single mitzvah, namely circumcision. Thus we read, "*As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I have blessed him, will make him fruitful, and will increase him most exceedingly. He will beget twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation*" (*Bereshith 17:20*). The holy Zohar states, "*[The Holy One] banished the children of Ishmael…and gave them a portion here below in the Holy Land because of their circumcision. They are destined to rule over the land for a long time, so long as it is empty, just as their form of circumcision is empty and imperfect. They will prevent Israel from returning to their own land until the merit of the children of Ishmael will be exhausted*" (*Zohar II:32a*).

The son of David will only come once the merit of Ishmael's children will be exhausted, as the Aggadah states on the verse, "*He fell in the presence of all his brothers*" (*Bereshith 25:18*): "*In one place it says, 'He fell,' but in another place it says, 'He shall dwell in the presence of all his brothers' [Bereshith 16:12]. As long as he does not put his hand on the Temple, he shall dwell. But as soon as he puts his hand on the Temple, he shall fall*" (*Midrash HaGadol*). The descendants of Ishmael are destined to fall at the end of days, when the glory of Israel will arise.

G-d fully realizes that the children of Ishmael will harm Israel in the future, as it is written: "*Why is he called Ishmael? Because in the future G-d will listen [yishma] to the cry of the [Jewish] nation for what the children of Ishmael will do*" (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 32*). On the verse, "*As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him*" (*Bereshith 17:20*), the Midrash also says: "*Know that he will father twelve tribal leaders. They will all be kings, and the last among the twelve will be Hagar. He will enact evil decrees against the people, and will reign for a short time. His kingdom will be strengthened at the end, and I will make of him a great people*" (*Yilamdeinu, Bereshith 79*).

We may logically infer the following: If these evildoers received their reward in this world for a single mitzvah – one which they did not fulfill perfectly – then how much more will Hashem reward the Jewish people, to whom He has given 613 mitzvot which they fulfill with all their heart! The reward for the former is given in this world, whereas the reward for the latter is reserved for the World to Come, as it is written: "*No eye has seen, O G-d, except You*" (*Isaiah 64:3*).

The Mitzvah of the Red Heifer Leads to Complete Teshuvah

It is written, "*This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded, saying: '…they shall take for you a completely red heifer…. Someone shall burn the heifer before his eyes…. The one who burns it shall immerse his clothing. … This is the Torah: A man who dies in a tent, anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be impure for seven days. … Anyone who touches a human bone or a grave shall be impure for seven days'*" (*Bamidbar 19:2-16*).

We need to think about this mitzvah. What does it all allude to? What does it actually mean? Why a heifer, why red, why burn it, and why sprinkle its ashes upon one who is impure? We need to explain why the Torah decreed that whoever touches a dead body is impure for seven days, and then afterwards, in order to be purified, the ashes of the red heifer must be sprinkled on him. We also need to explain why the person who burns the heifer, and the person who purifies the impure, become impure themselves.

We may recall that the Sages have said, "*If a man sees that painful sufferings come upon him, let him examine his conduct. … If he examines it and finds nothing, let him attribute this to a neglect in the study of Torah*" (*Berachot 5a*). In the time of the Temple, since the Torah decreed that anyone who touches a corpse would be impure, people would reflect upon their behavior whenever this happened: "*Why did this happen to me? What sin did I commit, such that the Holy One, blessed be He, has shown me that I've become impure, since we have been ordered to be holy and pure [Vayikra 19:2]?*" People were obligated to tell themselves that they committed a sin and that G-d wanted to open their eyes in order to repent. In fact people would search their souls, discover their sins, and completely repent.

Teshuvah must truly be complete, for semi-repentance is not teshuvah. Since many people fail in this regard by doing teshuvah that is incomplete, the Torah says that we must burn the red heifer and sprinkle its ashes on a person who is impure, thus hinting to him that from dust he comes, and to dust he shall return. As such, he will do complete teshuvah. The Sages have advised us to recall the day of death (*Berachot 5a*), which is a good way to protect ourselves from the evil inclination.

In regards to the red heifer, we may say that the term *parah* ("heifer") is formed by the same letters as *rapheh* ("weak"), meaning that if someone has become impure, the underlying reason is that his study of Torah has weakened. On the verse, "*Amalek came and battle Israel in Rephidim*" (*Shemot 17:8*), the Sages say that the Children of Israel had become weak (*raphu yedeichem*) in the study of Torah (*Tanchuma, Beshalach 25*). The term *adumah* ("red") evokes the word *din* ("justice"), meaning that one who weakens in the study of Torah draws the attribute of justice upon himself, and one who has become impure must realize that an accusation has been raised against him because he weakened in the study of Torah.

As the Sages have said, "*If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. … If he examines it and finds nothing, let him attribute it to a*

neglect in the study of Torah." When circumstances are such that a person becomes impure, he must reflect upon his actions and determine what sin caused it. If he reflects and find nothing objectionable, he should attribute it to a weakening in the study of Torah. He has certainly grown weak and drawn the attribute of justice to himself, which is the red heifer – rapheh din. Ashes from the heifer are sprinkled upon him, which will make him think of the day of death, and he will do complete teshuvah before Hashem.

As for the fact that the kohen who burns the heifer becomes impure, we have explained this concept at length elsewhere. It happens because the Torah has deeply probed the thoughts of the kohen who burns the heifer: This act is liable to make him grow proud, for among all the kohanim, he alone was chosen to burn the heifer that purifies the impure. In order to remove this pride from his heart, since pride ruins and destroys all that is good, the Torah has decreed that he becomes impure, such that he cannot boast on the inside.

Now that we have explained all this, it seems that we can understand the secret of the red heifer. However the Torah has said, "*This is the chukat [decree] of the Torah*" (*Bamidbar 19:2*) – "*I have decreed it. You have no right to challenge it*" (*Tanchuma, Chukat 7*), meaning that no one knows the real secret of the red heifer. All we have pointed out up to now are nothing but small allusions.

Midrash Pliyah also asks how Korach could have contested Moshe's leadership. Korach saw the red heifer, and he knew some of its secrets. In fact this is what he is criticized for. He was aware of some of the allusions contained in the mitzvah of the red heifer, which hints to a person that he should do complete teshuvah and reminds him of the day of death, as well as the fact that he draws the attribute of justice upon himself because he has weakened in the study of Torah. Furthermore, the kohen who burns the heifer becomes impure so as to prevent him from growing proud. Although Korach saw all this, he still did not repent or forgo his pride.

This serves as a lesson to us as well, for due to our numerous sins, we see people who are struck by misfortunes and do not search their souls. We also see people who speak during prayer, which is forbidden (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 124:7*), and who speak Lashon Harah despite the fact that the Torah says: "*You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people*" (*Vayikra 19:16*). Yet instead of drawing a lesson from all this and not saying forbidden things, they continue to sin.

Why does this happen to them? Because of pride. They know that such things are forbidden, and yet their pride does not allow them to search their souls and repent. Indeed, they think that they haven't sinned at all. We must therefore be very careful in this regard and repent, and we must especially distance ourselves from pride and yield to Hashem.

The Influence of the Street

It is written, "*Moshe sent emissaries from Kadesh to the king of Edom. … 'Let us pass through your land'*" (*Bamidbar 20:14-17*).

Why did Moshe want the Children of Israel to pass through the territory of Esav? This decision obligated him to ask for a favor from its inhabitants by declaring: "*So said your brother Israel: You know all the hardship that has befallen us*" so they would allow Israel to pass through their land. Yet were there no other routes they could take? Furthermore, why was Moshe not afraid of the inevitable and destructive consequences of making an agreement with Esav? In fact by passing through his territory and dwelling there, the Children of Israel might imitate the bad behavior and corrupt lifestyle of their neighbors! Is it possible that Moshe overlooked this? Nevertheless, and despite incessant and repetitive requests, the king of Edom refused to let the Children of Israel pass through his territory. He even threatened them with war by stating, "*You shall not pass through me – lest I come against you with the sword*" (*v.18*). Here Rashi comments, "*[Edom said:] You pride yourselves with the 'voice' that your father bequeathed you, and you declare: 'We cried out to Hashem and He heard our voice' [v.16]. But we will go out against you with what my father bequeathed me: 'You shall live by the sword' [Bereshith 27:40].*" Yet Moshe repeated his request: "*We shall go up on the highway, and if we drink your water – I or my flock – I shall pay their price*" (*v.19*). Rashi adds (*v.17*): "*Moshe said, 'Though we have manna to eat and a well from which to drink, we will not drink from it, but will buy food and drink from you, for your benefit.'*" However the king of Edom was not swayed, and he reiterated his position: "*He said, 'You shall not pass through!' Then Edom went out against him with a massive horde and a strong hand*" (*v.20*). Here Rashi states: "*With our grandfather's promise: 'the hands are the hands of Esav.'*" Having no other choice, "*Israel turned away from near him*" (*v.21*) – as if the people were overcome by fear and therefore chose another route.

To better understand this, let us examine a verse near the beginning of this week's parsha: "*This is the decree of the Torah*" (*Bamidbar 19:2*). This verse is discussing the mitzvah of the red heifer, concerning which G-d said to Moshe: "*I have decreed it. You have no right to challenge it*" (*Yoma 67b*). It is therefore a mitzvah whose reasons were not revealed, and concerning which even King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, declared: "*I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me*" (*Kohelet 7:23*). From here we learn that all the wisdom in the world cannot compare to that of the holy Torah, which has no equal. Other wisdom is certainly useful, but it may also do more harm than good. For example, the advent of the nuclear age has been very beneficial, for it has enabled us to harness nuclear energy that powers all kinds of devices used by man. However it also has the power to destroy the world in seconds. The same goes for all kinds of technological progress. Today the development of the Internet and cellular telephones is of great interest to many, but it can also be detrimental and make us descend into a spiritual abyss. There is no doubt that King Solomon, the wisest of all men, could have created and developed everything we have mentioned. Nevertheless

he refrained, for he was aware of the serious consequences that would result from it. The wisdom of the holy Torah, on the other hand, is only beneficial, both for us and the entire world. It has no negative or destructive consequences. That is why King Solomon declared, "*I thought I could become wise.*" From every angle, the Torah possesses extraordinary wisdom. It spreads blessings upon all Creation, allowing us to attach ourselves to the Creator and cleave to Him. I think that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to show the Children of Israel the abysmal difference between themselves and Edom, the incredible gap that separated their refined and positive culture from the depraved society of the wicked Esav, from whom the civilization of Edom emerged. In order to clearly demonstrate the differences between them, Moshe considered it preferable for the Children of Israel to approach Edom for a short time, for them to cross the border of this territory and live alongside them. At that point they would discover the immense gulf between them, and they would realize that the lifestyle of Jews is destined to elevate and refine a human being. In fact the power of the Jewish people resides in its words, according to the verse: "*The voice is the voice of Jacob*" (*Bereshith 27:22*). In other words, the path of Torah and mitzvot teaches us decency and helps us acquire good character traits. On the other hand, by observing the descendants of Esav, the Children of Israel would understand what Esav lost by repudiating the path of Torah and mitzvot, descending to an incredibly low level as a result. In fact the power of Esav's descendants lies entirely in the sword, for their civilization is completely based on strength of arms. This is the teaching that Moshe wanted to transmit to the Children of Israel by making them pass through the territory of Edom. He wanted them to understand the serious loss that a person can experience by neglecting the path of Torah in order to quench his own thirst in broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

However the king of Edom continued to refuse the Children of Israel passage through his land, for it is a halachah that "*Esav hates Jacob.*" Why? Because deep down, Esav knows the truth and recognizes that the Children of Israel have adopted the correct and genuine path, one that leads to a good and happy life. Esav knows that it is their attachment to Torah and mitzvot that gives them the merit to be the people chosen by G-d, and he has tremendous difficulty accepting this reality. That is why he hates Israel. Still today, the nations of the world know the truth and realize that Jews are the chosen and eternal people, and that their culture – completely based on the Torah and divine commandments – is the correct and true path. However it is difficult for them to adopt this lifestyle, and they cannot make an effort to follow such a path, for the Torah demands that we restrain our passions and control our desires. Not feeling capable of this, they experience tremendous hatred for the Jewish people.

Balak

What the King of Moab Feared

It is written, "*Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite. Moab became very frightened of the people, for it was numerous, and Moab was disgusted in the face of the Children of Israel*" (*Numbers 22:2-3*).

We need to understand why Balak was so afraid of the Children of Israel, so much so that he and his entire people were disgusted with life because of their fear. We also need to understand what the parsha states a few verses later: "*For I know that whoever you bless is blessed*" (*v.6*). The Sages have said that Balak told Bilam that he knew this because Bilam had helped Sihon to defeat Moab (*Tanhuma, Balak 4; Bamidbar Rabba 20:7*). This is difficult to understand, for what proves that since Bilam helped Sihon in his victory over Moab, he could also help Balak to defeat the Children of Israel? As we know, the Children of Israel went through more difficult wars than this (e.g. the war against Amalek), yet emerged victorious from them all.

We may explain this by saying that the wicked Bilam knew the secret of the Children of Israel's success, namely that unity reigned among them. As we noted, "*Moab became very frightened of the people, for it was numerous*" (*Numbers 22:3*), meaning that the Children of Israel performed numerous mitzvot in unity. That is, what one person didn't perform, another person did perform, resulting in the performance of all 613 mitzvot. This is what Balak was so afraid of. Therefore even before laying out his request to Bilam, Balak explained to him that the entire reason for the Children of Israel's success lay precisely in the unity that reigned among them, as testified by the verse: "*Behold, a people has come out of Egypt*" (*v.5*). Here the expression "*has come out*" is in the singular, meaning that the people acted as a single person with a single heart. Furthermore, "*Behold, it has covered the face of the earth*" (*ibid.*), means that it rules on earth and defeated Sihon and Og, who had protected them, for Israel possessed great strength due to its unity. The people dwelled in the tents of Torah and the service of G-d, all in love and unity.

Hence Balak told Bilam that what he wanted from him was to "*come and curse this people for me*" (*v.6*). In other words: Give me some advice that will lead to infighting, something that will create dissension and hatred among them, thereby damaging their unity. In that case, "*Perhaps I will be able nakeh [to strike] it*" – the word nakeh implying menakeh, to deduct (*Tanhuma, Balak 4; Bamidbar Rabba 20:7*). If Balak could sow division among them – even leading some of them to hate one another – he would be able to chase them from the land. When their unity would be shattered, Balak could conquer them without difficulty, since even the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes them when they are not united. Balak's logic was sound, for the Sages tell us that Jerusalem was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Balak knew just how

greatly Hashem detests discord and dissension, for even the Torah was not given to the Children of Israel until they were united, as it is written: "*Israel encamped opposite the mountain*" (*Exodus 19:2*). Here the term "*encamped*" is in the singular, which led the Sages to say that they encamped "*like a single person with a single heart*" (*Mechilta, ad loc.*).

Therefore Balak's wicked plan was to sow division among the Children of Israel, as the passage states: "*My people, hear now what Balak, the king of Moab, planned*" (*Micah 6:5*). The Holy One, blessed be He, is asking Israel to always remember Balak's destructive plans, for all his attempts to destroy Israel rested on an idea, not on force, an idea that sought to separate and divide the Children of Israel in order to strike them. Since Balak knew that the Children of Israel's entire success lay in unity, he decided to adopt the same strategy for his own people as well. He even decided to make peace with the Midianites, as we read in the verse: "*Moab said to the elders of Midian*" (*Numbers 22:4*). Here the Sages note that the Midianites and Moabites had always been enemies, as the verse states: "*...who defeated Midian in the field of Moab*" (*Genesis 36:35*). Therefore how could they suddenly make peace now? Here we learn that Balak the king of Moab realized the power of unity, which he learned from Israel. Hence Balak and his people decided to make peace with the Midianites, using the power of their unity against the Children of Israel in order to defeat them.

We have thus resolved the two difficulties that we presented at the outset. Balak and his people were so afraid of Israel that they were disgusted with life, for they understood the power of unity. This is why they feared the Children of Israel, since they were solidly united. This also resolves our second difficulty, which was why Balak asked Bilam to provoke dissension and division among the Children of Israel. Their aim was to cause Israel to lose the power of unity so that Balak could defeat them. However in His great compassion, Hashem thwarted the plans of the wicked, for after Balak adorned Bilam with honor, gold, and silver to convince him of joining with him – yet he saw that Bilam was not doing what was expected of him – Balak sent him back, as the verse states: "*Now, flee to your place*" (*Numbers 24:11*). Their alliance therefore crumbled, and they were unable to defeat Israel.

From all that has been said, we learn just how great the power of unity is. Furthermore, the Sages tell us that when the Children of Israel are united, even if they worship idols, the attribute of justice cannot strike them (*Tanhuma, Shoftim 18*). This is not just some platitude, but a sure and proven thing. The generation of Ahab demonstrates this, for although they worshipped idols, they were always victorious in war. In fact they never even lost a single soldier (*Yerushalmi, Peah 1:1*)! Why did they merit this? It was because none of them disparaged people, stirred up hatred, or provoked strife.

All this can serve as a great motivation for us. Let us also adopt these ways, infuse them into our hearts, and conduct ourselves toward every Jew with love and fraternity. Let us be united like a single person with a single heart, for in so doing we will be assured of defeating our enemies, and no nation will have power over us.

The Tzaddik Shall Live by His Faith

It is written, "*The donkey saw the angel of the L-RD and crouched beneath Bilam. Bilam's anger flared, and he struck the donkey with the staff. ... [The donkey] said to Bilam, 'What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?' Bilam said to the donkey, 'Because you mocked me! If only there were a sword in my hand, I would have killed you now!' The donkey said to Bilam, 'Am I not your donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I been accustomed to doing such a thing to you?' He said, 'No.' Then the L-RD uncovered Bilam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the L-RD standing on the road with his sword drawn in his hand. He bowed his head and prostrated himself on his face*" (*Numbers 22:27-31*). We need to understand how a donkey could have seen an angel standing on the road, yet Bilam did not see it until Hashem opened his eyes. Is it not written, "*The words of one who hears the sayings of G-d, knows the knowledge of the Supreme One, and who sees the vision of Sha-dai*" (*Numbers 24:16*)? Here the Gemara asks, "*He did not even know the mind of his animal, so how could he know the mind of the Most High?*" (*Berachot 7a*). We also need to understand why G-d did not open the mouth of the donkey before Bilam's leg was pressed against a wall, prompting him to want to kill it.

We shall explain this according to a statement made by the Sages: "*With the light that the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see from one end of the world to the other. Yet as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion, and He saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them…. For whom did He reserve it? For the tzaddikim*" (*Chagigah 12a*). From these words, we learn that if G-d's creations had not sinned, it would have been fair for them to see from one end of the world to other, all due to the great light that Hashem made at the beginning of Creation. However since He knew that they would become corrupt, only the tzaddikim are allowed to see from one end of the world to the other. In fact this light was never hidden from them. From whom was it hidden? Only from the wicked, for they sin and are not worthy of using this great light.

As a result, it is not surprising that the donkey saw the angel, for a donkey does not have an evil inclination and the primordial light was not hidden from it. Therefore it could see what no one else could. On the other hand, Bilam did not see it because he was an evildoer, a man who corrupted his ways, and furthermore he possessed no faith. Even when he saw, he did not understand what he was seeing and paid no attention to it. Yet when the Holy One, blessed be He, perceives that a person has no faith and sees nothing, He opens his eyes. How does G-d do this? It is by sending hardships upon a person, for it is through hardships that the soul of man awakens to repentance. Hence G-d sent hardships upon Bilam, for his leg was pressed against a wall and he suffered greatly as a result. Hashem finally opened the mouth of the donkey so Bilam could realize that these hardships were sent to him because he went to curse Israel. In any

case, since Bilam was a great evildoer, he did not reflect upon this and still proceeded to curse them.

Generally speaking, whoever does not possess faith cannot perceive anything. The wicked Bilam, because he did not believe in Hashem, did not perceive things, and conversely the tzaddikim, because they do believe in Hashem – as it is written: "*The tzaddik shall live by his faith*" (*Habakkuk 2:4*) – can see from one end of the world to the other. We know that the tzaddikim were the eyes that saw everything occurring in the world. How many times did they save lives! How did they achieve this? It was by not becoming impure through sin. They believed in Hashem and were granted permission to use the great light that was made at the time of Creation.

A friend once told me that a Jew went to see my uncle, the tzaddik Rabbi Nissim Pinto Zatzal (the brother of my father Zatzal), who was living in Montreal. This Jew told my uncle that one of his enemies had informed the government that he did not pay his income tax, though he could not prove otherwise. Government workers came to see this Jew, going through his home and taking papers and documents with them. Needless to say, he was afraid of being punished. The tzaddik told him, "*Tomorrow they will call your home and apologize for what they have done. In addition, they will return some money to you.*" The next day, government workers called him to apologize, saying: "*We don't know why we sent people to your home yesterday, because it's clear that you don't owe us any money. In addition, we noticed that you paid more than what you owed, and we're going to reimburse you.*" I heard another incredible story about my uncle: One day as he was at home speaking with one of his friends, he suddenly stopped and said: "*Someone is going to arrive and give me a great deal of money,*" and he mentioned a certain amount. My uncle continued: "*As soon as that person leaves, someone else who needs that very same amount – not more or less – will arrive, and I'll take out the money brought to me by the first person and give it to the second.*" A few hours later, someone came to see my uncle with a certain amount of money and asked for a blessing. My uncle blessed him, and he left. They counted the money, and discovered that it was exactly the amount that my uncle had mentioned. As soon as this man left, a woman arrived in tears and said: "*Rabbi, my daughter is getting married tomorrow, but I don't have enough money to cover all the expenses!*" My uncle asked her how much she needed, and she mentioned the very same amount that the first person had brought. My uncle then took out the money and gave it to her, and she left happy. What characterizes those who have not sinned – those who live by faith and who fear sin – is that they see what no other eye can see, since others sin but they do not. Hence the Sages have said: "*The verse states, 'All the people saw the voices and the flames' [Exodus 20:15]. It is normally impossible to see voices. Yet here, just as they saw flames, likewise they saw voices. Why did the Children of Israel merit seeing voices in a supernatural way? It is because they possessed faith, as it is written: 'The people believed' [ibid. 4:31] and, 'They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant' [ibid. 14:31]*" (*Mechilta D'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*).

The Favors of the Wicked are Bad for the Jewish People

In this week's parsha, the Torah goes into detail regarding all the blessings which the wicked Bilam gave to the Children of Israel, something that requires an explanation. The Sages have said that there is not a single superfluous letter in the entire Torah (*Pesikta Zutrata, Pinchas 29:35*), and the Gemara states that Rabbi Akiva interpreted the meaning of the crowns on the Torah's letters, deriving numerous laws from them (*Menachot 29b*). A secret is hidden within each word, and each letter holds meaning. That said, why did the Torah describe all the blessings of the wicked Bilam in detail, since they made no sense whatsoever? After all, he did not bless the Jewish people willingly and sincerely!

To explain this, we shall expand a little on what is written in Parsha Vayishlach, where Jacob moved his children and possessions across the river: "*Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn*" (*Bereshith 32:25*). The Sages have said that this "*man*" was Esau's guardian angel, and that he fought Jacob throughout the night (*Chullin 91a; Bereshith Rabba 77:3*). The text states, "*He saw that he could not prevail against him [Jacob]*" (*Bereshith 32:26*), meaning that when Esau's guardian angel saw that he could not defeat Jacob, "*he touched the hollow of his [Jacob's] hip.*" Jacob began to limp, and the angel said to him: "*Send me away, for dawn has arrived*" (*v.27*). Jacob replied, "*I will not send you away unless you bless me.*" Thus "*he blessed him there…. Therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip, which is upon the socket of the hip, to this very day*" (*vv.30-33*).

We need to think about this. Why did Esau's guardian angel strike Jacob precisely on the hip, rather than elsewhere? We also need to explain why Jacob asked him for a blessing, since he did not lack any. Indeed, Jacob had received blessings from his father Isaac (*Bereshith 27:28-29*), and G-d Himself had blessed Jacob by saying: "*Behold, I am with you. I will guard you wherever you go…for I will not forsake you*" (*ibid. 28:15*).

The Sages have explained (*Midrash Aggadah*) that Jacob told the angel to willingly acknowledge the blessings that had been given to him by his father Isaac, blessings which Esau had contested. Yet even according to this view, our astonishment still remains, for why would Jacob want Esau's guardian angel to acknowledge these blessings? How would such an acknowledgement change things, since Isaac had blessed him? Even G-d Himself had blessed Jacob and promised to protect him! That said, what would be gained by the approval of Esau's guardian angel? Was this the only way in which Jacob's blessings would be fulfilled, or else be delayed?

The Sages have said, "*It is a Halachah – it is known that Esau hates Jacob*" (*Sifri, Beha'alotcha*). This Halachah, namely that Esau hates Jacob and seeks to attack him, is known and there is no need to proclaim it. However Jacob wanted to tell the whole world something else, something in addition to this, which we shall now explain.

When Esau's guardian angel chose to strike Jacob on the hip, we must say that he had a special objective in injuring his leg. This is because we accomplish many mitzvot with our legs, mitzvot that cannot be accomplished otherwise. Indeed, the zealous use

their legs to fulfill mitzvot as soon as possible, which is why he struck Jacob's leg, so as to introduce a degree of laziness into his performance of mitzvot and prevent him from promptly fulfilling them. In fact the word *tzolea* ("limping") evokes the word *atzlut* ("laziness"), and if Jacob had remained lame, laziness would have remained for all the generations. The Children of Israel would thus have fulfilled mitzvot imperfectly, without preparation, for the deeds of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children.

Hence when the angel asked Jacob to send him away because dawn was approaching, Jacob replied: "*I will not send you away unless you bless me*" (*Bereshith 32:27*). In other words, he would not send the angel away unless he first annulled the laziness that he had introduced into Jacob. It was not because Jacob needed this blessing, for it too had not been given willingly and sincerely. Rather, it had been given against the wishes of Esau's guardian angel, whose time had come to sing praises before G-d (*Chullin 91b*). Jacob also did not receive a blessing from him on this account, as it is hinted at in the verse: "*Therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip.*" Rather, he wanted to show and prove to the whole world, as well as to his offspring for all the generations, something incredibly wonderful and special. What was it?

Those who try to strike the Jewish people attempt to accomplish this by infusing them with laziness! When they do not succeed, they claim to only want the good of the Jewish people. However their favors are not good. They have no intention of helping Jews, and are instead seeking their own good. If they do them a favor, it is despite their true intentions, and furthermore they want to receive a reward for it [just as Esau's guardian angel blessed Jacob despite his intentions, for he wanted to ascend to Heaven to sing praises]. In this regard the Sages have said, "*All the favors of the wicked are bad for the righteous*" (*Yebamot 103a*).

According to all this, we may say that the Torah discusses all the blessings of the wicked Bilam in detail throughout Parsha Balak in order to teach us just how deep Bilam's hatred for the Jewish people truly was. It is also to teach us how all his blessings were completely worthless, just useless words, because he did not bless the Children of Israel willingly and sincerely. In fact the Torah recounts that Bilam initially wanted to curse them, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "*You shall not curse the people*" (*Bamidbar 22:12*). It was only when Bilam saw that he could not curse them that he went to bless them despite his true intentions, all in order to infuse jealousy and hatred into the heart of the nations towards the Jewish people.

Furthermore, Bilam wanted to receive a reward for doing this, as it is written: "*Bilam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey*" (*v.21*), meaning that he acted with tremendous haste, wanting to imitate Abraham and receive a reward for it. However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: " *'Evil one, their father Abraham has already preceded you,' as it is said: 'Avraham rose early and saddled his donkey' [Bereshith 22:3]*" (*Rashi on Bamidbar 22:21*). This is why the blessings of the wicked Bilam were worthless, for although he outdid himself – since he blessed them despite his true intentions – he only had his own interests at heart.

To prove this, we note that Bilam eventually advised Balak on how to defeat the Children of Israel, telling him: "*The G-d of these [people] hates lewdness…. Come, and I will advise you [on how to destroy them]*" (*Sanhedrin 106a*). If Bilam had loved Israel and sincerely blessed them, how could he contradict himself by advising Balak on how to wipe them out? This clearly proves that on the inside, Bilam hated them and did not want to bless them.

This is why the Torah goes into great detail about all this, teaching us that the same applies to all the wicked. Even if we think that they sometimes want the good of the Jewish people, it is simply not true. They are acting this way despite their true intentions, for they only seek their own benefit. Such "*favors*" from the wicked are bad for the Jewish people, as the Sages have said: "*All the favors of the wicked are bad for the righteous.*"

Fulfilling Mitzvot With Your Entire Being

It is written, "*Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab*" (*Bamidbar 25:1*). It is also written, "*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen saw, and he stood up from amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand*" (*v.7*). On the words, "*[he] took a spear,*" the Zohar states that the term romach (*"spear"*) alludes to the 248 (*ramach*) limbs of man (*Zohar III:237a*). When Pinchas aroused himself with zeal for Hashem, he went into action with all 248 of his limbs.

This presents a problem, for books of Mussar and Chassidut tell us that every mitzvah which a person does must be performed with all 248 limbs and 365 sinews. In fact the 248 limbs correspond to the 248 positive commandments, and the 365 sinews correspond to the 365 negative commandments (*Makkot 23b*), which together comprise the 613 commandments. The mitzvah of sukkah, which we accomplish with all of our 248 limbs and 365 sinews – since we enter the sukkah with our entire bodies, and even with our clothes – constitutes a lesson for all Torah mitzvot, one that teaches us to perform them with our entire being. Yet in that case, why did Pinchas only arouse his 248 (*ramach*) limbs when he was enflamed with zeal for Hashem? Why did he not include his 365 sinews as well? The truth is that he actually did perform this mitzvah with his 365 sinews as well, something alluded to in the words "*[he] took a spear beyado [in his hand].*" Here the term beyado seems redundant, for it would have been difficult for Pinchas to take a spear with his feet. Hence why tell us that he took it "*in his hand*"? It is because the term *beyado* has the same numerical value (counting the term itself) as *gido* ("his sinew") – thus alluding to the 365 sinews. Hence he "*took a romach [spear] beyado [in his hand]*" – *romach* for his 248 limbs, and *beyado* for his 365 sinews.

This represents a very great principle, meaning that we must literally grab hold of every mitzvah and fulfill it with our entire being. This is something of paramount importance in serving G-d. It is also something that is difficult to do, for by nature

every person is proud, and if he fails to nullify his pride and does not submit to Hashem before fulfilling a mitzvah, he will fulfill it incompletely, for he will not have performed it with his entire being. In order to nullify the pride that is in his heart, a person must correctly prepare himself to fulfill a mitzvah. In this way, he will know before Whom he is standing, and he will deeply humble himself. In the opposite case, he will not be able to properly fulfill a mitzvah because of the pride that dwells within him. How do we prepare ourselves correctly? We can imagine an alcoholic when he sees wine: As soon as he catches a glimpse of it, he can no longer divert his thoughts from drinking. Nothing will be able to distract him, and he will find no rest until he drinks some.

The same applies to the spiritual realm. When someone readies himself to fulfill a mitzvah, as soon as he begins preparing himself, he will no longer divert his attention from it for anything in the world. All his thoughts will be focused solely on fulfilling the mitzvah at hand until he has done so, for only in this way – in thinking about what he has to do – will he know why he does it. Then his heart will automatically be filled with humility, and he will carry out the mitzvah with his entire being.

If we are correct in this regard, it would seem that this constituted the difference between Avraham and Bilam. They apparently did the very same thing, insofar as they both rose in the morning to prepare for a mitzvah. To prepare himself for the sacrifice of Isaac, as Hashem had commanded him, Abraham "*rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey*" (*Bereshith 22:3*). Likewise, Bilam "*rose in the morning and saddled his she-donkey*" (*Bamidbar 22:21*), for he was leaving to bless the Children of Israel.

Nevertheless, Bilam's blessings are considered useless words, for he did not sincerely bless them. Rather, he blessed them just so he could show the Holy One, blessed be He, that he wanted the good of Israel. In his heart, however, Bilam despised them.

The difference between the two of them is that Abraham rose early in the morning to prepare for a mitzvah that G-d had given him. He knew that in order to carry out Hashem's will by sacrificing his son Isaac, he had to greatly prepare himself. Hence he did not turn his focus away from the mitzvah for an instant. In fact when the angel wanted to prevent him from slaughtering Isaac, he had to tell Abraham: "*Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, nor do anything against him*" (*Bereshith 22:12*). This was because Abraham was so intent on carrying out the mitzvah that nothing seemed capable of stopping him.

Such was not the case with Bilam. When he rose in the morning to go and bless the Jewish people, he had no intention of blessing them properly. This is because his blessings were not considered genuine blessings, but rather words said in vain. This is because they were not said sincerely and wholeheartedly, but against his will. When he went to bless the Jewish people, he did not really go to bless them, but to infuse hatred for them into the hearts of the other nations.

We must be very careful not to resemble Bilam in this regard. Because of our numerous sins, we see people who get up in the morning and proceed with vigor to

synagogue, where they don tallit and put on tefillin. We may think that there is no greater preparation for prayer, but in the final analysis such people allow themselves to speak Lashon Harah and utter useless words. How does this happen?

We must realize that their preparation for the mitzvah of prayer was not perfect. They were not focused on it, which is why they failed. If they had correctly focused on prayer, without turning their attention from it, they would certainly not have demonstrated such failings, and instead they would have prayed and fulfilled mitzvot correctly.

Hence it was crucial for Pinchas to prepare himself with all his 248 limbs and 365 sinews in order to accomplish the mitzvah of zeal for Hashem, without any jealously or personal pride entering his heart. Pinchas therefore arose amid the community, took a spear in his hand, saw the act, and remembered the Halachah. We may think that his intention was to teach a Halachah before his teacher, in which case he would have lost the reward of his mitzvah. We are therefore told that Pinchas acted with all his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, solely for Hashem.

With the Heart

On the verse, "*The spirit of G-d was upon him*" (*Bamidbar 24:2*), Rashi writes: "*It entered his heart not to curse them*" (which is why he blessed them by saying, *"How beautiful are your tents"*). The Siftei Chachamim explains that it is as if the verse said, "*A different spirit took hold of him, the spirit of G-d, to bless them and not curse them.*" Until now, what emerged from Bilam's mouth did not come from his heart. It is only in this verse, in the blessing, "*How beautiful are your tents,*" that he experienced a heartfelt desire to bless them. This was the first time that his heart experienced such an awakening, when he saw the Children of Israel encamped by their tribes, imbued with holiness and modesty, at which point he uttered the deep truth that lay hidden within him. This blessing arose from the depths of his heart, not superficial like the rest, which is why it has endured for all time. It represents the pure truth, for he put his heart into it. This is what Rashi means by writing, "*It entered his heart not to curse them*" – this blessing came from the inner truth; it wasn't just talk, which is why it was fulfilled.

From here we learn the importance of putting our hearts into every mitzvah we accomplish. We can pray every day, but in a completely superficial way, meaning without concentration, despite the verse that screams: "*With its mouth and with its lips, it [the people] has honored Me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me*" (*Isaiah 29:13*). We may sit down to study a book, and yet learn without concentration, impatiently waiting for the end so we can get up and leave, like a child who skips school. This is obviously not the path that Hashem has chosen, for the Holy One, blessed be He, commands: "*Place these words of Mine upon your heart*" (*Devarim 11:18*). In fact the essence of Torah must come from the heart, from the inner truth. In his wisdom King Solomon said, "*My child, when your heart becomes wise*" (*Mishlei 23:15*). What connection is there between

the heart and wisdom? The answer is that if a person puts his entire heart into Torah, this Torah is solid, to the point that all wisdom will reside in his heart. Conversely, with Bilam it was only the blessing, "*How beautiful are your tents*" that endured for all time, for it was only into this blessing that he put his heart. Now when we put our heart into something, it lasts.

This is the meaning of the verse, "*The living should take it to heart*" (*Kohelet 7:2*). It is only when a person focuses all his attention on the meaning of life, on the goal of being human in this world, that he can distance himself from the evil inclination, destroy it, and draw closer to Hashem. In fact it is only by reflecting upon such concepts and examining the wisdom of the heart that we will feel compelled to better ourselves and improve our conduct.

When I was in London, someone came to see me for a blessing to have children. Through Hashem's great mercy, a year later he had a son and came to thank me. Standing before me was this man, who was completely estranged from any trace of Judaism. I said to him, "*Do you think that you should be thanking me?*" He said yes.

"*Think about it,*" I told him. "*Do you think you owe me any kind of gratitude?*" In the end, he agreed and said, "*It's true, you prayed for me.*" I then immediately asked, "*To Whom did I pray?*" Hesitating, he answered: "*To G-d.*" I then asked him, "*Alright then…where is G-d in your life? How can you thank Him for the marvelous gift that He has given you?*" He answered me, "*I want to make a substantial donation.*"

I didn't leave him alone, however, for I asked: "*But what will you give G-d?*" He then innocently asked, "*What can I give G-d? Will I make Him an offering?*" I replied, "*Thank Him by observing Torah and mitzvot, by putting on tefillin, by observing Shabbat.*" All of a sudden he said, "*But I'm a Reform Jew.*" I was immediately taken aback, but quickly got back on track and said, "*Know that you have been given this wonderful gift from the Holy One, blessed be He, not from Reform Judaism, which distances itself from Him.*" That moment, thank G-d, became a time of great favor, for his heart became open to Torah, and words of truth entered it. He immediately committed himself to doing complete teshuvah. This is exactly what Rashi said about Bilam: His heart inspired him to bless the Children of Israel at a time of truth, with upright thoughts and great concentration. Under such circumstances, thoughts take root in the depths of the heart and produce the fruit of teshuvah and good deeds, for when we put our heart into something, it lasts.

A person who pays attention to his surroundings will ask why, in recent times, we have been using disposable plastic items, all made from petroleum products. The textile industry also uses a great deal of plastic. The reason is that in these last times preceding the Final Redemption, the Holy One, blessed be He, wants to draw all the sparks of holiness that have been dispersed throughout the world, even in the most distant places, including sparks of holiness hidden in oil wells. Hence G-d inspired the creation of these disposable items created from petroleum products, as well as all the other steps required in their production.

Thus a Jew finds himself at home and recites the shehakol blessing over a plastic cup or utensil, be it for a Shabbat meal or any other meal, and he says the blessing with the proper concentration. Through such blessings, all these sparks of holiness are drawn out and elevated to their rightful place. Even sparks found in rocks and dispersed throughout the world are elevated when marble or similar material is imported from various countries and used in the construction of synagogues and houses of study. Hence even these sparks are elevated. It is precisely now, just prior to the Final Redemption, that the Holy One, blessed be He, is hastening to liberate these sparks.

As a result, through the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot, we draw forth and redeem the sparks of holiness that are found among non-Jews. Hence we must strengthen ourselves in Torah and mitzvot, and take upon ourselves the yoke of Torah with devotion and a sincere love for Hashem. With every mitzvah that we accomplish, we must make an effort to be focused and act solely for the sake of Heaven and the glory of Hashem.

Pinchas

All Jews Must Ensure that Hashem's Honor and Mitzvot are Respected

It is written, "*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, turned back My wrath…. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood'*" (*Numbers 25:11-13*).

The Torah tells us that when Pinchas saw Zimri's vile deed, he realized that the honor of Heaven was being desecrated, and that thousands of Jews would die. Motivated by feelings of jealously for Hashem's honor, Pinchas therefore arose and took his spear to kill Zimri without hesitating or wavering, thereby saving Israel from death.

Pinchas' bravery was impressive in Hashem's eyes, which is why He told Moses to inform Pinchas that he would be rewarded on account of his great deed. What was his reward? It was a covenant of peace for himself and his descendants after him, a covenant of eternal priesthood, meaning that his descendants would always possess the holiness of the priesthood.

We need to understand this incident, for when Zimri sinned and disaster was about to strike, many of the Children of Israel saw and were fully aware of what he was doing. That being the case, why was it only Pinchas who decided to arise and carry out Hashem's wrath?

We also need to understand the meaning of the statement, "*Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood.'* " Although Pinchas was rewarded in this way, elsewhere we have learned that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world (*Kiddushin 39b*)!

The explanation is the following: When Pinchas saw what Zimri was doing, he not only perceived the physical reality around him, but also looked into himself and perceived his own strength, sensing an incredible awakening inside. He felt that the hidden forces within him were suddenly telling him to get up and carry out Hashem's vengeance. At that point not using these forces would have been regrettable. Although Pinchas was not one of the most important figures among the tribes, he was a descendant of Aaron, one of the greatest figures in Israel, and he sensed that the merit of his fathers would help him carry out Hashem's vengeance. Hence the verse states, "*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest.*" Pinchas' name alone would have sufficed here, so why mention his lineage as well? It is in order to tell us by allusion that Pinchas relied on the merit of his fathers to help him fulfill Hashem's will, thereby preventing a plague.

Pinchas also understood that he was precisely the person who had to take action, for at that point the Halachah had been forgotten, and even Moses did not know it. Pinchas

therefore saw Zimri's deed and recalled the Halachah, leading him to the realization that Heaven had chosen him to kill Zimri. Pinchas understood what was happening, and he sensed that things now depended on him. If he hesitated or wavered at that point, a plague would break out and kill thousands of people. This completely explains our first question, which is why it was Pinchas who took action. He did so because he felt that Heaven gave him the strength needed for this task, and he realized that he was precisely the person chosen to carry it out.

The great proof that what Pinchas did was for the sake of Heaven – that his intentions were pure, not tainted in any way by self-interest – lies in the fact that twelve miracles were performed for him, as the Targum explains at the end of Parsha Balak. This is the greatest proof that all he did was solely for the sake of Heaven, completely devoid of self-interest.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Pinchas His covenant of peace, for his only intention was to bring peace between the Children of Israel and their Father in Heaven. As the Sages have said, "*Resh Lakish stated: Pinchas is Eliyahu. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'You have made peace between Me and the Children of Israel in this world, and in the future you will also make peace between Me and My children.'* " Pinchas merited the priesthood for himself and all his descendants, and death had no power over him (*Zohar III:214a*). According to this, we can understand the question that we raised earlier, namely how Hashem could have rewarded Pinchas for his deed, since there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world. The question can be answered in several ways:

1. A person does not merit a reward in this world for a mitzvah that he performs, since his reward is reserved for him in the World to Come. However what he adds to a mitzvah, meaning the devotion and effort that he puts into completing it to perfection, is rewarded in this world. Here Pinchas risked his very life by acting as he did for Hashem's honor.

2. When we say that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world, we are speaking of a material reward. A person nevertheless merits a spiritual reward in this world, such as the priesthood and long life, since Pinchas was rewarded with these.

3. There is no reward for a mitzvah in this world when it is performed with the sentiment that personal merit is the cause. Pinchas did not act as he did by relying upon his own merit, but upon the merit of his fathers. Although he had a number of personal merits in his favor, Pinchas still humbled himself, and therefore it is fitting that he was rewarded. It was not a personal reward that he received, but the reward of his fathers, accompanied by its fruits.

Pinchas' brave deed teaches us that when we see the honor of Heaven being desecrated or Judaism's sacred values being trampled upon, we are not allowed to ignore it and weigh our options in order to save face. Although we are not called upon to emulate Pinchas' deed, there are still many ways that we can ensure that Hashem's honor is being respected. As the Sages have said, " *'There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the L-RD' [Proverbs 21:30]. Whenever the Divine*

Name is being profaned, honor must not be paid to one's teacher [i.e., Pinchas did not wait for Moses' ruling upon seeing Hashem's Name being profaned]" (*Sanhedrin 82a*). Every Jew must therefore ensure that the honor of Hashem and His mitzvot are respected, in which case the glory of the Torah will be exalted and Hashem's Name will be sanctified in the world.

The Reward for a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah

It is written, "*Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood'*" (*Numbers 25:12-13*). Here the Sages say, "*It is right that he should receive his reward*" (*Bamidbar Rabba 21:1*).

We need to understand what this means, since the Gemara states that there is no reward in this world for performing a mitzvah (*Kiddushin 39b*).

We may explain this by saying that we do not deserve a reward in this world solely for carrying out an actual mitzvah, whose reward is reserved for the World to Come. However we are rewarded in this world for adding to the mitzvah, embellishing the mitzvah, or performing it with devotion.

Pinchas, whose father and grandfather served as High Priest, was infused with tremendous zeal for Hashem, and this zeal pushed him to emulate them. Now that he had an opportunity to kill Zimri and thereby stop an epidemic, he elevated himself and merited the level of the High Priesthood. Thus by carrying out all the laws concerning the High Priest, he could stop the epidemic and atone for the Children of Israel on Yom Kippur. He could also atone for the sin of Lashon Harah by means of his garments. Even after Pinchas decided to kill Zimri, he saw two reasons for doing so. The first was that he could thereby grow and inherit the High Priesthood of his father. The second was to stop the epidemic that was raging among the Children of Israel. From here we see the greatness of Pinchas, for although these two reasons were for the sake of Heaven, and despite the difficulty of calculating pros and cons at such a difficult and critical time (especially since it related to himself and his own honor), he nevertheless only had the welfare of others in mind. He preferred to kill Zimri only in order to stop the epidemic that was raging among the Children of Israel, not for any other reason, since stopping the epidemic was so important. Thus we read, "*The epidemic was stopped*" (*Numbers 25:8*) – it was the only reason why Pinchas killed Zimri. Hence it was fitting for Pinchas to be rewarded.

We may explain the situation in another way: Pinchas did not, in fact, receive a reward for his deed. However since he carried out a spiritual action, he received a spiritual reward, namely the High Priesthood and a long life of helping and defending the Children of Israel. This does not mean that he was rewarded for his deed, but that one mitzvah leads to another.

We must also say that a person does not receive a reward in this world for performing a mitzvah by his own merit. Pinchas did not perform this deed by his own merit, but by

relying upon the merit of his fathers. He possessed numerous merits of his own, and he also knew that this deed would earn him the High Priesthood. Nevertheless, Pinchas humbled himself and carried out this deed by the merit of his fathers, for he believed that it would help him. That is why it was fitting for Pinchas to be rewarded. It was not his own reward that he received, but that of his fathers, with Pinchas receiving the fruit of this reward.

In reality, Pinchas drew his strength from Abraham, concerning whom it is written: "*The L-RD appeared to him on the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He raised his eyes and looked, and behold: Three men were standing over him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them*" (*Genesis 18:1-2*). In other words, once Abraham circumcised himself and became complete, he also merited becoming a vehicle for the Shechinah. Yet Abraham still sat by his tent and waited for guests, even though Hashem appeared to him. When he saw three passers-by whom he did not know, he ran to meet them as if they were longtime friends. This is very surprising for two reasons: (*1*) While still standing before the Shechinah, how could Abraham leave to run after potential guests, regardless of how important they were, and especially since they appeared to be simple Arabs? (*2*) How did Abraham have the strength to run on the third day following his circumcision, which is the most painful day of all, as it is written: "*On the third day, as they were in pain*" (*Genesis 34:25*)? His pain was so intense that even angels noticed and wanted to leave, as the Sages state, especially since a person who is occupied with one mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah.

It seems that we may explain this as follows: Abraham, in realizing just how hot it was outside (since Hashem had taken the sun out of its sheath), was afraid that people would not want to venture out as a result. He therefore thought that now he had to overcome his weakness and pain, which were trials. Since this depended solely on him, especially now that he had become a vehicle for the Shechinah and was complete, he had to run after every passer-by and bring him into his tent. This was despite the fact that Abraham knew that for every moment he stayed with Hashem, he could elevate himself and reach unparalleled heights. Therefore each instant was more precious than gold, and by taking the action that he did, Abraham was damaging his service of Hashem. Nevertheless he decided to put aside his personal interests and the spiritual levels that he could have reached by staying close to the Shechinah. Instead of serving Hashem and receiving a reward, he preferred to use his strength to help others, so they too could recognize Hashem with perfect faith. They too could therefore benefit from the World to Come, just as he was now benefiting from the Shechinah. Abraham's great spiritual level would make itself known by this deed, which is why the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "*Your reward is very great*" (*Genesis 15:1*). Likewise Pinchas, who put all his personal interests aside and redeemed the Children of Israel solely because of his love for Hashem, merited a reward. By this merit, all his descendants after him would be priests. Pinchas also followed this path, and because he was concerned for others and not for himself, he merited the High Priesthood for himself and his descendants after him, as we have explained.

Aided by the Merit of his Fathers

It is written, "*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen, turned away My wrath from the Children of Israel*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*). Rashi cites the Sages in explaining why the verse describes Pinchas' lineage: "*Since the tribes were disparaging him, saying, 'Have you seen the son of Puti, whose mother's father pitem [fattened] calves for idols, and who killed a leader of an Israelite tribe,' Scripture traces his lineage to Aaron*" (*Sanhedrin 82b*). We are familiar with the Sages' statement that everything Pinchas did was solely for the sake of Heaven, and that he devoted himself entirely to the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, and to the sanctity of Israel's camp (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:2*). Another comment appears in a halachic discussion that we find in the Shulchan Aruch concerning the name "*Pinchas,*" namely whether to write it with a yud or not (*see Responsa Even HaEzer 129*). The letter yud in Pinchas' name testifies to the fact that everything he did was for the sake of Heaven.

He Taught the Halachah Before His Teacher

We should still be surprised, however, for Moshe was also present at the time, as were Aaron and the 70 elders of the people, since the Sages have said: "*One does not teach the Halachah before his teacher*" (*Yerushalmi, Gittin 1:2*). That being the case, how could Pinchas have killed a tribal leader on his own initiative?

There is something else even more surprising, for the Sages said that Pinchas "*saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah*" (*Sanhedrin 82a*). Therefore why did Pinchas not mention this Halachah before Moshe? Had he done so, he would have received Moshe's permission to kill the transgressor and he would not have needed to act like one who "*teaches the Halachah,*" the transgression of which is death.

Furthermore, it seems that Pinchas could have used the same expression that his father Elazar employed when Moshe became angry with the soldiers returning from battle and had forgotten the Halachah. Elazar said, "*This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe*" (*Bamidbar 31:21*). In other words, he said this in Moshe's name. Therefore his son Pinchas could have done the same, saying what he needed to say in Moshe's name.

Let us explain the statement of the Sages concerning Pinchas: "*He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah.*" This means that Pinchas saw what happened to the first man and remembered the Halachah. He remembered that the Holy One, blessed be He, told Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (*Bereshith 2:17*). However Adam thought that he should eat from it because he was clever, knowing that he could serve Hashem with greater vigor and strength if he ate from it.

This means that the pride of a strange fire – a fire that Hashem had not commanded – entered Adam, which is why he sinned. In fact instead of thinking of Hashem and His commandments, Adam only thought of himself, of how he could augment his own glory, with the result being that he transgressed Hashem's word. All this resulted from the fact that Adam could not benefit from the merit of his fathers. He had been fashioned

by the Holy One, blessed be He, and he thought that everything was permissible for him to do, which is how he came to sin. From here we see the greatness of the merit of the fathers. Adam did not have such merit to protect him, whereas Pinchas did, since the verse links him to Aaron. It was precisely that merit which helped him to overcome this trial.

Overcoming Trials

To understand the nature of the difference between Pinchas and Adam, let us first cite a statement from the Mishnah: "*Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an accounting*" (*Pirkei Avoth 3:1*). The commentators say that the first part ("*from where you came*") was lacking with Adam, for he had been fashioned directly by the Holy One, blessed be He.

Such was not the case with Pinchas. We are told that he was "*the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen,*" proving that he was born from a woman and originated from a putrid drop. This led him to humility and prevented him from growing proud, for he could relate to everything mentioned by the Mishnah, including "*from where you came.*" Adam, to whom Hashem said, "*on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die,*" believed the very opposite, namely that he should eat of it in order to overcome the trials of this world, to be strengthened by them, and to receive a great reward. As for Pinchas, he risked his life knowing full well that he was in tremendous danger, all in order to increase the glory of Heaven.

Personal Interests

It follows that from the time Pinchas sensed the great danger that threatened the Children of Israel because of Shimon's tribal leader, he did not have time to seek Moshe's advice in order to learn the Halachah. If Pinchas had addressed Moshe to learn the Halachah, thousands of Jews would have died in the meantime. He therefore took the initiative, despite the great danger that it posed to his life and even to his place in the World to Come, just to save the Children of Israel and proclaim Hashem's Name, which had been profaned.

Thus Pinchas arose from the midst of the congregation, took a spear in his hand, and killed the transgressors in order to halt the epidemic. It was for this reason that he received the reward of long life, and henceforth he was considered a kohen (*Zevachim 101b*). The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Pinchas a great blessing and reward. Which one? "*I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood*" (*Bamidbar 25:12-13*), for everything that Pinchas did was for the sake of Heaven. On the other hand, since Adam had not risked his life in order to observe Hashem's word, but was instead concerned with personal interests, Hashem gave him death instead of life, as it is written: "*For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.*" How did Adam reach such a point? As we have said, it was because he was infused with pride and lacked the merit of his fathers.

Pinchas and the Merit of the Fathers

Concerning the words found in this week's parsha: "*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen, turned away My wrath from the Children of Israel*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*), Rashi cites the words of the Sages: "*Since the tribes were disparaging him, saying, 'Have you seen this son of Puti [i.e., Putiel, one of Jethro's names], whose mother's father pitem [fattened] calves for idols, and who killed a leader of an Israelite tribe,' Scripture traces his lineage to Aaron*" (*Sanhedrin 82b*). Hence the verse describes the lineage of Pinchas and connects him to Aaron. We know that the Sages have said that everything Pinchas did was solely for Hashem's sake (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:2*). In fact Pinchas devoted himself to the glory of Hashem and the sanctity of the camp of Israel. Furthermore, we find a halachic discussion in the Shulchan Aruch on whether to write the name "*Pinchas*" with or without a yud (*see Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 129*). The letter yud in Pinchas' name testifies to the fact that everything he did was for the sake of Heaven.

He Saw and Remembered the Halachah

An explanation is still required because Moshe, Aaron, and the 70 elders were also present at the time. Furthermore, the Sages have said, "*One does not teach the Halachah before his teacher*" (*Yerushalmi, Gittin 1:2*). Therefore how could Pinchas have gone out and killed a leader of Israel on his own initiative?

Something even more surprising is the fact that the Sages say of Pinchas: "*He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah*" (*Sanhedrin 82a*). That being the case, why did he not remind Moshe himself of this Halachah? He would have then received Moshe's full permission to kill the transgressor, and he would not have needed to fall under the category of moreh Halachah (*"one who teaches Halachah*"), whose punishment is death!

Furthermore, it seems that Pinchas could have used the same expression as his father Elazar the kohen did when Moshe was angry with the soldiers who returned from battle and had forgotten the Halachah. At that point Elazar said to them: "*This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe*" (*Bamidbar 31:21*), meaning that he was speaking in Moshe's name. Hence Pinchas, the son of Elazar, could have done the same: He could have said this in Moshe's name.

To explain what the Sages said about Pinchas the son of Elazar (*"he saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah*"), we may say that Pinchas saw the deed of the first man and remembered the Halachah. That is, he remembered that G-d had told Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (*Bereshith 2:17*). Now Adam thought that it was better to eat from it, for he was intelligent and knew that if he ate from it, it would enable him to, as it were, serve Hashem with even greater strength and vigor.

This means that pride from an alien fire – which Hashem had not commanded him – entered Adam and led him to sin. Instead of thinking of G-d and His commandments, Adam thought only of himself. He thought only about increasing his own glory, which is what led him to transgress Hashem's command. All this occurred because the first

man did not benefit from the merit of his fathers. He had been fashioned by the Holy One, blessed be He, and he believed that he was allowed to do anything. That is how he came to sin. From here we see the importance of the merit of the fathers. The first man did not have this merit to protect him, whereas Pinchas did. That is why the verse traces his lineage to Aaron, for it was precisely this merit that helped him the most during his trial.

To Increase the Glory of Heaven

In order to understand the difference between Pinchas and Adam, let us first cite the words of the Mishnah: "*Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an account*" (*Pirkei Avoth 3:1*). The commentators say that the first part ("*from where you came*") did not apply to Adam, since he had been fashioned by Hashem.

What of Pinchas? Of him it is said, "*the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen,*" proving that he was born from a woman and that he came from a putrid drop. This led him to humility, to not growing proud of himself, for all three things mentioned in the Mishnah applied to him, including "*from where you came.*" This is why Adam, to whom G-d said, "*on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die,*" thought the very opposite, namely that it was good to eat in order to overcome the trials of this world and receive a great reward. As for Pinchas, he risked his own life with the knowledge that he was in gave danger, all in order to increase the glory of Heaven.

A Personal Decision

Therefore when Pinchas felt the great danger that threatened the Children of Israel because the leader of the tribe of Shimon was sinning, he did not have time to seek Moshe's advice and receive the Halachah from him. If he had addressed Moshe to know what the Halachah was, thousands among the Children of Israel would have died. Pinchas therefore took a decision on his own – despite a grave danger to his own life, and even at the risk of losing his portion in the World to Come – solely to save the Children of Israel and avenge G-d's Name, which had been profaned.

This is why Pinchas immediately arose among the community, took a spear in his hand, and killed the transgressors to stop the plague. This earned him the great reward of long life, and at that point he earned the crown of the priesthood as well as the great blessing: "*I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood*" (*Bamidbar 25:12-13*). All this because his deeds were solely for the sake of Heaven. As for Adam, because he did not do everything to fulfill Hashem's orders, but was concerned with his own interests, he received death rather than life, as it is written: "*For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.*" Why did this happen to him? It was because he grew proud and did not benefit from the merit of the fathers.

The Devotion of Pinchas as Compared to Adam

Commenting on the verse, "*When Pinchas saw…he arose from amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand*" (*Bamidbar 25:7*), the Gemara explains: "*He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah*" (*Sanhedrin 82a*).

In this regard, we may ask the following questions:

1. What did Pinchas see, and what Halachah did he remember?

2. Our Sages teach that it was on account of the spear which Pinchas held in his hand that the kohanim receive the shoulder as their share from the offerings (*Devarim 18:3; Rashi, Sifri 18:46*). What connection exists between these two body parts? Finally, the phrase "*in his hand*" seems redundant, since Pinchas could only hold his spear in his hand.

3. Commenting on the phrase, "*[Pinchas] took a spear in his hand,*" the Zohar teaches that the numerical value of the name *Pinchas* (208) is equal to the letters *resh* (200) and *chet* (8). When Pinchas saw the letter *mem* (numerical value: 40) flying in the air (*Zohar III:237a*), he grabbed hold of it and added it to *resh chet*, making *romach* ["spear"] (numerical value: 248). In other words, he used the 248 limbs of his body to fulfill this mitzvah. What happened to his 365 sinews with which mitzvot must also be fulfilled?

4. Commenting on the phrase, "*When Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the kohen,*" the Gemara asks why the verse connects him to Aaron, and responds by explaining: "*The tribes now began abusing him, 'You see this son of Puti, whose maternal grandfather pitem [fattened] cattle for idols'*" (*Sanhedrin 82b*).

5. Why did the tribes humiliate him now, rather than earlier? Did they not know that Pinchas was Aaron's grandson?

To answer these questions, we must go back to Adam.

We know that when someone fulfills a mitzvah, he should do it with the utmost devotion and without any ulterior motives. One must use all the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of his body, completely annulling his ego, by pouring out his soul and demonstrating the greatest degree of humility. The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Adam not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, "*for on the day that you eat of it, you will surely die*" (*Bereshith 2:17*). The Gemara calls this an easy mitzvah (*Shabbat 55b*), at least in regards to the first man. Nevertheless, Adam did not control himself, and he ate it. How could this man, this Divine creation (*Kohelet Rabba 3:14*), not fulfill such an easy mitzvah? Even if it had been a difficult mitzvah, the fact is that he did not adhere to his Creator's will! On the other hand, since Hashem threatened him with death if he were to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, why did He not carry out His threat right away? Why was Hashem content on simply cursing him, as it is written: "*By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread*" (*Bereshith 3:19*)?

The answer is that he ate from the Tree of Knowledge because his wife Eve encouraged him to do so (*v.6*). Moreover, our Sages teach that a woman is more

intuitive than a man (*see Bereshith Rabba 18:1*), and knows how to influence him. Perhaps she convinced him that eating from the Tree of Knowledge could help him to serve G-d? Thus he may have believed that he could only adhere to G-d's will, devoting body and soul to the fulfillment of Divine precepts, by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. He was aware of the fact that he was risking death in so doing, but he was ready to literally risk his life in order to serve his Creator in the loftiest possible way, thus putting into practice the saying of Rabbi Yaakov: "*A single hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is greater than all of the World to Come*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:17*).

Nevertheless, as soon as he ate from the Tree of Knowledge and his mind grew sharper, he became aware of his minor importance, as it is written: "*And they knew that they were naked*" (*Bereshith 3:7*). The Midrash explains: "*They even stripped themselves of the one mitzvah which they possessed*" (*Bereshith Rabba 19:6*). Adam certainly understood that he had transgressed, but he took the decision to conform to G-d's will from now on, and to taste from the Tree of Life as well. He thus demonstrated tremendous pride, for not only was he not content with breaking the Creator's will, he dared to ask Him not to be punished! Hashem then expelled him from the Garden of Eden, saying: "*Now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat and live forever*" (*Bereshith 3:22*). He did not sentence him to death, however, for Adam only sought to spiritually elevate himself in doing what he did.

This incident shows us that if we break G-d's will, even for the sole purpose of spiritually elevating ourselves, we are fulfilling a mitzvah through a sin (*Sukkah 30a*), something which may lead to other sins. We will then not succeed in increasing our fear of G-d, even if we put an effort into it, and we will have committed a grave sin.

Pinchas saw what Adam did, namely that he increased his fear of G-d. As we saw above, Adam thereby broke G-d's will and his plan did not succeed. Pinchas remembered the Halachah, which consists precisely of not breaking G-d's will, even if we seek to increase our faith in so doing. It is forbidden to demonstrate pride and arrogance in order to achieve this. On the contrary, we must demonstrate humility by conforming solely to G-d's will.

After seeing all this, Pinchas the son of Elazar actively prepared himself to carry out his sublime deed, and he implored G-d for help. He needed an abundance of mercy from Heaven, a real miracle, for as a kohen he was liable to render himself impure by the action he was preparing to undertake (*see Sanhedrin 82a*). He therefore did what he had to do with the upmost degree of sincerity and devotion, without the slightest trace of pride. He placed a *romach* ("spear") *beyado* ("in his hand"), meaning that he put his 248 limbs into action. Yet what of his *shasa gidim* (365 sinews)? The term *beyado* has the same numerical value as *gido* ["his sinew"] (plus one for the kollel = 23). Thus Pinchas also used his 365 *gidim* (sinews) with perfect devotion. The kohanim became worthy of receiving the shoulder of an animal that is brought as an offering to G-d because the arm personifies heroism and self-annulment. Furthermore, the terms zeroah and chassid have a combined numerical value of 365, representing the 365 sinews which

Pinchas used in taking action *bizroah netuyah* ("with an outstretched arm"), the numerical value of which is 365. He thereby conformed to the *retzon aviv* (will of His Father), the numerical value of which is also 365, contrary to Adam, who broke it.

The Holy One, blessed be He, Who probes hearts and minds (*Tehillim 7:10*), valued the exemplary deed of Pinchas, who turned Divine anger away from the Children of Israel by demonstrating his zeal for G-d (*see Bamidbar 25:11*). As the Sages say, "*In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:5*). By acting in this way, Pinchas certainly put his life in danger, for one who teaches the Halachah before his teachers is liable to the penalty of death (*Berachot 31b; Tanchuma, Acharei Mot 6*). However in seeing Zimri's sin, which endangered the entire Jewish people, Pinchas was prepared to risk his life in order to save the Jewish people from extermination.

Contrary to Adam – who committed a very grave sin, was cursed for it, and yet dared to ask for a reward – Pinchas acted solely for the sake of G-d, without asking for even the smallest reward. In fact he asked G-d to help him so that nothing evil would result from his deed. The Holy One, blessed be He, nevertheless gave him a reward and added the letter yud to his name, just as Moshe added the letter *hei* to the *yud* of Joshua's name (thus becoming Y-H, for Moshe prayed: *"May Y-H save you from the plan of the spies"*). This Name has a numerical value of 15, which is the same as *ga'avah* ("pride"), from which Hashem wanted to spare Pinchas so he could act solely in G-d's Name. Thus by increasing His glory, Pinchas would demonstrate his total devotion. This extra yud also allowed Pinchas to never sin again. In fact the numerical value of the name Pinchas (208) is equal to that of *ve'ein chet ba'al-yado* ("no sin through his hand"). By acting in this way, Pinchas demonstrated chesed, lovingkindness towards the Jewish people. Furthermore, the name Pinchas has the same numerical value as *chesed yesovevenu* ("surrounding oneself with loving kindness").

Pinchas also merited a long life, for the Angel of Death had no power over him (*Zohar III:214a*), and as we know, Pinchas is Eliyahu (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 47*). As opposed to Adam – whose life was shortened "*pen [lest] he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life*" – Pinchas lives eternally, as we said earlier. This is the meaning of the name Pinchas (*"pen-chas"*). His pen corrected the pen of Adam, while *chas* has the same numerical value as *chaim* (*"life"*).

All this will help us to better understand the teaching of the Tanna Akavia, son of Mahalalel: "*Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting*" (*Pirkei Avoth 3:1*). Just asking where you are going – and recalling before Whom you will have to give an accounting – can certainly dissuade a person from sinning. Yet how can just knowing from where you came dissuade a person from sinning? The answer is that it is not enough to recall punishment in order not to sin. We must do everything with the utmost degree of humility (like Pinchas), and not demonstrate the least degree of pride (like Adam). In that case, we will fulfill all the mitzvot with the utmost of perfection. Thus by thinking

about where we came from (*a putrid drop*), we will act with humility and a contrite heart, solely to adhere to the will of our Creator.

"*Why did Adam sin?*" asks Midrash Pliyah. It is because he saw two; and if he had seen three, he would not have sinned. In other words, the first man did not think about where he came from. In fact he had not been created like all other men after him, from a putrid drop, but was instead the work of G-d's hands. Adam only reflected upon "*where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting.*" Hence we may say that he sinned with the utmost devotion, and since he could not reflect upon where he came from, he continued to demonstrate pride and even asked for a reward: To taste from the Tree of Life. The result was that he was punished.

Adam's sin did not constitute a "*descent for the sake of ascent*" (*Makkot 7b*), for even at birth Adam was so perfect a creation, says the Midrash, that the angels mistook him for a divine being and wanted to sanctify him. They had no idea that he could sin, for they knew that his deed was essentially geared to intensifying his service of G-d. That is why the angels asked the Holy One, blessed be He: "*Why did You impose the penalty of death upon Adam?*" (*Shabbat 55b*). He replied, "*I gave him an easy [kalah] command, and yet he violated it!*" In other words, the first man did not come from a putrid drop, and instead of demonstrating humility (*kal ve'anav*), he grew proud. Since he did not act for the sake of G-d, he merited death.

Pinchas, on the other hand, knew from where he came: From a putrid drop (from Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen). It was from his grandfather that he inherited humility, as it written: "*For what are we?*" (*Shemot 16:7*). Since Pinchas thought of the three things which the Tanna mentioned (*cited above*), he did not sin.

The tiny yud in the name Pinchas alludes to his humility, and the broken vav in the word shalom (*Bamidbar 25:12*), may be considered as a regular *yud* and *vav*, which together have a numerical value of 16. This is the same value as the initials of *chayil bala vayekiyenu* (*"he devoured wealth, but will disgorge it" – Job 20:15*). As we have seen, according to the writings of the holy Arizal, this Name is effective in rectifying blemishes to the sign of the holy covenant. In this regard, kabbalistic writings teach that Adam sinned because he did not wait until Shabbat to cohabit with Eve, which according to the Sages (*Bereshith Rabba 18:6*) caused the serpent to desire her. Adam thus blemished the sefirah of *yesod* (sign of the covenant), which encompasses the 613 mitzvot. Instead of attaining *shelemut* (perfection) – which is *shalom* (peace), as it is written: "*He makes shalom [peace] in His heights*" (*Job 25:2*) – he blemished the sign of the covenant and experienced death. On the other hand, Pinchas did not blemish it (*Zohar III:220a*), and he turned G-d's anger away from the Children of Israel. This is why Hashem granted him *briti shalom* ("My covenant of peace"), the term brit (*"covenant"*) having the same numerical value (*612 plus 1*) as *taryag* (613 mitzvot). He attained abundance and even received the name *chavu* (on account of the broken vav). He was therefore able to rectify the blemish of Adam.

In fact the Children of Israel, who allowed themselves to pursue falsehood and answer the call of Zimri (who scoffed at Moshe by asking if he was permitted to marry his Midianite wife), did not look upon the deed of Pinchas with favor. They did not explain to Zimri that Moshe had married the daughter of Jethro before the giving of the Torah. Since they demonstrated pride, they humiliated Pinchas by reminding him that he was the son of Puti, meaning that they questioned his lineage – not on the side of Elazar and Aaron – but on the side of Jethro, who had worshipped idols. His complete humility and sincere devotion teach all the generations when to truly grow spiritually, and when to be careful that this growth does not blemish and destroy the foundations of holiness. We learn not to act like Adam when he cut the shoots (i.e., veered from the right path) and experienced death, but rather to emulate Pinchas, who demonstrated zeal for G-d amid the assembly of Israel, and who earned a right to the place reserved for the tzaddikim.

Pinchas' Act of Total Self-Sacrifice: Rectifying the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge

It is written, "*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen, turned away My wrath from the Children of Israel*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*).

Rashi cites the Sages (*Sanhedrin 82b*) in stating, "*Since the tribes were disparaging him, saying, 'Have you seen this son of Puti [i.e., Putiel, one of Jethro's names], whose mother's father pitem [fattened] calves for idols, and who killed a leader of an Israelite tribe,' Scripture traces his lineage to Aaron.*"

Our Sages affirm that everything Pinchas did was solely for G-d's sake, meaning that he completely devoted himself to Hashem (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 5:2*). Despite this, the question is raised as to whether his name (*Pinchas*) should be written with or without a yud. In fact the presence of this letter testifies that all his actions were performed for the sake of the Divine Name, from which we learn that "*in a place where there are no men, strive to be a man*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:5*).

However a difficulty remains: Moshe Rabbeinu, as well as Aaron the kohen and the 70 elders of Israel, were in the camp [when Pinchas took action]! Now we know that "*one does not teach the Halachah before his teacher*" (*Yerushalmi, Gittin 1:2*). That said, how could Pinchas have killed a leader of Israel on his own initiative?

Furthermore, in regards to Pinchas we read: "*He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah*" (*Sanhedrin 82a*). That being the case, why did he not simply remind Moshe of this Halachah? Moshe could have then given him complete permission to kill the transgressor, and Pinchas would not have needed to "*teach it*" himself!

Furthermore, Pinchas could have reprimanded the transgressions as his father Elazar had done. When Moshe, who had been angry with soldiers returning from battle, had forgotten a Halachah (*Bamidbar 31:14*), Elazar said: "*This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe*" (*v.21*). In other words, he spoke to them in

Moshe's name. His son Pinchas could have done the same by mentioning the Halachah in Moshe's name.

Let us try and solve all these difficulties. "*He saw what was happening…*" What did he really see? He saw the sin of the first man…"*and remembered the Halachah.*" He remembered that Adam had not received permission to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (*Bereshith 2:17*). Adam took the initiative to eat from it because he was intelligent, believing that it would allow him to serve G-d with even greater vigor.

Hence because of his pride, the first man sought to introduce an "*alien fire*" that G-d had not commanded him. That is where his sin lay. In fact rather than thinking of G-d and His commandments, Adam allowed himself to transgress His order with the hope of gaining even more glory for himself! Of his own free will, Adam introduced the evil inclination into himself so it would constantly fight him, something that G-d absolutely did not want.

All this happened to the first man because he did not possess any "*merit of the fathers.*" He was the direct work of G-d's hands (*Devarim Rabba 11:3*), and he thought that everything was permissible to him. That is how he ended up sinning. From here we see just how valuable is the merit of the fathers, for Adam could not benefit from such protection, as opposed to Pinchas. This is also why the text points out that Pinchas was a descendant of Aaron, for it was precisely the "*merit of the fathers*" that helped him to overcome this trial.

Nevertheless, how are we to understand that the first man, fashioned by G-d himself, could have been led into disobeying Him? After all, Hashem warned him by saying: "*On the day you eat of it, you will surely die*" (*Bereshith 2:17*). We must say that Adam did not understand the full significance of death, and therefore he could not grasp the severity of this prohibition (eating from the Tree of Knowledge), which is why he sinned. Probably because of his fear of G-d, Adam thought that he was able to defeat the evil inclination, which in turn led to his arrogant behavior. However his sin lay in transgressing G-d's word.

It is now easier to understand the main difference between Pinchas and Adam. In Pirkei Avoth 3:1 we read, "*Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an accounting.*" According to some commentators, "*from where you came*" did not apply to the first man, since he was the work of G-d's hands. He did not come from a putrid drop, and therefore he was not used to engaging in soul-searching.

Such was not the case with Pinchas, concerning whom the text specifies that he was "*the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the kohen,*" meaning that he did come from a putrid drop. That is what encouraged him to be humble, not to grow proud, for he felt that all three points of the above saying applied to him, including "*from where you came.*" Hence Adam – to whom G-d said, "*On the day you eat of it, you will surely die*" – acted in the very opposite way as Pinchas, who risked his life (while fully realizing the significance of doing so) solely for the purpose of glorifying G-d.

We can now better understand things. Pinchas felt the great danger which the Children of Israel were in because of the sin committed by the leader of the tribe of Shimon. There was no time to speak to Moshe and assure himself of the Halachah, for the plague was spreading and thousands among the Children of Israel were still dying. That is why he took this decision on his own, thereby putting his life in danger and even risking his portion in the World to Come. His only goal was to save the Children of Israel and demonstrate zeal in preventing a desecration of Hashem's Name.

Thus Pinchas immediately rose from the midst of the assembly, took a spear, and went to kill the transgressors in order to end the plague. It was precisely because of this action that he merited long life, for he became a kohen (*Zevachim 101b*) and received the blessing: "*I give him My covenant of peace*" (*Bamidbar 25:12*).

For the action that he took, G-d conferred great merit upon Pinchas. Which one? "*I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood*" (*ibid. vv.12-13*), for his deeds were done without self-interest. On the other hand, Adam – who did not devote himself to G-d, and who was only concerned with his own glory – received death instead of life, as it is written: "*On the day you eat of it, you will surely die.*"

A Jew's Name

The end of Parsha Balak describes the horrific sin that Zimri the son of Salu, a leader from the tribe of Shimon, committed with the Midianite Cozbi the daughter of Zur. The Torah describes the incident in the following way: "*Behold, an Israelite man came and brought a Midianite woman to his brothers in the sight of Moshe*" (*Bamidbar 25:6*). It does not mention their names, for they caused the concealment (if we may use the term) of the Divine Name in this world. Their names are mentioned afterwards, when Pinchas kills them with a spear at risk to his own life, thereby earning the Torah's praise and being rewarded by G-d with an "*eternal covenant of priesthood.*" In fact after this incident, the verse explicitly mentions their names: "*The name of the slain Israelite man…was Zimri the son of Salu…and the name of the slain Midianite woman was Cozbi the daughter of Zur.*" My dear son Rabbi Mikhaël asked me why the Torah waited for this moment to mention their names, rather than doing so earlier.

A person's given name reveals the nature of his unblemished soul, which emanates from the supernal worlds. Each name that Jewish parents give their child is inspired by divine providence in relation to the child's connection to the supernal worlds. This is why our Sages said that Rabbi Meir verified the names of people he dealt with, for in this way he could determine their character traits and nature (*Yoma 83b*). Our given name connects us to the root of our soul. Through sins, however, especially through grave sins, we break our connection to the supernal worlds and the holy Shechinah, and we destroy (*G-d forbid*) our root connection to the world of life. The connection now broken,

a person's given name disappears because it connected him to his source, leaving him nameless.

This is what happened with Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, and her son Ishmael. Sarah did not mention their names when speaking of them, but instead said: "*Drive out this slavewoman and her son*" (*Bereshith 21:10*), for Ishmael did not follow the path of Torah and mitzvot. As he grew older, Ishmael adopted the behavior of a wild man, taking to the wrong path and even turning to idolatry. Since he separated himself from G-d – from the root of his soul beneath the Throne of Glory – he lost his name, which is what connected him to his root. The same happened to his mother, who led him along this path and who also lost her name.

We can now understand why the Torah does not explicitly mention the name of Zimri the son of Salu at first. As a result of his grave and premediated sin, he cut himself off from Hashem, which made him a stranger to the Torah. This in turn made him lose the name that connected him to the source of his soul, which was rooted beneath the Throne of Glory.

Now we know that Zimri the son of Salu was not an ordinary man; he was not among the lower classes. According to the Midrash, he was called Schlemiel ben Tzurishadai, and he was a giant in Torah. He was a leader from the tribe of Shimon, and was worthy of serving as a judge on Moshe's court. However the evil inclination suddenly ignited in him, and he took a Midianite woman and sinned with her before the eyes of all Israel. Through this reprehensible act, and by the desecration of the Divine Name that ensued, he cut himself off from G-d and His Torah. Furthermore, his root connection to the world of life was severed and he lost his name at the time of his transgression.

Yet at soon as Pinchas arose to avenge G-d's honor by killing Zimri, his soul (if we may say) was rectified. In fact his death served as his atonement. Not only that, but since Zimri's act brought about a deadly plague among the Children of Israel, they experienced a fear of sin and understood just to what point G-d hates promiscuity. If a few members of the Children of Israel initially had a negative view of Pinchas' excessive jealously, they immediately changed their minds upon seeing that G-d approved of his deed and even fully rewarded him for it. Hence they understood that G-d abhors such actions and kept quiet. They also examined their own behavior more closely as they tried to draw closer to G-d.

Our Sages add that at that point, 12 miracles were performed for Pinchas (*Bamidbar Rabba 20:25*). These miracles obviously contributed to magnifying G-d's Name and sanctifying Him in public, this in order to compensate for the desecration of the Divine Name that had just occurred.

Since G-d's Name was eventually sanctified after Zimri's reprehensible act, merit was also conferred to him and his soul was rectified and became reconnected to its source. As a result, Zimri regained his name and the Torah clearly mentions him by describing him as "*Zimri the son of Salu.*"

Despite having been aroused by evil intentions, Zimri served as an intermediary for the sanctification of the Divine Name, enabling the Children of Israel to draw closer to G-d and infuse themselves with a fear of sin. Hence this was counted to Zimri as a merit, and the connection that had previously been severed was now restored, allowing him to regain his name.

The Ohr HaChaim writes that although Zimri sinned, he still remained a member of the Jewish people. G-d punished him so that he would not be rejected or excluded from the assembly of Israel. This is why the text states in regard to Zimri, "*The name of the slain Israelite man*" (*Bamidbar 25:6*), meaning that he was a member of the people despite his sin. In light of these words, we can better understand why the Torah decided to mention his name only after he was punished.

Matot

The Role of the Tribal Leaders

It is written, "*Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel, saying: '…When a man vows a vow to the L-RD, or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do'*" (*Numbers 30:2-3*).

Several issues seem unclear in this passage:

1. In designating the tribal leaders, why does the text use the expression *rashei hamatot* ("the heads of the tribes") rather than *nessi'im* (leaders), since the passage concerns the leaders?

2. Why does the verse begin with the term vayedaber, a term that denotes strictness, but continues with leimor, which is a milder term?

3. Regarding the expression rashei hamatot, Rashi states: "*He honored the leaders by teaching them first, and only later the rest of the Israelites.*" Now it seems obvious that the leaders are to be honored first, so what is Rashi telling us by this? The explanation is that Moses knew that the leaders had the power to influence the Children of Israel for better or for worse, as we see in the case of the spies. Although the spies were some the greatest men among the people, they still had a harmful influence on the Children of Israel, who did not want to enter the land after listening to them. The result was that they remained in the desert for 40 years and an entire generation died, all because the spies only cared about their own interests, which led them to disparaging the land. Yet when the nessi'im, the leaders of Israel, conducted themselves with humility and annulled themselves before Hashem – when they studied Torah and performed mitzvot unselfishly – they obviously had a good influence on the people and encouraged them to serve Hashem. However this only happened when they weren't focused on seeking their own glory.

We now have answers to all three of our questions. The verse begins with the term vayedaber, which denotes strictness, because the text is concerned with the welfare and honor of the leaders. Moses wanted to teach them how to serve Hashem, and his strict words would be beneficial to them. He therefore addressed himself to the rashei hamatot, not the nessi'im, for the word *matot* ("tribes") alludes to the fact that the leaders must turn their heads downwards (*matah*) and demonstrate humility and obedience. In fact they have a very important role to play as leaders, a role that conferred great honor to them, and therefore they had to be careful not to grow proud as a result.

Our third question is also resolved. To achieve humility, we must study Torah, since it is impossible to uproot pride without it. Moses therefore began by honoring the leaders and teaching them the passage concerning vows, for vows and the Torah are

connected, as the Sages have said: "*He who says, 'I will rise early to study this chapter or this tractate,' has vowed a great vow to the G-d of Israel*" (*Nedarim 8a*). By making a vow, a person becomes holy to Hashem, and he can conquer the evil inclination by vowing to study Torah. Doing so enables a person to establish fences for himself that lead to sanctified conduct, as it is written: "*He shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do*" (*Numbers 30:3*). By emulating the leaders in this regard, the Children of Israel would learn to conduct themselves with humility and carry out everything they say, and Hashem would act with them measure for measure. He would honor what they say, similar to the teaching that Hashem carries out what the righteous decree (*see Moed Katan 16b*).

From all that has been said, we understand the true power of the leaders of Israel. They have a great responsibility, for the entire spiritual fate of the people is in their hands, and they must serve the public by setting a personal example. In order to do this, they must demonstrate exemplary conduct and use their lofty position to elevate people to great heights in the fear of Heaven and the service of G-d.

Between Man and His Fellowman

It is written, "*The children of Reuben and the children of Gad had very abundant livestock. … The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and said to Moses…. 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan.' Moses said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here? … Behold, you have risen up in place of your fathers, a band of sinful people, to add more to the burning wrath of the L-RD against Israel'*" (*Numbers 32:1-15*).

We need to understand why Moses did not allow the children of Gad and Reuben to immediately tell him what they meant by their request. Instead he interrupted them and issued a reprimand. There is something else that we need to understand, for the cities that they wanted to settle in were part of the territory belonging to Sihon and Og, and when these cities were conquered, nobody settled there. Therefore why did Moses not annex them to Eretz Israel, in which case the entire discussion would have been moot?

It is possible to explain this passage through the teachings of Mussar, for we always read this parsha during the period known as Bein HaMetzarim. It is connected to the destruction of the Temple, and we must learn a lesson from it. The Gemara recounts the story of a person who was hosting a meal in his home for the Sages. A mix-up occurred, and one of the host's enemies, a man by the name of Bar Kamtza, was invited. Upon arriving, he wanted to partake of the meal along with the Sages of the city. Despite the supplications of Bar Kamtza, the host stubbornly refused to give him a seat at his table. Bar Kamtza was filled with rage and said, "*Since the Sages saw how scornfully this man treated me, and yet they said nothing, I will go and speak to the emperor.*" He therefore went to the Roman emperor, who was in control of Jerusalem,

and said to him: "*The Children of Israel are rebelling against you!*" The emperor asked, "*How do you know this?*" He answered, "*Send me to them with an offering from you for the Temple. I am certain that they will not offer it upon the altar.*" The emperor sent his offering, and on the way to Jerusalem Bar Kamtza made a blemish on it, one considered a blemish only by the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, the Kohanim wanted to offer it on the altar for the sake of peace.

Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas objected to this, arguing: "*People will say that blemished animals are offered upon the altar.*" It was then suggested that Bar Kamtza be killed, which would prevent him from informing on them to the emperor. Yet Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them, "*Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?*" Bar Kamtza returned to Rome and described what happened to the emperor, who sent his armies against Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Hence Rabbi Yochanan said, "*By the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas, our house has been destroyed*" (*Gittin 55b-56a*).

This raises a perplexing question. The Sages have taught, "*Why was the Second Temple destroyed, since in its time people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of charity? Because of the prevalence of baseless hatred*" (*Yoma 9b*). That being said, how can these two teachings be reconciled?

The answer is that there is a connection between the two. The Sages at the meal witnessed their host humiliating Bar Kamtza, but they did not reprimand him in any way. Afterwards, when a blemished offering was presented to them, everyone began to discuss the case, with some permitting and others prohibiting the offering. When that happened, the attribute of justice said: "*These Sages were silent when they saw their host shaming a fellow Jew on account of baseless hatred, not reprimanding or saying anything to him. Now that a simple offering is the issue, everyone is opening his mouth to permit or forbid it. If they had remained silent – if they had said nothing about the offering and had indeed brought it upon the altar – it could be said that they simply do not know how to reprimand. However since they raised their voices in this case, but not with their host, they are guilty. As long as disputes arise among them, they do not deserve to remain in their land.*"

At that point, it was decreed that the Temple would be destroyed and that the Children of Israel would go into exile. G-d is lenient when it comes to matters between man and G-d, but not when it comes to matters between man and his fellowman. We learn just how serious a sin is by the atonement that it requires. Sins between man and G-d are atoned by repentance on Yom Kippur. However sins between man and his fellowman – even if the sinner has repented and confessed – are not atoned by Yom Kippur unless the wronged party forgives him (*Yoma 85b*).

The Midrash states, "*The generation of Ahab were idolaters, and yet when they went out to war they were victorious. ... Since none of them spoke Lashon Harah, when they went out to war they were victorious. ... As for the generation of Saul, all of them spoke Lashon Harah*" (*Devarim Rabba 5:10*). Everyone in Saul's generation was

a ben Torah, and yet they were not victorious in war on account of Lashon Harah. This enables us to understand what happened to the children of Gad and Reuben. Since the Sages say that Eretz Israel is only acquired through hardship (*Berachot 5a*), Moses did not annex the territory of Sihon and Og to Israel, for such territory is not acquired through hardship. Hence when the children of Gad and Reuben said to him, "*Do not bring us across the Jordan,*" it implied that they did not want to go through hardship along with the rest of the Children of Israel. It implied that they wanted to settle in the land of Sihon and Og, for which they would not have to struggle to acquire. Moses therefore immediately interrupted them by saying: Do you think that you can settle down quietly and without problems while the other Children of Israel suffer for the land of Israel? Will your brothers go out to war while you dwell here? The greatest division among people occurs when one is not concerned about the pain of others. The children of Gad and Reuben quickly replied, "*We ourselves will go armed before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place, and our little ones will live in the fortified cities before the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until the Children of Israel inherit every man his inheritance*" (*Numbers 32:17-18*). They took it upon themselves to share in the difficulties of their brothers in Eretz Israel, and to do more than Moses asked of them. They did not move from there until the entire country was conquered and divided. At that point they returned and dwelled in peace, as Rashi says on Numbers 32:24: "*Moses had asked of them only 'and the land will be conquered before the L-RD, afterwards you may return' [v.22], but they undertook, 'until the Children of Israel will have inherited' [v.18].*" Nevertheless, because they did not mention their request properly – having said, "*Do not bring us across the Jordan*" – the Holy One, blessed be He, punished them, as the Midrash states: When Sennacherib exiled the 10 tribes from their land, they were the first to be exiled. This is because they could have presented their request without saying: "*Do not bring us across the Jordan,*" which seemed to imply that they did not want to share in the problems of the other tribes. Since they used this expression, they were the first to be punished.

Focusing on Mitzvot Between Man and His Fellowman

This week's parsha describes the events that transpired between Moshe and the tribes of Gad and Reuven: "*The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had very abundant livestock. ... The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and said to Moshe…. 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan.' Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?'*" (*Bamidbar 32:1-6*).

This passage requires an explanation. Why did Moshe not allow the children of Gad and Reuven to tell him what they wanted straightaway? Instead, Moshe interrupted and reprimanded them. Could we possibly think that the children of Gad and Reuven

did not want to enter Eretz Israel, but wanted to rebel against Hashem as their fathers had done?

There is something else that needs to be explained. These cities were part of the territory of Sihon and Og, and they were left uninhabited after being conquered. Therefore why did Moshe not annex them to Eretz Israel, in which case this dispute would have never occurred?

We may explain this passage through Mussar. Since we always read this parsha during the Three Weeks, it must deal to the destruction of the Temple and the lesson that we must draw from it. From where do we see that there had been a revolt?

The Gemara speaks of a Jew who held a great feast in his home for the Sages. His servant, however, mistakenly invited his enemy to the feast, a man by the name of Bar Kamtza. When the host realized what had happened, he turned to Bar Kamtza and, in a harsh tone, told him to leave. Despite Bar Kamtza's supplications not to be humiliated by being sent away, the host stubbornly refused and utterly humiliated him. Bar Kamtza was filled with rage and said, "*Since the Sages saw how scornfully this man treated me, and yet they said nothing, I will go and speak to the emperor!*"

He therefore went before the Roman emperor, who was in control of Jerusalem, and said to him: "*The Children of Israel are rebelling against you!*" The emperor asked, "*How do you know this?*" He answered, "*Send me to them with an offering from you for the Temple. I am certain that they will not offer it upon the altar.*" The emperor sent his offering, and on the way to Jerusalem Bar Kamtza made a blemish on it, one considered a blemish only by the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, the kohanim wanted to offer it on the altar for the sake of peace. Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas objected to this, arguing: "*People will say that blemished animals are offered upon the altar.*" It was then suggested that Bar Kamtza be killed, which would prevent him from informing on them to the emperor. However Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them, "*Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?*" Bar Kamtza returned to Rome and described what happened to the emperor, who sent his armies against Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Hence Rabbi Yochanan said, "*By the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas, our house has been destroyed*" (*Gittin 55b-56a*).

Elsewhere we find that the Sages have said, "*Why was the Second Temple destroyed, since in its time people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of charity? Because of the prevalence of baseless hatred*" (*Yoma 9b*). This requires an explanation, for if the Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred among the Jewish people, then it was not the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas that destroyed it. How can we reconcile these two explanations, which appear to contradict one another?

The Sages who attended the feast witnessed their host humiliating Bar Kamtza, but they did not say a word. Yet afterwards, when a blemished animal was presented to them, everyone began to discuss the case, with some permitting and others prohibiting it as an offering. When that happened, the Attribute of Justice came upon them and

said: "*When these Sages saw their host humiliating a fellow Jew on account of baseless hatred, they remained silent and did not say anything to him. They did not reprimand him from shaming another Jew in public. Yet now that humiliation is no longer the issue, but rather an offering, they do not remain silent. Some of them permit it as an offering, while others forbid it. They are therefore not worthy of dwelling in their land, where there are disputes among them.*"

If they had remained silent when the blemished animal had been brought before them, we could say that they simply did not know how to issue a reprimand. However since they issued reprimands in one case but not in the other, this made them culpable. At that point the Attribute of Justice attacked them and the Roman emperor sent his legions against Jerusalem. Not long afterwards, the Temple was destroyed and the Children of Israel went into captivity.

This is why Rabbi Yochanan said that the humility of Rabbi Zechariah was responsible for destroying the Temple. Without his humility, the blemished animal would have been offered, and the Attribute of Justice would have been unable to say anything against them.

No Greater Division

Since the Sages say that Eretz Israel is only acquired through hardship (*Berachot 5a*), Moshe did not annex the territory of Sihon and Og, which is not acquired through hardship like Eretz Israel. When the children of Gad and Reuven said to him, "*Do not bring us across the Jordan,*" it implied that they did not want to endure hardship along with the rest of the Children of Israel; they instead preferred to remain in the territory of Sihon and Og. This is why Moshe immediately interrupted them by saying, "*Do you think that you can settle down quietly and without any problems, while the rest of the Jewish people endure hardship in Eretz Israel? Will your brothers go out to war while you dwell here?*" This teaches us that he was afraid that there would not be any peace among them, since there can be no greater division than when one person is not concerned with another.

The children of Gad and Reuven immediately replied, "*We ourselves will go armed before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place, and our little ones will live in the fortified cities before the inhabitants of the land*" (*Bamidbar 32:17*). This means that they took it upon themselves to share in the hardship of their brothers in Eretz Israel, and they would not budge until the land was completely conquered. At that point it would be divided among the tribes, who would settle down in peace.

In any case, since they improperly presented their request to Moshe – for they said, "*Do not bring us across the Jordan*" – the Holy One, blessed be He paid them back: When Sennacherib exiled the 10 tribes from their land, the tribes of Gad and Reuven were the first to go into exile. This is because they could have presented their request without saying: "*Do not bring us across the Jordan,*" which seemed to imply that they did not want to share in the hardship of the other tribes. Since they used this expression, they were the first to be punished.

Learning from the Destruction of the Temple

It is written, "*The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had very abundant livestock. … The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and said to Moshe…. 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan.' Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?'*" (*Bamidbar 32:1-6*).

In reality, why did Moshe not let the children of Gad and Reuven immediately tell him what they wanted? Instead, he interrupted and reprimanded them. Could anyone think that they did not want to enter Eretz Israel, and that they were rebelling against Hashem as their fathers had done?

We need to understand something else: The cities in question were found among the territory of Sihon and Og, and no one was living there after they were conquered. Therefore why did Moshe not annex them to Eretz Israel, in which case this dispute would never have occurred?

We may explain this in the light of Mussar. Since this passage is always read between Tammuz 17 and Av 9, it has a connection to the destruction of the Temple, and we must learn a lesson from it.

The Humility of Rabbi Zechariah

The Gemara states that someone once held a feast for the Sages of Jerusalem. His servant, however, mistakenly invited his enemy to the feast, a man by the name of Bar Kamtza. When the host learned of this, he turned to Bar Kamtza and told him to leave. Despite Bar Kamtza's supplications to be seated, the host refused and utterly humiliated him. Bar Kamtza was filled with rage and said, "*Since the Sages saw how this man humiliated me, and yet said nothing, I will go to the emperor!*" He therefore went before the Roman emperor, who ruled Jerusalem, and said to him: "*The Jews are rebelling against you!*" The emperor asked, "*How do you know?*" He said, "*Send me to them with an offering for the Temple. I can assure you that they will not offer it upon the altar.*" The emperor sent his offering, and on the way to Jerusalem Bar Kamtza made a blemish on it, one considered a blemish only by the Children of Israel. Nevertheless, the kohanim wanted to offer it on the altar for the sake of peace. Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas objected, arguing: "*People will say that blemished animals are offered upon the altar.*" It was then suggested that Bar Kamtza be killed, so he could not inform on them to the emperor. Yet Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them, "*Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?*" Bar Kamtza returned to Rome and described what happened to the emperor, who sent his armies against Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Hence Rabbi Yochanan said, "*By the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas, our House is destroyed, our Temple burned, and we ourselves exiled from our land*" (*Gittin 55b-56a*). Elsewhere we find that the Sages said, "*Why was the Second*

Temple destroyed, since in its time people occupied themselves with studying Torah, observing mitzvot, and practicing charity? Because of the prevalence of baseless hatred" (*Yoma 9b*). This requires an explanation, for if the Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred in Israel, it was not the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas that destroyed it. How can we reconcile these two explanations, which appear to contradict one another?

The Sages attending the feast witnessed their host humiliating Bar Kamtza, but they did not say a word. Yet afterwards, when a blemished animal was presented to them, everyone began to discuss the case, with some permitting and others prohibiting it as an offering. When that happened, the Attribute of Justice attacked them by saying: "*When these Sages saw their host humiliating a fellow Jew on account of baseless hatred, they remained silent and did not say anything to him. They did not reprimand him for humiliating another Jew in public. Yet now that humiliation is no longer the issue, but rather an offering, they do not remain silent. Some permit it as an offering, while others forbid it. As long as there are disputes among them, they are not worthy of dwelling in their land.*"

If they had remained silent when the blemished animal was presented to them, we could have said that they did not know how to reprimand. However since they reprimanded in one case but not the other, they were culpable. A decree was immediately enacted and the Roman emperor sent his legions against them. Not long afterwards, the Temple was destroyed and the Children of Israel were sent into captivity.

This is why Rabbi Yochanan said that the humility of Rabbi Zechariah is what destroyed the Temple. Without his humility, the blemished animal would have been offered, and the Attribute of Justice could not have said a word.

Until the Other Has Forgiven Him

A person must always be careful in terms of his relationship with others, even more than in his relationship with G-d. The proof is that if a person repents for his sins against G-d, he is forgiven on Yom Kippur. Yet for the sins that a person commits against his fellowman, even if he repents and confesses, Yom Kippur does not atone for them unless the other has forgiven him (*Yoma 85b*). Hashem is lenient for the sins that a person commits against Him, but not for the sins that a person commits against others.

Since the Sages have said that Eretz Israel is only acquired through hardship (*Berachot 5a*), Moshe did not annex the territory of Sihon and Og, for it was not acquired through hardship like Eretz Israel. When the children of Gad and Reuven said to him, "*Do not bring us across the Jordan,*" he believed that they did not want to endure hardship like the rest of the Children of Israel, and that they wanted to settle in the territory of Sihon and Og, which is not acquired through hardship. Hence Moshe immediately interrupted them and said, "*Do you think that you can settle down in peace and not concern yourself with the fact that the rest of the Jewish people are suffering for Eretz Israel? Will your brothers go out to war while you dwell here?*" This teaches us that

Moshe was afraid that there was no peace among them, and there can be no greater division than when one person is not concerned with another.

The children of Gad and Reuven immediately replied, "*We ourselves will go armed before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place, and our little ones will live in the fortified cities before the inhabitants of the land*" (*Bamidbar 32:17*). This means that they took it upon themselves to share in the hardship of their brothers for the sake of Eretz Israel, and they would not budge until the land was completely conquered and divided. At that point they would settle down in peace.

However since they improperly presented their request to Moshe – for they said, "*Do not bring us across the Jordan*" – Hashem punished them: When Sennacherib exiled the 10 tribes from their land, the tribes of Gad and Reuven were the first to go into exile. Why? It is because they could have presented their request without saying: "*Do not bring us across the Jordan,*" an expression which seemed to imply that they did not want to share in the hardship of the other tribes. Since they expressed themselves in this way, they were the first to be punished.

The Influence of the Leaders of the Generation on the Community

It is written, "*Moshe spoke to the leaders of the tribes of the Children of Israel, saying: '…. When a man makes a vow…he shall not profane his word. According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do'*" (*Bamidbar 30:2-3*).

This requires an explanation. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu specifically address the leaders of the tribes, something that we find in regards to no other mitzvah?

We may start by discussing the juxtaposition of Parshiot Matot and Masei. The first two letters of the term *matot* are *mem* (numerical value: 40) and *tet* (numerical value: 9) which correspond to the 49 gates of impurity. The first two letters of the term *masei* are *mem* and *samech*, which correspond to the *Samech Mem* – representing the forces of evil and impurity. The remaining letters in the terms *matot* and *masei* are *vav tav ayin yud*, which combined have the same numerical value (486) as *Ve'Lilit*.

This alludes to a way of serving G-d. Someone who studies Torah, even if he were to unfortunately breech the 49 gates of impurity and cleave to the kelipah of Lilit and other such things – to the point of finding himself trapped by the Samech Mem – can still attain the 50 gates of holiness through Torah, which is called *pito* ("his bread"), the term *pito* [*peh-tav-vav*] having the same numerical value as *Ve'Lilit*.

Furthermore, the term *pito* also contains an allusion: The letters *peh* (numerical value: 80) and *vav* (numerical value: 6) have the same numerical value (86) as the Name *El-kim*, which designates strict justice. The letter *tav* (numerical value: 400) corresponds to Esau's 400 emissaries and the angels of destruction who accompanied him in his war against Jacob. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, judges them by the merit of the Torah, and in this way they can also elevate themselves towards the 50 gates of holiness.

It is here that the Torah warns us by stating: "*According to all that proceeds from his mouth, he shall do.*" The term *mipiv* ("his mouth") contains an allusion: The letters *peh* and *vav* have the same numerical value as El-kim, alluding to the attribute of strict justice that reigns over the Samech Mem and its band (which impeded the Children of Israel and caused them to breach the 49 gates of impurity and to be tainted by Egypt). They can then elevate themselves and weaken Amalek by carrying out everything that emerges from their mouths, and by controlling what they say.

All this is alluded to in the term *El-kim* (same numerical value as *peh vav*). What remains in the term *mipiv* are the letters *mem* and *yud*, which have a numerical value of *nun* (50). This means that when a person guards his mouth, controls his tongue, and fulfills everything that emerges from his mouth, G-d (*El-kim*) will raise him from the 49th gate of holiness towards the 50th gate of holiness, slightly shy of it, as in the verse: "*You have made him but slightly less than the angels*" (*Tehillim 8:6; Nedarim 38a*).

If we are correct, we may clearly understand why this passage was addressed specifically to the leaders of the tribes. The reason is that there was a deficiency in the leader of the tribe of Shimon because of the incident with the Midianite woman. That incident had an influence on his entire tribe, for tribal leaders have a direct influence on the members of their tribe.

This is why Pinchas was forced to kill a leader from the tribe of Shimon, in whom some aspect of the deeds of Bilam and Balak had remained, and which led him towards the band of the Samech Mem, Amalek, and Lilit. Pinchas wanted to prevent an epidemic from breaking out among the entire Jewish people, as it is written: "*So that I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*). This is because the entire Jewish people were endangered by this harmful influence of a tribal leader. By his act, Pinchas put a stop to the influence of the kelipah.

That is why Moshe Rabbeinu issued a warning to the leaders of the tribes: You serve as an example and have an influence over all the Jewish people. Hence you must not profane your words, for if you do, the entire Jewish community will automatically emulate your deeds and your ways. Therefore do not utter any words in vain, and then the Jewish people will be drawn towards the 49 gates of holiness to fight for Hashem El-kim with strict justice against the band of the Samech Mem, Lilit, and other demonic forces. The kelipah of Amalek will then leave on its own, this husk of impurity that caused such serious damage through the 400 emissaries of Esau by disrupting the service of G-d and His Torah.

Since the influence of the tribal leaders is indeed immense, it was truly for the sake of Heaven that Pinchas did what he did, prior to the Holy One, blessed be He, testifying of him: "*Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel when he zealously avenged Me*" (*Bamidbar 25:11*). The tribes had scorned Pinchas by saying, "*Have you seen this son of Puti, whose maternal father pitem [fattened] cows for idolatry?*" Hence Scripture underlines that he was a descendant of Aaron (*see Sanhedrin 82b*). Even after the death of the tribal leader

from Shimon, his kelipah and deeds continued to exert an influence on the people. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, had to protect Pinchas and extol him for his action.

This is why the verse testifies that Pinchas did what he did for the sake of Heaven, and that he repelled the kelipah of Zimri, who derived his power from Bilam and Balak, whose names contain the letters of "*Amalek.*" It was this merit that earned Pinchas – who is Eliyahu (*Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 771*) – the reward of becoming the angel of circumcision. At every circumcision of a Jew, when the foreskin is removed, it is a proclamation that he has no portion in the Samech Mem, Lilit, and their band. Rather, his portion is among the Jewish people and the Creator of the universe. He cleaves to the Shechinah and merits to burn the thorns covering the rose, meaning the Shechinah.

From all this, it follows that it is incumbent upon all Jewish leaders in every generation, and upon all leaders who possess the spirit of G-d, to sanctify what they say, not to profane it, and to keep their word. We also find that Jacob made a vow: "*If G-d will be with me…*" (*Bereshith 28:20*). Now this is an extremely serious issue, for children die as punishment for unfulfilled vows (*Shabbat 32b*). Children become guarantors for the Torah of their parents, which is why they must not profane their word.

Even if someone made a vow but later arranged to be released from it, this demonstrates his faith in the Holy One, blessed be He, and in his Torah, for he has thereby fulfilled what Moshe said. Since he observes the Torah's commands, he is not profaning his word, and he sanctifies his deeds. If he acts in this way, the Creator of the universe will help him to grow stronger in Torah and the fear of Heaven.

If the leaders of the tribe and the leaders of the generation are not careful with their words, the kelipah and impurity will cleave to them. Yet when they push away the kelipah by learning Torah, and when they sanctify their words and their deeds so as not to render them profane, the Holy One, blessed be He, will fight against the Samech Mem, Lilit, and their band of 400, and He will judge them. The entire Jewish people will then cleave to their leaders and to their ways, which will elevate them as a whole.

Masei

The City of Refuge – A Place of Spiritual Awakening

It is written, "*There shall be six cities of refuge for you. Three cities shall you designate on the other side of the Jordan, and three cities shall you designate in the land of Canaan. They shall be cities of refuge. For the Children of Israel and the proselyte and resident among them, these six cities shall be a refuge, for anyone who kills a person unintentionally…. He must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, and after the death of the High Priest the murderer shall return to the land of his possession*" (*Numbers 35:13-15, 20*).

We need to understand the basic points of this mitzvah:

1. What is the significance of the cities of refuge, and why is the unintentional murderer not to hide in his own city?

2. Why does Scripture make the unintentional murderer's return from the city of refuge dependent on the death of the High Priest? Why does it not establish a set time for him to return from there?

3. The Sages have also questioned the statement concerning the mothers of the priests, who would provide food for these unintentional murderers and care for them, lest they pray for the death of their sons. This seems to mean that if these unintentional murderers had prayed for the death of the High Priest, their prayers would have been answered. How could this be, given that it is written: "*An undeserved curse will not come to rest*" (*Proverbs 26:2*)? The Sages have explained that the High Priest should have asked for mercy for his generation, but he failed to do so.

It remains difficult, however, to understand how the prayer of a murderer could be accepted. Just because the unintentional murderer wants to return home, how can it lead to the death of the High Priest? Although the unintentional murderer is not a murderer in the real sense (since he killed by mistake, not on purpose), the Sages have said that evil occurs by means of a person who is already guilty. Therefore if the person in question has done something as serious as killing, it means that he is not beyond reproach.

Some have explained the situation in light of the verse: "*You reduce man to dust and say, 'Repent, O sons of man'*" (*Psalms 90:3*). We know what the Sages have said, namely that even if all other gates are closed, the gates of prayer and the gates of teshuvah (*Eicha Rabba 3:15*) remain open. Since murderers are living in cities of refuge, they have certainly done teshuvah on account of the suffering and pain of exile. In fact their pain is considered to be almost like death, since they are separated from those they love and their place of birth, and they spend their days with strangers.

Since the gates of teshuvah and prayer and not closed, it is certain that their teshuvah is accepted. Indeed, even the repentance of King Manasseh, despite his sins, was accepted, as the Sages have said: "*Manasseh testifies that the Holy One, blessed be He, accepts the penitent.*" Therefore when those in exile repent and become great tzaddikim, we may fear that their prayers will be granted. That is, the High Priest may actually die when they curse him. This explanation remains difficult to accept, however, for in what way did the High Priest sin? What grave transgression did he commit, such that he will die from the curses of those who repented while in exile? Where is the justice in this?

We have already mentioned what the Sages have said on the passage regarding the choice of the cities of refuge. Although there were nine tribes in Canaan, and only two and a half tribes on the other side of the Jordan, the cities of refuge were equally distributed among them, for the territory of Gad contained many murderers. To explain this, we must say that the evil inclination is stronger outside of Eretz Israel. Now if this is true with regards to a sin as grave as unintentional murder, how much will the evil inclination try to convince a person to transgress in a less serious way! This is especially true with regards to unintentional sins, ones that we don't see at first glance: The evil inclination tries as hard as it can to make a person stumble outside of Eretz Israel, and sometimes it succeeds. Hence a person who finds himself outside of Eretz Israel should be especially careful.

We are also familiar with the Sages' statement that each person constitutes an entire world. When the time comes for a person to leave this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, ensures that someone else is born. In this way, nothing will be missing from the world. These things are stated with even greater emphasis regarding the tzaddikim, as the Sages have explained on the verse, "*The sun rises and the sun sets*" (*Ecclesiastes 1:5*): A tzaddik does not leave this world until a similar tzaddik is born. Therefore when a person kills someone, he destroys an entire world, and the blood of the deceased, along with all his would-be descendants, is imputed to the murderer. If he killed intentionally, it is obvious that only his death can atone for him.

Yet even if he did not kill intentionally, he still requires atonement. What can he do to achieve this atonement? It can only occur through exile, through complete repentance and regret for his grave transgression. By dint of his tears, he can begin to rectify the loss that he brought upon the world.

It is for this reason that the Torah condemned the unintentional murderer to live in a city of refuge, for he must have time to think about what he did. In fact since he was the cause of something as serious as the destruction of an entire world, it is certainly because he is guilty, for evil only comes about through the guilty. He will therefore think of repentance, and he will plead with the Holy One, blessed be He, to forgive him for his sin. If he manages to feel that his prayers have had an effect, it is a sign that he has reached the level of a ba'al teshuvah, a person whose sins have been transformed into merits. He can then rectify the loss that he brought about.

Yet even if he feels that he has the ability to pray for the death of the High Priest in order to return home, he is forbidden to do so. He is also forbidden to pray that he may leave his city of refuge, for this request could bring about the death of the High Priest. The tikkun of the involuntary murderer is to do teshuvah without asking to leave, for otherwise it will be accounted to him as a mitzvah obtained through a sin: The mitzvah of teshuvah obtained by inadvertently cursing the High Priest and bringing about his death. If a person truly desires to repent, it is not enough for him to refrain from praying for the High Priest's death. He must also pray for the High Priest's welfare. It is measure for measure, for just as he killed a person, he must now pray for a person's life, even if it means that he will have to remain in his city of refuge. During all that time, he must repent and learn from the deeds of his neighbors the Levites. He must infuse himself with their holiness and alleviate the attribute of justice's treatment of him.

Teshuvah and Prayer

It is written, "*There shall be six cities of refuge for you. Three cities shall you designate on the other side of the Jordan, and three cities shall you designate in the land of Canaan. They shall be cities of refuge. For the Children of Israel and the proselyte and resident among them, these six cities shall be a refuge, for anyone who kills a person unintentionally…. He must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol, and after the death of the Kohen Gadol the murderer shall return to the land of his possession*" (*Bamidbar 35:13-15, 20*). We need to reflect upon the fundamentals of this mitzvah: 1. How are we to understand the cities of refuge, and why can the unintentional murderer not hide in his own city to escape the "*avenger of blood*"? 2. Why does the verse make the unintentional murderer's return from a city of refuge dependent upon the death of the Kohen Gadol, rather than establishing a set time for him to return? 3. The Sages have raised questions about the fact that the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim provided food and clothing to unintentional murderers, so they would not pray for their sons to die. Why would they do this, since it is written: "*An undeserved curse will not come to rest*" (*Mishlei 26:2*)? They reply that the Kohanim Gedolim should have asked for mercy for their generation, but they did not. Yet the difficulty remains: How could the prayer of a murderer be accepted in Heaven, such that it could bring about the death of the Kohen Gadol, just so this same murderer could return home from a city of refuge? Even if we say that he is not a real murderer (since he killed by mistake, not deliberately), the Sages have said that evil comes through someone evil. Thus if something as serious as a murder has occurred, it means that the person in question is not a tzaddik.

Some have explained the situation according to the verse, "*You reduce man to dust and say, 'Repent, O sons of man'*" (*Tehillim 90:3*). We know what the Sages have said, namely that even if all other gates are closed, the gates of prayer and teshuvah remain open (*Eicha Rabba 3:15*). Since murderers are living in cities of refuge, they have certainly

done teshuvah on account of the suffering they experience in exile. Their pain is almost like death, for they are separated from their friends and place of birth, and they must spend all their days among strangers. Since the gates of teshuvah and tears and never closed, it is certain that their teshuvah is accepted. Indeed, even the teshuvah of King Manasseh, despite all his sins, was accepted, as the Sages have said: "*Manasseh testifies that the Holy One, blessed be He, accepts the penitent.*" Therefore when those in exile repent and become great tzaddikim, their prayers are likely to be granted. That is, the Kohen Gadol may actually die when they curse him. This explanation remains difficult to accept, however, for in what way did the Kohen Gadol sin? What grave transgression did he commit, such that he should die from the curses of those who repent while in exile? Where is the justice in this? We have already mentioned what the Sages said on the passage regarding the choice of the cities of refuge. Although there were nine tribes in Canaan, with only two and a half tribes on the other side of the Jordan, both sides contained the same number of cities of refuge. This is because there were many murderers in Gilad. To explain this, we must say that the evil inclination is stronger outside of Eretz Israel. Now if this is true with regards to a sin as grave as unintentional murder, how much more will the evil inclination try to convince a person to commit less serious sins! This is especially true with regards to unintentional sins, those which do not appear like sins at all, and which the evil inclination tries as hard as possible to make a person transgress outside of Eretz Israel. Sometimes it succeeds, which is why a person who lives outside the Holy Land must pay even greater attention to these things.

We are also familiar with the Sages' statement that each person constitutes an entire world. When the time comes for a person to leave this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, ensures that someone else is born so that nothing is missing from the world. This is especially true in regards to the tzaddikim, as the Sages have explained on the verse, "*The sun rises and the sun sets*" (*Kohelet 1:5*): A tzaddik does not leave this world until another tzaddik like him is born. Therefore when a person kills someone, he destroys an entire world, and the blood of the deceased – along with all his would-be descendants – is imputed to the murderer. If he killed intentionally, it is obvious that only his death can atone for him. Even if he killed unintentionally, he still requires atonement, and in exile he must completely repent and regret his grave transgression. Thus by shedding tears in abundance, he can begin to return what he took from the world.

Hence the Torah decreed that an unintentional murderer must go and live in a city of refuge, for in doing so he would have time to think about his deeds. If such a grave sin, leading to a deficiency in the world, has occurred through him, it means that he is certainly guilty of something, since evil only comes through someone evil. He will therefore think of repentance, and he will plead with the Holy One, blessed be He, to forgive him for this sin. If he reaches the point of sensing that his prayers can help him leave this place, it is a sign that his prayers are accepted in Heaven. It means that he

has reached the level of a ba'al teshuvah, a person whose sins have been transformed into merits, and he has rectified the deficiency that he caused.

Yet even if he feels that he can pray for the death of the Kohen Gadol in order to return home, he is forbidden from doing so. He must not ask to leave his city of refuge, for such a request could lead to the death of the Kohen Gadol. The tikkun of the unintentional murderer is to do teshuvah without asking to leave, for otherwise it will be accounted to him as a mitzvah obtained through sin: The mitzvah of teshuvah obtained by inadvertently cursing the Kohen Gadol. If he truly wants to repent, then not only must he not ask for the death of the Kohen Gadol, he must also pray for his welfare. Thus measure for measure, just as he unintentionally killed a person, he must intentionally pray for the life of someone, even if it means that he must remain in a city of refuge.

No One is Allowed to Rely Upon His Own Wisdom

It is written, "*Moshe commanded the Children of Israel according to the word of Hashem, saying: 'Correctly does the tribe of the children of Joseph speak. This is the word that Hashem has commanded regarding the daughters of Zelophehad, saying: Let them be wives to whomever is good in their eyes…'*" (*Bamidbar 36:5-6*).

From the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, and from the Halachah that ensues, our Sages concluded that no one is capable of relying upon his own wisdom. Even someone who has studied a great deal and has become a great scholar should not attribute his understanding to his efforts alone. In fact G-d disapproved of our teacher Moshe declaring, "*Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I shall hear it*" (*Devarim 1:17*). To this, G-d responded: "*You feel capable of judging a complicated case? By your life, I will prove to you that you cannot! I will place before you a case that even the least among your students can resolve, but you will be incapable!*" (*Sifre, Devarim 17*). What does this refer to? To the case of the daughters of Zelophehad, concerning which it is said: "*Moshe brought their claim before Hashem*" (*Bamidbar 27:5*). Along the same lines, we find the following story in the book of Samuel: "*Saul approached Samuel inside the gate and said, 'Tell me, please, which is the house of the seer?' Samuel answered Saul, saying: 'I am the seer'*" (*I Samuel 9:18-19*). The Sages teach that Hashem said, "*Are you really a seer? I will make you realize that you are not!*" Under what circumstances did He make him realize this? It was when David, the future king, was being anointed. In fact G-d had commanded Samuel, "*Fill your horn with oil and go forth – I shall send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have seen a king for Myself among his sons*" (*I Samuel 16:1*). Upon the arrival of Jesse's sons, Samuel saw Eliav and thought: "*Surely, before Hashem is His anointed one*" (*v.6*). G-d then said to Samuel, "*Do not look at his appearance or at his tall stature, for I have rejected him. For it is not as man sees – man sees what his eyes behold, but Hashem sees into the heart*" (*v.7*).

Still on this subject, it is taught that certain tzaddikim grew proud because they performed mitzvot to perfection, and so Hashem caused them to falter. For example, King David declared: "*Your statutes have been my songs*" (*Tehillim 119:54*), meaning that to him they were as easy and familiar as songs. Here the Sages teach, "*The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'By your life! In the end, you will err in a matter that children read in Scripture!' When he brought up the Ark, he erred and put it on a cart, as it says: 'They set the Ark of G-d upon a new cart' [II Samuel 6:3]. The Ark suspended itself in the air, and the cows slipped beneath it. Uzzah drew near to support it, 'and G-d struck him there for his error' [v.7], for an error in learning amounts to presumption. 'David was displeased because Hashem had struck Uzzah' [v.8]. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'Did you not say, "Your statutes have been my songs*"? Have you not learned: "*But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, for the service of the holy things belonged to them; they bore them upon their shoulders*" [Bamidbar 7:9]?' David began to reflect: 'Hashem our G-d made a breach in us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance' [I Chronicles 15:13]" (*Bamidbar Rabba 21:12*). Let us return to our original subject. G-d allowed Moshe to falter in order to question him on what he had said: "*Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I shall hear it*" (*Devarim 1:17*). As the Sages teach, "*It is like the case of a money-changer who said to his apprentice: 'If you are brought selayim to change into small coins, change them. However if you are brought pearls, bring them to me.' Glass beads were brought to him, and he took it to his master. His master, however, went to consult someone else about it! It is the same here. Moshe said: 'Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me.' Yet when the daughters of Zelophehad came, He concealed the law from him: 'Moshe brought their claim before Hashem. Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak properly*" ' [Bamidbar 27:7]. This, He meant, is the law! The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'Did you not say, "*Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me*"? The law with which you are unacquainted is decided by the women!' " (*Bamidbar Rabba 21:12*).

The Midrash (*Bereshith Rabba 61:1*) also recounts that the verse, "*Praiseworthy is the man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked*" (*Tehillim 1:1*) refers to Avraham, concerning whom G-d declared: "*For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children...that they may keep the way of Hashem*" (*Bereshith 18:19*). This Midrash states that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "*His [Avraham's] father did not teach him, nor did he have a teacher. From where, then, did he learn Torah? The fact is that the Holy One, blessed be He, made his two kidneys serve as two teachers for him, and these welled forth and taught him wisdom.*" Hence it is written, "*I will bless Hashem, Who has advised me; also in the nights my reins [kidneys] instruct me*" (*Tehillim 16:7*).

We also know that Avraham went to study Torah with Shem, Noah's son. Yet G-d had given him two kidneys to teach him Torah, so why did he go and learn with Shem? The answer is that Avraham was afraid of becoming pretentious and thinking, "*All my*

understanding has come not from a teacher or a father, for I've learned everything on my own!" He therefore went to study with a teacher in order to avoid all feelings of pride. No student can declare before his rav, "*I've learned everything on my own!*" The rav's very presence contradicts this. Such was Avraham's thinking: "*Until now, I could have thought that I learned everything on my own. Yet from now on, since a teacher is instructing me, I can affirm that I understand nothing on my own, and that everything I know comes from a teacher.*"

Aleph, Why Are You Silent?

Still on the same subject, we note that the letter aleph, by which Hashem began the Ten Commandments, merited this honor only because it did not consider itself particularly wise. It humbled itself before G-d and did not seek greatness for itself, as recounted in Otiyot d'Rabbi Akiva: "*When the aleph saw that G-d created the world by the letter beit, it stood aside and remained silent until Hashem called out, 'Aleph, aleph, why are you silent?' It responded, 'Sovereign of the universe, I cannot allow myself to stand before You and speak.' Hashem said, 'Why not?' The aleph replied, 'Because the [numerical] values of all the other letters are greater than mine: Beit is two, gimel is three, dalet is four, hei is five…but I am only one.' G-d then reassured it: 'Aleph, you have nothing to fear, for you are at the head of all the letters, like a king. You are one, I am One, and the Torah is one. It is through you that I will give the Torah to My people Israel as a heritage on Mount Sinai,' as it is written: 'I am [Anochi, which begins with the letter aleph] Hashem your G-d' [Shemot 20:2].*"

To summarize, no one can rely upon his own wisdom. Instead, we must all reply upon G-d's goodness. Furthermore, the Gemara says: "*If a man makes his prayer rely upon his own merit, Heaven makes it rely upon the merit of others. If he makes it rely upon the merit of others, Heaven makes it rely upon his own merit*" (*Berachot 10b*). It is also said, "*Israel had two good leaders: Moshe and King David. They could have sustained the world by their good deeds alone, but nevertheless they beseeched Hashem to provide for them*" (*Sifrei, Devarim 26*). If these men, who could have relied upon their own good deeds to sustain the world, nevertheless implored G-d's favor, how much more should a person who does not even reach the ankle of their disciples' disciples implore G-d's favor!

Demonstrating Even Greater Unity During the Month of Av

Parsha Masei is generally read around the time of Rosh Chodesh Av, and the Mishnah in Taanith 26b states: "*With the beginning of Av, rejoicing is curtailed.*" This is contrary to the month of Adar, of which it is said: "*With the beginning of Adar, rejoicing is increased*" (*Taanith 29a*), because it is an auspicious month for Israel. Rashi explains, "*Jews experienced miraculous days, Purim and Pesach,*" since they willingly accepted the Torah, which brought them radiant joy, contentment, cheerfulness, and honor. Conversely, rejoicing diminishes with the arrival of Av, for on account of our

sins the Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred. Now the fact that it has not been rebuilt proves that baseless hatred still exists among us, which is what should trouble us. Our Sages say, "*Every generation that does not build [the Temple], it is as though it has destroyed it*" (*Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1*).

In reality we should always experience joy, even if just a little, for we need joy in order to serve G-d. King David said, "*Serve Hashem with joy; come before Him with joyous song*" (*Tehillim 100:2*), and the Gemara teaches: "*The Divine Presence rests [upon] man neither through sadness nor sloth…but only through joy in connection with a mitzvah*" (*Shabbat 30b*). It is also written, "*Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant, so will you serve your enemies*" (*Devarim 28:47-48*). Nevertheless we diminish our rejoicing during that time, for we are obligated to afflict ourselves due to the punishment we deserve for having fostered baseless hatred and division among ourselves, and for having served G-d without enthusiasm. We also find in this week's parsha an allusion to the concept of unity. It is written, "*They journeyed from Haradah and encamped in Makhelot. They journeyed from Makhelot and encamped in Tahat*" (*Bamidbar 33:25-26*). The names of these places are not random; they are connected to what our ancestors experienced there. Thus the name Haradah evokes the fear of G-d, for a man filled with divine fear is known as fearing (*hared*) the word of G-d. Their fear of Hashem united them, which is what the name Makhelot refers to: They gathered together (*nikalu*) and were united, for whoever fears G-d is careful not to harm others, thus assuring unity among the people. This is why G-d protected the honor of their fellowmen and brought unity among the people. Now when we live together in harmony, we yield to others and peace reigns among us. Hence the verse continues the account of their journeys by saying, "*They journeyed from Makhelot and encamped in Tahat*" – implying that they agreed to yield (*lihyot tahat*) to one another. In our days, the Jewish people must acquire these virtues in order to rid themselves of baseless hatred and merit the Final Redemption. Yielding, which is what the term tahat refers to, is essential for the continued existence of the Jewish community. Without it, disputes can erupt at any moment. After the destruction of the Second Temple, a great city by the name of Beitar, located near Jerusalem, was still resisting Roman forces. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beitar did not chase out the Samaritans, who eventually wronged them, as stated in the Midrash: "*A Samaritan went and found [Emperor Hadrian] and said, 'My lord, so long as that old cock [a reference to the famous Rabbi Elazar, who wore sackcloth and fasted in order to prevent Beitar from being destroyed] wallows in ashes, you will not conquer the city. But wait for me, because I will do something that will enable you to subdue it today'*" (*Eicha Rabba 2:4*). His strategy was successful, and the Gemara (*Gittin 57a*) relates that the Romans did not hesitate to kill men, women, and children in Beitar until their blood actually ran into the Mediterranean some four miles away. The Midrash adds, "*The skulls of 300 children [were dashed] upon one stone, and 300 baskets of boxes for tefillin were found in Beitar...with a total weight of three hundred seahs*" (*Eicha Rabba 2:4*). This begs the question: Why did these

children die? Were they guilty of anything? After all, it is written: "*Sons shall not be put to death because of fathers*" (*Devarim 24:16*)! In this case, Beitar's inhabitants were opposed to those of Jerusalem. Why was Beitar destroyed? Because their inhabitants lit candles to celebrate the destruction of the Temple. Our Sages teach, "*See how grave strife is! In fact the earthly court only punishes sinners starting from the age of 13, and the celestial court waits until the age of 20. Yet here, even infants were killed!*" (*Tanchuma, Korach 3*). This also occurred during Korach's rebellion, as it is written: "*with their wives, children, and infants*" (*Bamidbar 16:27*). As a result, since the inhabitants of Beitar were not united with the rest of the Jewish people, and since they wanted to enter into a separate covenant with the other nations, they received a harsh and bitter punishment.

Likewise Rabbi Akiva's disciples, who were tzaddikim, suffered a terrible death because they failed to show respect for one another. Now if a person fails to respect others, he will eventually despise and ultimately hate them. I see this in everyday life, for at first we welcome others warmly, but as time goes by we neglect to greet them or we say a cold hello. Eventually we don't say hello at all, and then one day we detest them and become their enemy!

According to what we have said, we can better understand why Jacob made a covenant with Lavan, as it is written: "*So now, come, let us make a covenant, I and you*" (*Bereshith 31:44*). This was actually a covenant of separation, as we read: "*This heap is a witness and this monument is a witness, that I will not cross over this heap to you, and that you will not cross over this heap and this monument to me for evil*" (*v.52*). They went their separate ways from that point on, never seeing one another again. The Ben Ish Hai explains (*Parsha Vayeitzei*) that contrary to covenants of peace with the nations of the world, this type of covenant is permitted.

May we merit to increase our unity, banish baseless hatred from among ourselves, and merit the Final Redemption and rebuilding of the Temple, soon and in our days. Amen!

Devarim

Why Was the Land Destroyed?

This week's parsha states, "*These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plain opposite Suf…*" (*Deuteronomy 1:1*).

Commenting on Ecclesiastes 1:1, Rashi explains: "*Wherever it says 'the words of,' it refers to words of reproof.*" He also states: "*Since these are words of rebuke, and here [Moses] enumerates all the places where they angered the Omnipresent, it therefore makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead merely alludes to them out of respect for Israel*" (*Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:1*). In reality, the generation that heard Moses' admonition was not the generation that had sinned, for their fathers were the ones who had sinned before Hashem. Moses merely alluded to these sins out of respect for their fathers. This concept is found in the term *ba'aravah* ("in the plain"), which evokes *avar* ("the past"). The question then becomes why he admonished them, given that Scripture is speaking of their fathers' sins.

The answer is that Moses warned them so that they would not follow in the footsteps of sinners and anger Hashem. Reflecting upon this, we note that Parsha Devarim is always read before Tisha B'Av, and the Sages have said that "*these are the words*" refer to words of Torah (*Shemot Rabba 38:4*). This hints at why the Temple was destroyed, as it is written: "*Why was the land ruined? … Because they have forsaken my Torah*" (*Jeremiah 9:11-12*). This means that Eretz Israel's entire existence depends on the holy Torah, which can prevent the land's destruction. Hence Moses told the Children of Israel: "*These are the words,*" meaning that if they strengthened themselves in "*the words*" – in words of Torah – they will be spared what Scripture states: "*Alas, she sits solitary, the city that was so full of people…*" (*Lamentations 1:1*).

We need to understand how it is possible that after all the admonitions and warnings repeated to the Children of Israel, and which they heard from the prophets in ever generation, they still sinned and failed to heed reproof. The result was that all their sins brought about the destruction of the land. The answer is found in this week's haftorah, which states: *Chazon Yeshaya ben Amotz* (*"The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz" [Isaiah 1:1]*). As we know, the Torah illuminates man's path in this world, saving him from misfortune and destruction.

The Gemara states, "*Light surely means Torah*" (*Taanith 7b*). The sins of our fathers are hidden within this concept, and it is why the Torah did not save them from the destruction of the Temple. The Sages have said that the problem was that they studied the Torah by rote, not as a personal endeavor to fulfill mitzvot. They lacked enthusiasm and joy in serving Hashem, which is why their hearts were dark. Observing the Torah by rote and through habit could not save them from the destruction of the land, without

mentioning the fact that they failed to search their souls and reflect upon their deeds. They did not think that disaster awaited them, for they lived their lives out of habit. Yet what reason is there to study Torah and perform mitzvot without understanding the reason for each mitzvah, and without seeing the beauty hidden within the Torah? They failed to think about this, which is why Isaiah compared them to the animals of the earth, as it is written: "*The ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's trough, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand*" (*Isaiah 1:3*). The ox knows its owner despite the fact that it lacks man's intelligence, and so too for the donkey, which is at an even lower level than the ox, for it know its master's trough, the place where it eats. As for the Children of Israel, they were at an even lower level than the ox and the donkey, for although they knew Who created them, they did not consider His deeds, nor did they reflect upon the goal of Creation. In fact it is obvious that man was not created with the same goal as animals, for a Jew's goal in life is to connect himself to the Creator and the Torah. The demands placed on man are great, for his soul was taken from beneath the Throne of Glory, and he is greater than everything rest in Creation. Hence he must be very careful not to neglect his goal. May we all serve Hashem with enthusiasm and joy, and may we quickly merit the Final Redemption.

Moses' Reprimands: A Guideline for Living

On the verse, "*These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel*" (*Deuteronomy 1:1*), Rashi cites the Sages in explaining that all the names given in this passage are places where Israel angered Hashem. Moses mentions them by allusion, however, in order not to shame the people.

In his book Pituchei Chotam, the tzaddik Rabbi Yaakov Abutzteira states that Moses wanted to warn the Children of Israel about this by alluding to the Torah and observance of mitzvot, which required great holiness on their part. The "*words*" – which are words of Torah – must be protected from useless remarks. The term *bamidbar* ("in the desert") evokes *deibur* ("speech"). The term *ba'arava* ("in the plain") alludes to the evil inclination and the desires that are *arev* (pleasing) to man. Yet we must be pleasing to Hashem alone, as it is written: "*Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the L-RD*" (*Malachi 3:4*). Furthermore, the word arava is formed from the terms *rah ba* ("evil in him"), for the desires of the evil inclination are completely evil. As for the expression *mol suf* ("opposite suf"), Moses explained that a person must consider the *sof* (end), Hashem Who is aware of the end of all people, as it is written: "*Declaring the end from the beginning*" (*Isaiah 46:10*). This means that we must raise everything towards greater holiness in order to draw closer to Hashem, His mitzvot, and His Torah.

Moses asks, "*Eicha [How] can I alone bear your weight, your burden, and your strife?*" (*Deuteronomy 1:12*). The prophet Jeremiah, at the time of the destruction of the first Temple, also employed the term eicha as he exclaimed: "*Eicha [How] she sits alone, the city that was full of people*" (*Lamentations 1:1*). There seems to be a connection between

these two verses. In fact the main reason why the Shechinah abode in the Temple was to dwell among the Children of Israel. How could it dwell among them? Only by the people learning Torah and cleaving to Hashem, for in this way there would be an awakening on high that would radiate upon the Jewish people. Yet if they faltered, then automatically there would no longer be the Shechinah to receive abundance and transmit it to the Children of Israel. There would no longer be a need to rebuild the Temple, for it would not receive divine influence. This is the primary reason for the Temple's destruction and the exile.

The remedy for such destruction is when we build synagogues and houses of study for Torah and prayer, in which case we are building the Temple, as it is said: "*I have been for them a small Temple*" (*Ezekiel 11:16*). This refers to synagogues and houses of study (*Megillah 29a*). When the second Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai asked: "*Give me Yavneh and its Sages*" (*Gittin 56b*). As Rashi explains: Do not destroy it or kill its Sages, for the Jewish people will be renewed even after the destruction by the Sages who survive. Through the construction of yeshivot, the community of Israel will be rebuilt.

This is what Moses meant by saying, "*How can I alone….*" In other words: How can I be connected and attached to the Holy One, blessed be He, without your will? You, the Children of Israel, are responsible for one another (*Sanhedrin 27b, Shevuot 39a*). It is difficult for each individual to fulfill all 613 mitzvot, for there are some mitzvot that apply only to the priests, and some that only apply to the Levites. It is only through mutual responsibility that everyone together can fulfill all the mitzvot, just as we say "*in the name of all Israel*" before performing a mitzvah. Thus Moses said: I cannot exist alone, but only through your Torah study and observance of mitzvot, since it is Hashem's will for everyone to be united. By performing mitzvot "*in the name of all Israel,*" they can all be observed. Above all, Moses told the Children of Israel: Pay attention to your relationship with your fellowman, as it is written: "*Judge righteously between a man and his brother and the stranger*" (*Deuteronomy 1:16*).

Is this just a supplement to the Torah? The responsibility between man and his fellowman is what decides whether Hashem will be our G-d and make His Shechinah dwell among us! Without mutual responsibility and Torah observance, there can be no Shechinah in the Temple to radiate upon the Children of Israel.

According to this, we can understand the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "*How she sits alone, the city that was full of people*" – how is it possible that Jerusalem, the city that was so populated, now sits alone and the crown has fallen from its head? How could the Shechinah have left this city that was so full of people, and to which all eyes turned? The main reason can be found in the verse itself: "*She sits alone*" – there was no unity among them, no mutual responsibility, which is why it was destroyed.

Thus on one hand, Moses was warning the Children of Israel: If you want to grow spiritually, it does not depend on the tzaddik of the generation, but on the will of the people and the entire people's mutual sense of responsibility. The tzaddik can

help spread Hashem's influence, but a person must still be a vessel that can receive abundance. Otherwise the tzaddik will sit alone, there will be no mutual responsibility, nor any good influence. The tzaddik will then be unable to elevate himself or the people with him.

We must interpret the remainder of the passage in our parsha as an allusion: "*The L-RD our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying*" (*Deuteronomy 1:6*) – Hashem became our G-d because of Horev, because of Mount Sinai. What did He say to us? "*Rav lachem [Enough of your] circling this mountain*" (*ibid. 2:3*) – this mountain has become your Rav, your guide to humility and self-effacement before Hashem. We then have, "*Turn yourselves around and journey*" (*ibid. 1:7*), which means that we must always be free to study Torah and perform mitzvot. That is when we can journey. That is when we can continue in Torah and go from strength to strength. It is when we attain humility as did this mountain, Mount Sinai, which lowered itself before Hashem and acted with humility.

Reprimanding in Love

It is written, "*These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plain opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan and Hazeroth and Di-Zahav*" (*Devarim 1:1*). Rashi explains: "*Since these are words of rebuke, he lists here all the places where they angered the Omnipresent. Hence it makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead just alludes to them out of respect for Israel.*" This is surprising, for not all the parshiot in the book of Devarim consist of reprimands. There are only a minority that do, while the majority simply reiterate what was said in the previous books. Even if some parshiot consist of reprimands, that does not turn the entire book into a reprimand. Furthermore, we need to explain why Moshe deemed it good to reprimand that generation, which did not participate in the sin of the golden calf or in Korach's rebellion. Everyone who participated in those episodes died in the desert during the 40 years of wandering. Therefore what was the purpose of reprimanding a generation for the sins of their fathers?

Normally, when we say farewell to a friend, we host a meal to honor him and give him gifts that he will treasure. Yet Moshe, when he was saying farewell to the Children of Israel before leaving this world, assembled the people to reprimand them for their misdeeds, and he preached to them. Why did he not follow the usual custom, thereby departing from them in joy?

Our Fathers Did Not Understand Him

When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "*Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites*" (*Bamidbar 31:2*), Moshe and the Children of Israel knew that his death would follow this war. In fact our Sages have said, "*See the great love that the shepherds of Israel have for their people, to the point of not hearing that the war with Midian would precipitate the death of Moshe*" (*Sifrei, Bamidbar 157b*). It is

written, "*What shall I do for this people? A little more and they will stone me*" (*Shemot 17:4*), which means that the war with Midian would precipitate Moshe's death. The Children of Israel began to hide themselves, but they were still, despite their wishes, called into the army, as it is written: "*So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel…twelve thousand armed for war*" (*Bamidbar 31:5*). From the fact that they did not wish to be called into the army to fight against Midian, Moshe realized how much they loved him.

Moshe knew that the Children of Israel would understand him after 40 years, for it is written: "*It may take a person 40 years to know the mind of his teacher*" (*Avodah Zarah 5b*). Since they understood him, they knew just how devoted to them he had been during all these years, how many times he had prayed for them, and how many times he made himself sick over them. Moshe even asked G-d to wipe his name out of the Torah in order to forgive the Children of Israel. They realized that Moshe had acted with them like a father with his children, above and beyond every possible measure. They also realized that their fathers, because they did not understand Moshe, were not aware of this.

Diminishing Their Love

The Holy One, blessed be He, did not reveal Moshe's burial place because of their great love for him. Otherwise, all the Children of Israel would have gone to pray by his grave, and not a single person would have entered Eretz Israel. He therefore concealed it from them.

This is why Moshe was afraid that the Children of Israel might lose hope upon his passing, since they loved him so much. They also knew that without him, not the slightest trace of Israel would have remained. Who was now going to prevent the Attribute of Justice from accusing them? Perhaps the Satan would drive the Children of Israel mad?

Hence Moshe began to reprimand them in order to diminish their great love for him. In fact when a rabbi reprimands his students, they will reluctantly feel a certain degree of animosity entering their hearts, for no one likes to be reprimanded, as it is written: "*If a scholar is loved by the townspeople, it is not due to his superiority, but because he does not rebuke them*" (*Ketubot 105b*). Moshe wanted to diminish their love for him to a certain degree. Why? To prevent this love from leading them to err after a certain time.

What were the reprimands that Moshe made? He reviewed the entire Torah before the Children of Israel, saying to them: If you fulfill all the mitzvot written here, which I have taught you during all these years, good. Otherwise, if you emulate your fathers, who worshipped the golden calf and bowed before Peor, you will not enter Eretz Israel.

Even After His Death

This is extraordinary. Despite everything he did, Moshe was unable to diminish their love for him, which we see from how they mourned his passing. In fact when

Moshe died, we read: "*The Children of Israel wept for Moshe in the plains of Moab for 30 days*" (*Devarim 34:8*). The Midrash states, "*They wept for him 30 days before his death, all because of their great love for him despite his reprimands, for 40 years had passed and they understood him and realized that he had been completed devoted to them during all those years*" (*Sifrei, Devarim 257*).

From here we learn that Moshe only reprimanded the Children of Israel because of the great love that he had for them. It was also because he was afraid that after his death, the Satan would come and make them lose hope. This teaches us just how great Moshe's compassion was, for he was worried about what would happen to the people even after his passing, afraid that the Satan would come and lead them astray.

Even after Moshe's passing, he continued to worry about the Children of Israel. In comparing similar expression that occur in two passages (*Devarim 34:5 and Shemot 34:28*), the Gemara states: "*As in the latter passage [when Moshe was alive] it means standing and ministering, so also in the former [when Moshe died] it means standing and ministering*" (*Sotah 13b*). From here we learn that Moshe had no intention of humiliating the Children of Israel through his reprimands. He did so only because he loved them, for he was afraid that their love for him would eventually lead to problems.

One Who Studies Torah with Reviewing It

Our Sages have called this book *Mishnah Torah* ("Repetition of the Torah"), for it contains nothing new. It consists entirely of a repetition of the things that were said in previous books, and we find only a very few passages or mitzvot containing new elements. Nevertheless, since there exist certain passages that have not been stated elsewhere, why is the book called Mishneh Torah? After all, it contains new things as well. We also need to understand why the book begins with words of admonishment.

We may explain this by citing the beginning of Moshe's admonition, which he issued to the Children of Israel: "*Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: 'Enough of your dwelling by this mountain'*" (*Devarim 1:6*). We need to understand why he uses the term Horev rather than Sinai. In every account of the giving of the Torah, the mountain is called Sinai, not Horev, as it is written: "*All of Mount Sinai was smoking*" (*Shemot 19:18*), "*Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai*" (*v.20*), and "*The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai*" (*v.23*). Therefore why did he mention Horev here rather than Sinai, which is used for the giving the Torah?

The answer is that Moshe told the Children of Israel that they had a mitzvah to discover new teachings in the Torah. The word horev is formed by the same letters as rahav (*large*), as it is written: "*I shall walk varehava [in large pathways]*" (*Tehillim 119:45*). Here Rashi explains that King David acted in ways that were widely accepted and widespread in Israel. From the fact that a person studies Torah and reviews it numerous times, he can discover new teachings that he did not find at first, as the Gemara states: "*One who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one*

who studies it 101 times" (*Chagigah 9b*). Furthermore, the Mishnah says: "*Learn it over and over, for everything is in it*" (*Pirkei Avoth 5:21*). The more that a person goes over the Torah's words, the more new teachings he will merit to find in it.

This is why Moshe gave the Children of Israel several new passages in this book, this Mishneh Torah. It was to show them that the more a person studies Torah, and the more he reviews his studies, the more flavor he will find in it. One must not say, "*I've studied this passage two or three times – why should I come back to it? Better to study something new, something that I've never studied before.*" The Sages have already responded to such an attitude by saying, "*Whosoever studies Torah but does not review it is like one who plants without harvesting*" (*Sanhedrin 99a*).

I've Studied Again and Again

Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan (*ch. 24*) states that a person can study Torah for ten years and forget it in two. How? If someone studies for six months and does not review it, he will end up saying that the pure is impure and the impure is pure. For twelve months without review, he will mix up the Sages. For eighteen months without review, he will forget the main passages. For twenty-four months without review, he will forget the main tractates.

Furthermore, by constantly reviewing what he has learned, a person will not fall into sin, for his every thought will cleave to the words of the holy Torah. The Children of Israel allowed themselves to be led astray by the daughters of Moav because they did not review their studies, as it is written: "*Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moav*" (*Bamidbar 25:1*). What pushed them to do this with the daughters of Moab? It was because they did nothing and failed to review their studies. People said, "*I've studied again and again, so why should I continue to study? I've already learned everything, so now I want to rest a little.*" At that very instant, the daughters of Moav were able to seduce them.

It is also said, "*Whoever occupies himself with Torah for its own sake merits many things. … He becomes like a fountain which flows with ever-increasing strength*" (*Pirkei Avoth 6:1*). It is said that when the Arizal taught Torah to his students, the fountains of wisdom opened before him. He could not say a word, and he had to ask Hashem for words of Torah to enter into his head little by little, not all at once. Only one who studies Torah for the sake of Heaven and reviews what he has learned can merit this.

In this regard our Sages have said, "*May the words of Torah not seem like something old in your eyes, but like something new, towards which everyone runs*" (*Sifrei, Va'etchanan 6:8*). When words of Torah seem new to a person, and when he studies them as if he had never done so before, he will be able to find discover new teachings in it.

To prevent the Children of Israel from saying, "*If so, if we have to constantly review and repeat our studies, we may add to the number of mitzvot,*" Moshe said: "*These are the words.*" This teaches us that we must not add to them or take away from them, as the Sages have taught: " *'These are the words' [Shemot 19:6] – no less and no more*" (*Mechilta,*

BaChodesh 2). Here too, Moshe warned the Children of Israel: Although you have a mitzvah to review your studies, don't think that you have a right to change the essentials.

As If I Knew Nothing

Moshe also said to Hashem, "*You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand*" (*Devarim 3:24*). Let us think about this: Was it only at that point that Hashem showed Moshe His strong hand? Why did he say, "*You have begun*"? Moshe told the Children of Israel, "*Now that I will die, do you think that I have succeeded in knowing the greatness of G-d and His powerful hand? Know that there is no man in this world who knows the ways of G-d. Each day I realize that my understanding of the previous day is like nothing. Each day I again see the greatness and the powerful hand of G-d, and it seems as if I had never seen them before.*" These were the words of admonishment that Moshe gave them here, namely that the Torah's words must seem new to them each day, and that they must review their studies.

The Midrash states, "*This book is only called Mishnah Torah because it explains to us what was hidden, either because conditions were lacking, or things were repeated for fear of negligence on our part, or because a mitzvah was never given, teaching us that the essence of the book is to strengthen what has already been said.*"

Soul-Searching to Prepare for Learning Torah

It is written, "*These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel*" (*Devarim 1:1*).

Once the Torah had been given by Moshe and he remained on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights to annul himself before Hashem, he knew that the Torah does not lead to pride, but on the contrary to humility. After the giving of the Torah, the verse testifies that Moshe "*was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth*" (*Bamidbar 12:3*). Hence the present verse says eleh ha-devarim (*"these are the words"*), for everywhere the term eleh appears, it disqualifies what came before it (*Bereshith Rabba 12:3*). Thus Moshe told the Children of Israel, "*In the past I said, 'I am not a man of words,' for since I had not tasted of Torah, I feared that I might grow proud. Yet now I have tasted of Torah, 'these are the words that Moshe spoke' – and words of Torah lead man to humility, which is not what I thought at first.*"

How do words of Torah lead to humility? By words of admonishment! If you do not listen to admonishment, the Torah will lead you not to humility, but to pride. It is said, "*G-d says to the wicked, 'For what purpose do you recount My decrees…for you hate admonishment and you threw My words behind you'*" (*Tehillim 50:16-17*). Which evildoer does G-d abhor? It is the proud, as the Sages teach: "*Of every arrogant man, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'*" (*Sotah 5a*). Since that is the case, he has no part in the holy Torah. Why not? Because he detests admonishment.

Earlier it was written, "*I am not a man of words*" (*Shemot 4:10*). How is this possible? Initially, before the Torah was given, Moshe said: "*I am not a man [ish] of words*"

– am I someone who can bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt? Here the term ish designates an important man. Moshe annulled the "*I*" (*anochi*) – he did not want the Torah to be given through him – for he wanted to be like all other Jews who listen to their teacher. This is because he feared that he would grow proud through the knowledge of Torah. Hence Hashem told him to send Aaron, for he also wanted to hear Torah from the mouth of Aaron.

I have seen in a short pamphlet from Rav Elimelech of Lizensk Zatzal that everyone must completely repent before learning Torah.

I once went to see my teacher Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal, and he told me that he was busy writing a book on Shev Shematata by Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heller Zatzal, the author of Ketzot HaChoshen. He added, "*Know that whenever this holy Rav began to study, before opening a book he would isolate himself and begin to search his soul, saying: 'G-d says to the wicked, "For what purpose do you recount My decrees?*" ' He did this because he believed, according to his level, that he was not worthy of studying the holy Torah. Hence each time that he began to study, he admonished himself, reflecting upon his deeds and repenting in order to infuse himself with humility. He was therefore able to grow and write important books such as Ketzot HaChoshen and Shev Shematata, for he studied Torah with tremendous humility." (Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heller's fear of Heaven led him to write an introduction to Shev Shematata that is filled with zeal.)

How to Attain True Humility

My teacher Zatzal told me that if such was the case for the author of Ketzot HaChoshen, how much more should we search our souls before learning, in order for the Torah to manifest itself in us! Yet because of our many sins, the opposite takes place, and we see that when people go to the study at the Beit HaMidrash, before making their way inside they make a few telephone calls, smoke a cigarette or two, and then enter and chat a little with their chavruta about current issues, what is happening at work and at home. Only then do they open a book to study, leaving just half the time or less which they had set aside for learning. That is how we prepare ourselves for learning: Instead of concentrating with zeal, we spend our days in useless pursuits, and nobody watches out for it.

If people really cared about reflecting upon their deeds before learning Torah, annulling themselves before Hashem as the author of Ketzot HaChoshen did, they would not neglect Torah or grow proud through learning, for one who annuls his entire being is incapable of directing his focus on things other than Torah. When we focus on useless pursuits because we have not annulled ourselves before learning, the Torah that we study will lead us to failure.

In general, one cannot attain humility through Torah if it is not accompanied by admonishment and Mussar. When someone studies Torah without admonishment, not only will his Torah not lead to humility, it will lead him to pride. Our Sages have warned us against learning Torah in order to derive honor from it: "*Rabbi Tzadok said,*

'Do not make it a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an axe with which to cut.' So too Hillel used to say, 'He who exploits the crown [of Torah] shall perish. Indeed, you have learned from this: Whoever derives personal gain from words of Torah removes his life from the world'" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:5*).

This is why Moshe repeated all these mitzvot to the Children of Israel here, beginning with words of admonishment. It is therefore written, "*These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel,*" as Rashi explains: "*Since these are words of admonishment….*" Moshe wanted to hint to them how the Torah would lead them to humility, given that they would examine their deeds before learning. If they acted in this way, they could rest assured that Torah would lead them to humility and the fear of Heaven.

Who is Rich? He Who is Aware of His Role!

Sefer Devarim begins with a description of Moshe's words from Hashem to the Children of Israel: "*On the other side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying: 'Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. Turn yourselves around and journey, and come to the Amorite mountain…'*" (*Devarim 1:5-7*). The words of this passage require clarification. What does the Torah mean by saying: "*Enough of your dwelling on this mountain*"?

We also need to explain what Rashi says here: "*Enough of your dwelling – according to its plain meaning [it refers to the extended length of time]. However there is an Aggadic interpretation: You have received much fame and reward as a result of having dwelled on this mountain. You constructed the Sanctuary, the Menorah, and [sacred] vessels; you received the Torah; you appointed a Sanhedrin for yourselves, officers in charge of hundreds, and officers of thousands.*" This explanation seems to contain two difficulties, the first being what we have already mentioned, namely what connection this has with the statement: "*Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying.*" The second difficulty is why, in such a case, G-d said to them: "*Turn yourselves around and journey*"? Why not remain there, by the mountain where they had accomplished so many things, and where they had merited so many privileges?

A few remarks before we proceed: The Holy One, blessed be He, created man with wisdom, each individual having his own particular abilities. G-d breathed into man's nostrils "*a breath of life*" (*Bereshith 2:7*), which the Targum translates as "*a speaking soul.*" This wisdom is something astounding, something unfathomably deep, and it develops from childhood to old age, the point at which a person is called *zaken* ("elder"), from the expression *zeh kana chochma* ("this one has acquired wisdom"). If we see that an older person is amazed by the same things that amazed him in childhood, it means that he is a fool, that his intelligence has not properly developed. Generally speaking, one who acquires wisdom progresses in life, meaning that if he loved a certain game in his youth, he will no longer play it once he matures. It is a very simple concept.

We must realize that just as a person's interests change as he grows older, likewise his role on earth also changes. The situation is like a worker who is hired at a factory, and whose initial task consists of cleaning the factory. Little by little, he rises in position until he is eventually named as the factory director. If at that point he begins to clean instead of directing the factory, he is not doing his job properly! The same applies to man, who goes through several stages in life from the age of five (when he must learn Scripture) until the age of 80, and at each stage he has a particular task to undertake. In addition to the general tasks that are incumbent on all men, there are specific responsibilities that are meant for him alone.

For example, people believe that a rich man is someone who possesses large amounts of money and numerous possessions. However our Sages have taught: "*Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot*" (*Pirkei Avot 4:1*). This means that the truly rich are not those whose homes are filled with silver and gold, but rather those who are content with what they have, even if their possessions consist of very little. In fact wealth is measured in proportion to what a person feels that he is lacking, which is why someone who is content with what he has, and does not want more, is very rich. Yet someone who possesses numerous homes, large bank accounts, and luxury cars – and yet still desires more cars, more homes, and so on – is someone who is poor, for he is "*lacking*" so much.

Furthermore, the Sages have taught that "*jealousy, desire, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world*" (*Pirkei Avot 4:21*), for a person must be content with what Heaven has given him. He should not ask for more, nor should he look at what others have and desire their home, their income, or the respect which they enjoy from others. In fact every individual has an entire world for himself, a world that is absolutely specific to him alone.

The Midrash recounts an extraordinary story from which we can all draw a lesson in this regard: One of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students left Eretz Israel and grew rich, which caused his other students to grow jealous and want to leave Eretz Israel as well. When Rabbi Shimon learned of this, he realized that these other students were clearly not motivated by money, but by a desire to study Torah day and night with complete peace of mind. Nevertheless, he wanted to prevent them from leaving, for such is not the way of the Torah. What did he do? He gathered his students and brought them to a valley, and there he prayed: "*Valley, valley, become filled with gold dinarim.*" At that point the valley began to fill with gold dinarim before their very eyes. Rabbi Shimon said to his students: "*If it's gold that you want, here it is. Come and take it. Yet know that everything you take will be deducted from your share in the World to Come, for we receive no reward for the study of Torah in this world, only in the World to Come.*"

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai showed his students that if it was gold they wanted, they could have it, but only at the cost of their share in the World to Come. You can take gold, you can become wealthy, but you will lose your soul. From here we see just how

suspicious we should be of money that is not destined to us by natural means, for all the effort that we make to obtain it by other means is liable to be "*at the cost*" of our World to Come. Hence Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students left without touching any of the gold in the valley, as the Midrash says (*Shemot Rabba 52:3*).

Let us add something else: Everyone has their own role to play in this world, and the role of one is not like the role of another. One receives the trial of poverty, while another receives the trial of wealth. One receives trials in the area of sustenance, while another receives them in the area of children or health, and that is his role on earth. If a poor person wants to become rich, it is possible that his wish will be granted through supplications and prayer, but he will have lost his world in the process, for he will not have fulfilled his task on earth, the task for which his soul – which is a divine spark – was sent here to accomplish. Hence if a person wants to become rich, he may do so, but at that point he will lose his World to Come, for the World to Come is granted for overcoming the trials and difficulties that are destined to us, and for having fulfilled the Torah under the most difficult of circumstances, despite our desires and numerous obstacles. We may therefore say: "*Who is rich? He who is aware of his role!*"

Now that we have gone over this, we can better understand what the passage in this week's parsha is saying: "*Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. Turn yourselves around and journey, and come to the Amorite mountain….*" In fact when a person sees that he has achieved great success in a certain area, having overcome obstacles and acquired possessions, he has no desire to move on. Yet sometimes, despite all this, his task is to move on to another area, for that is Hashem's will. Likewise he must rejoice in his lot, in the role that he has been assigned on earth, be it in poverty or wealth. He must rejoice in the role that has been given to him. This is what Moshe taught the Children of Israel by telling them: "*Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. Turn yourselves around and journey.*" In other words: It is true that you merited great things at the foot of this mountain – the Torah, the Menorah, the sacred vessels, the Sanhedrin and your officers – but now you have completed the task that the Creator has given to you in this area, which is why you must continue and move on. There is no greater Torah explanation than this realization: "*Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying,*" this being the answer to all the questions that we raised at the outset.

Moshe's Reprimand: The Torah and Unity Defeat the Evil Inclination

At the beginning of the parsha, we find Moshe's admonishment to the Children of Israel. He reprimands them by means of the places where they had upset G-d, telling them that they can do teshuvah despite having sinned. If reprimands can make their way into a person's heart, they can help him to repent, as it is written: "*Take words with you and return to Hashem*" (*Hosea 14:3*). Moshe reprimanded the Children of Israel by way of allusion, however, because he did not want to shame them (*Sifrei*). In reflecting upon this, we can discover which reprimands lay hidden in his words.

"*On the other side of the Jordan*" (*Devarim 1:1*) – this alludes to the fact that repentance is useful for the sinner's entire past, meaning all his evil deeds, for the numerical value of the term *yarden* ("Jordan"), including the word itself, is the same as *rah* ("evil"). In other words, *teshuvah* (repentance) is effective against all that is *rah* (evil). The term *bamidbar* ("in the desert") encompasses the word *midbar*, which evokes *daber* (to speak). This alludes to the fact that repentance is useful for all the frivolous words that a person has spoken.

The term *ba'arava* ("in the plain") is formed by the same letters as *ba'avera* ("in sin"), signifying that teshuvah is effective against all sins. "*Opposite Suf*" alludes to effective advice on how to outsmart the evil inclination. As the Sages have said, "*Let a person remind himself of the day of death*" (*Berachot 5a*), for death (*sof*) is the fate of all men. The Sages explain that recalling the day of death enables a person to always remain upright before Hashem his G-d.

When we reflect on all of this, we will automatically start to perform mitzvot, which are called fruit, leaving behind all that is not important. This is the meaning of "*between Paran and Tophel,*" for *Paran* evokes *peri* (fruit), and *Tophel* evokes things that are *tephelim* (not important).

In the final analysis, the evil inclination does not weaken when someone repents. In fact it once again tries to kill him (*Kiddushin 30b; Kallah 2a*). On the other hand, the good inclination encourages a person to do mitzvot. He therefore finds himself in the middle, having to overcome all kinds of obstacles in order to remain white and pure, without sin. Even if he has often transgressed, his premeditated sins will be considered merits when he repents out of love (*Yoma 86b; see also Bava Metzia 33b*). Indeed, "*If your sins are like scarlet, they will become white [lavan] as snow*" (*Isaiah 1:18*); hence the expression "*and Lavan*" (*Devarim 1:1*). Only in this way will we merit to sit in the courtyards (*hatzerot*) of the house of Hashem in the World to Come, which explains the expression "*and Hatzerot*" (*ibid.*). There we will receive the reward for our work, which is the meaning of "*and Di-Zahav*" (*ibid.*), for zahav is gold.

We may also explain Moshe's admonishment as follows: If a person wants to defeat the evil inclination and remain white (*lavan*), he must follow the advice of the Sages: "*If that repulsive wretch [the evil inclination] meets you, drag him to the Beit HaMidrash*" (*Sukkah 52b*). These are the courtyards (*hatzerot*) of Hashem. In so doing, we will arrive at *Di-Zahav* (gold), meaning we will attain all that is good – an abundance of blessing and success granted by the Creator of the universe.

We can also explain Moshe's admonishment kabbalistically. In the expression *ve'Di-Zahav*, the letters forming the term *ve'Di* have a combined numerical value, including the term itself, of 21. Also having a numerical value of 21 is the Divine Name *E-hyeh*, through which G-d appeared to the Children of Israel (*Shemot 3:14*). The Children of Israel, however, made a calf of gold (*zahav*) and said: "*This is your G-d, O Israel*" (*ibid. 32:4*). Hence Moshe reprimanded them by way of allusion, saying: *ve'Di-Zahav – ve'Di* [same numerical value as the Name of G-d], you have exchanged Him for zahav

(gold) and you must repent. Furthermore, there is no mitzvah that does not contain Hashem's Name. Now we know that the word mitzvah is formed by the same letters as the Tetragrammaton, for the letters mem and tzadi become yud and hei via Atbash [a simple substitution cipher]. Along with the letters vav and hei, the term mitzvah thus forms the Tetragrammaton. In fact a person who takes a mitzvah – which contains Hashem's Name, the numerical value of which is the same as ve'Di – and exchanges it for *zahav* (gold), meaning for the present world, has exchanged his Creator for gold. His punishment will be severe, and he must immediately and wholeheartedly repent. According to this explanation, we can understand the essence of Tu B'Av (*the 15th of Av*), which immediately proceeds Parsha Devarim and Tisha B'Av. As we know, Tu B'Av rectifies many sins, including those mentioned by Moshe in his admonishment.

The Sages have said, "*For Israel, there were never greater days of joy than Av 15*" (*Mishnah in Taanith 26b*). This is difficult to understand, for how can we claim that Av 15 was greater than, say, Rosh Hashanah or Shavuot?

We may explain this by noting that it was precisely on Av 15 that joy was complete, for even the daughters of the wealthy went out in borrowed plain clothes in order not to shame those girls who could not afford nice ones (*Taanith 26b*). There was an awakening below in the realm of men, an awakening that caused peace and unity to reign. As we know, this leads to an awakening above, one that brings abundance and peace upon the entire world.

Such is not the case for the other holidays, which do not contain the concept of equality between rich and poor. During other holidays, each person celebrates in his own particular way. Hence from this point of view, there is no holiday that can compare to Av 15. It is a day that marks unity, and unity leads to all good things and the rectification of misdeeds. As such, we may rectify all that is mentioned in Moshe's admonishment.

We may also explain why Av 15 was specifically selected for this purpose, rather than some other day, as well as why five things happened to the Children of Israel on that day, as our Sages have said. What does this day represent?

In my humble opinion, several catastrophes occurred during the month of Av, starting from the time of the spies. The Children of Israel wept throughout the night of the 9th of Av, without justification, and as a result Hashem established their tears for the generations to come. The Temple was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins as well as baseless hatred. Hence it is fitting for this month to be precisely the one in which Hashem performs miracles and wonders for the Jewish people, in order that we may return to Him and He may forgive us. At that point, He will pour out all His kindnesses upon us.

In fact G-d provided the cure before the ailment, and on Av 15 the people of the generation of the desert ceased dying. At that point, all the Children of Israel saw that Hashem had forgiven them, which is why they later forgave the tribe of Benjamin and were reunited.

Why precisely the 15th? Fifteen is the numerical value of *yud-hei*, and we know that this Name alludes to peace and the Shechinah. As the Sages have said (*Sotah 17a*), if a man (*ish*) and woman (*ishah*) are worthy, the *Shechinah* dwells among them, for *ish* contains the letter *yud* and *ishah* contains the letter *hei*. Hence there is peace and the *Shechinah* between them. In the opposite case, the *yud* is removed from *ish* and the *hei* is removed from *ishah*, leaving the letters aleph and shin. These letters form *aish* ("fire"), meaning that a fire will devour them.

Since the number 15 symbolizes the Divine Name that denotes peace, Hashem chose it precisely in order to show the Jewish people that He is their father. Hence they should also demonstrate unity and peace towards one another, for the poor received from the wealthy, and the wealthy went to visit the poor. In this way, they rectified the sin of baseless hatred.

By way of allusion, we may say that this evokes Av 15 itself, for the expression *chamisha assar menachem av* ("Av 15") has the same numerical value as the words *yom achdut ve'ahava l'Israel* ("a day of unity and love for Israel").

This is what Moshe's admonishment alludes to: Learning Torah, showing unity, and demonstrating love for one another. In that case, it becomes possible to rectify all misdeeds and do complete teshuvah. We see an allusion to this in the numerical values of the expressions in Moshe's admonishment.

In fact the expression eleh hadevarim asher diber Moshe (*"these are the words that Moshe spoke"*) has the exact numerical value as the words *achdut otzar haberachot* ("unity is a treasure-trove of blessings"). Furthermore, the expression *eleh hadevarim asher diber Moshe el kol Israel* ("*these are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel*") has the same numerical value as the words *haTorah nitzachon hayetzer harah* ("*the Torah and unity ensure victory over the evil inclination*"). It is only by these words that we can conquer the evil inclination and reach Av 15, which is a holiday for Israel.

Conflict in the Home is like the Destruction of the Temple

It is written, "*How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?*" (*Devarim 1:12*).

This week's parsha is usually read during the sad period of the year when our Temple was destroyed (between Tammuz 17 and Tisha B'Av). We find an allusion here to Megillat Eichah, which is read on Tisha B'Av, for the term eichah appears in both texts: "*How [eichah] can I alone carry*" and "*How [eichah] she sits in solitude*" (*Eicha 1:1*).

Our Sages ask, "*Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of…idolatry, immorality, bloodshed. … Yet why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of charity? Because of baseless hatred*" (*Yoma 9b*). The Gemara asks which sin was worse: "*Were the earlier generations better, or the later ones?*" It replies, "*Look upon the Temple!*" In other words, the earlier generations witnessed the rebuilding of the Temple, but not

the later generations. Since it has not yet been rebuilt after 2,000 years, it is clear that baseless hatred is a graver sin that those committed by the earlier generations. That being the case, the way to remedy this is through baseless love. I once heard a Torah giant of our generation commenting upon the Sages' statement: "*Whosoever partakes of the wedding meal of a bridegroom…it is as if he has restored one of the ruins of Jerusalem*" (*Berachot 6b*). He noted that at first glance, it is difficult to see the connection between rejoicing newlyweds and rebuilding the ruins of Jerusalem. Yet as we know, rejoicing newlyweds is an extremely important mitzvah that allows us to merit the five expressions of joy mentioned in regard to the wedding ceremony, as well as to acquire Torah. A person who sings, dances, and rejoices in honor of newlyweds whom he does not personally know demonstrates selfless love, and he rectifies the baseless hatred that caused the destruction of our Temple. Hence the text considers him to have rebuilt the ruins of Jerusalem. It is as if he has repaired what has been broken, thus contributing to the reconstruction of the Temple by spreading baseless love, rather than the baseless hatred that brought about its destruction.

According to what we have said, I would like to explain the following teaching of our Sages: "*If a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears*" (*Gittin 90b*). Why is it precisely the altar that sheds tears? The answer is given by Rabbi Akiva, who said: "*If husband [ish] and wife [ishah] merit it, the Shechinah rests upon them. Otherwise, fire consumes them*" (*Sotah 17a*). When they merit it, G-d places the yud from His Name in the man (*ish*) and the hei from His Name in the woman (*ishah*). When they do not merit it, however, G-d withdraws the letters of His Name from them, leaving them with *esh* ("fire"), which consumes them. When man and wife live in peace, love, and harmony – each of them concerned for the other and trying to shower them with kindness – their home becomes a place where baseless love is expressed, and by this merit their home becomes like the Temple, since G-d's Name (*Y–H*) is found in them and the Shechinah rests upon them. In the opposite case, baseless hatred will develop among a couple that is torn apart by quarrels, disputes and arguments. In fact hatred burns like a fire, and therefore each of them will do things to upset the other and harm them without reason, simply due to a lack of love. This baseless hatred distances the Name of G-d from their home, which then becomes like the ruins of the Temple. In that case, the Temple and its vessels shed tears, especially the altar, the main purpose of which is to establish peace between Jews and their Father in Heaven by enabling the bringing of offerings, by which Hashem forgives the sins of His children. Yet now that this home, which is a sanctuary, has destroyed itself through the baseless hatred that has come between the couple, to the point of leading them to divorce, the altar sheds tears because it senses that the Temple is still far from being rebuilt. In fact it was destroyed because of baseless hatred, which continues to be powerfully felt.

Much to our despair, lewdness in the diaspora is so powerful that it becomes difficult to protect ourselves from forbidden images. To guard ourselves from it requires a

tremendous sacrifice. Nevertheless, those who fear Hashem and respect Torah manage to control what they look at and avoid appalling impurity. How do they merit this?

In reality, everything begins in the home. When man and wife live in peace and love, the Shechinah abides with them and G-d's Name (*Y–H*) rests upon them. The Shechinah accompanies them with every step they take, both inside the home and out. A man who lives in such an atmosphere is not interested in the lewd sights that surround him, for he is enveloped by the holy Shechinah that accompanies and protects him from all sin. In the opposite case, if the home is destroyed and conflict reigns within, the Shechinah withdraws itself and we find ourselves at the mercy of our evil inclination, even outside the home. It is up to us to realize how important it is to respect our spouse. We sometimes see certain individuals being very considerate with their friends, being polite and demonstrating good manners, listening to their concerns and helping them with their needs. Yet these very same individuals will adopt a poor and reprehensible attitude toward their spouses, failing to demonstrate concern or respect, and even hurting them with wrongful words. Why? Because they think that they are the masters of their own home, that everyone should listen to their instructions and satisfy their desires, and woe to anyone who disregards their orders! However we must be aware that such behavior is destructive, and that the Shechinah will distance itself with any opening left for baseless hatred, which is tantamount to the Temple being destroyed once more. Whoever considers the gravity of the destruction of the First and Second Temples will realize that in a home where conflict resides, multiple sanctuaries are destroyed because of the numerous sins of the couple, and that the Temple as well as its ruined vessels shed tears as a result.

We must strengthen ourselves both in Torah study and the fulfillment of mitzvot, scrupulously and meticulously. In doing so, we will extinguish baseless hated both for others and for our spouse, and we will develop baseless love and merit the Final Redemption, speedily and in our days. Amen.

Va'etchanan

Unity and Torah Study in Humility Will Bring About the Coming Deliverance

It is written, "*Comfort, comfort My people, says your G-d*" (*Isaiah 40:1*). Concerning this double expression, the Sages have said: "*They sinned doubly…were punished doubly – as it is written: 'She has received double for all her sins from the hand of the L-RD' [Isaiah 40:2] – and are comforted doubly*" (*Eicha Rabba 1:57*). We also note that this haftorah is read on the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av (*Rambam, Hilchot Tefilah 13:19*) in order to remind the Jewish people that destruction came upon the land due to the baseless hatred they felt for one another (*Yoma 9b*). Hence they must live together in unity in order to rectify this sin, thereby ending our exile and leading to the Final Redemption.

We realize just how important unity is, for the Torah would not have been given to the Jewish people without it. As Rashi cites the Sages on the verse, "*Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain*" (*Exodus 19:2*), the Children of Israel acted "*as a single person with a single heart.*" In fact a substantial portion of the Torah's mitzvot deal with a person's relationship to his fellow, meaning that a lack of unity among Jews contravenes the Torah.

We can only achieve true unity through humility, as it is written: "*They stood at the bottom of the mountain*" (*Exodus 19:17*). This alludes to humility, a trait that Mount Sinai exhibited, as the Sages have said: "*What is the meaning of the verse, 'Why do you prance [teratzedun], O you mountains of majestic peaks?' [Psalms 68:17]. A Heavenly voice went out and said to them, 'Why do you seek judgment [tirtzu din] against Sinai? You are all full of blemishes in comparison to Sinai!'*" (*Megillah 29a*). The Sages have also said, "*A man should always learn from the mind of his Creator. For behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused His Shechinah to abide upon Mount Sinai*" (*Sotah 5a*). The Children of Israel stood at the base of Mount Sinai, meaning that they were more humble than it. This is what the prophet Isaiah alludes to by saying, "*Comfort, comfort My people.*" That is, since the Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred and a negligence in Torah study, it can only be rectified by unity, otherwise it would be useless for Jews to study the holy Torah that was given in 40 days on Mount Sinai (*Exodus 24:18; Menachot 99b*). We find this idea alluded to in the word *nachamu* ("comfort"), a word formed from chanu mem, meaning that this sin can only be rectified through unity, as at the giving of the Torah, and by a desire to study Torah, which was given in 40 days. Hence the prophet Isaiah said "*comfort*" twice, meaning that Hashem consoles the Children of Israel for the destruction of the Temple, be it the First Temple, which was destroyed by a negligence in Torah study, or the Second Temple, which was destroyed by the sin of baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b*). The fact that they have a way to rectify this sin constitutes the tremendous consolation

that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to the Children of Israel after all the suffering caused by such destruction. This tells us that our deliverance is truly standing at the door, and that just a small act of baseless love on our part, as well as the study of Torah, will lead to our swift deliverance.

On this subject the Sages have said that the Holy One, blessed be He, combines good intentions with deeds (*Kiddushin 40a; Zohar I:28b*). If He sees that a person has the desire and will to study Torah, and that he yearns to become an expert in all its fields – yet cannot reach the level that his heart desires because of limited intelligence – then the Creator will consider him as the greatest in his generation.

Yet because of our many sins, we see just how the Satan defeats us. Immediately after Tisha B'Av, everyone leaves on vacation, and instead of repenting on Shabbat Nachamu, we commit yet another sin. Instead of augmenting our Torah learning and performance of mitzvot, we neglect the Torah even more than during the rest of the year. Not only that, but we also engage in sexual immorality, an extremely grave sin, since Israel went into exile and Jerusalem was destroyed on account of it (*Zohar III:77b*). It is said that a person's brain is so affected by debauchery that a barrier is created between the sinner and Hashem, a barrier that makes repentance impossible (*ibid. 44b*). Similarly, a vacation in the month of Av leads to such spiritual slacking that a person no longer fears the month of Elul. In fact during the Days of Awe, he will still be under the influence of his vacation and all that accompanied it because of the harmful effects it had on him. It will also be difficult for him to get up early and recite selichot, or to implore Hashem to pardon his sins. Even if he actually goes to synagogue, it may prove detrimental to him, for the evil inclination will lead him to think that the Holy One, blessed be He, has truly forgiven all his sins and that he has nothing to fear. The evil inclination will tell such a person, "*Just give tzeddakah and do kaparot, and you'll be inscribed for a good life!*"

Thus we see just how cunning the Satan is, and how it can toy with a person, who by comparison is foolish and possesses little intelligence. He follows everything the evil inclination entices him with, as it convinces him to relax and take advantage of this world. The only way to be saved from its trickery is to study the holy Torah, as it is written: "*If this wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit Midrash*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). The Sages have also said, "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote*" (*ibid.*). Thus a person is forbidden to think that he loves Hashem with his entire heart simply because he rises early every morning, gives a great deal of tzeddakah, and has faith in the Sages. In fact someone who does not learn Torah and does not fix regular times for its study is liable to commit numerous sins – even serious ones that the Torah explicitly mentions – without even noticing it.

May Hashem help us to achieve unity and study the Torah in humility. As such we will merit the fulfillment of the verse *Ga'al Hashem avdi Ya'akov* (*"The L-RD has redeemed His servant Jacob"*), which has the same numerical value (328) as *Nachamu, nachamu* ami (*"Comfort, comfort My people"*), signifying the coming of our deliverer, speedily and in our days, amen.

The Power of Prayer and Torah at all Times

It is written, "*I implored the L-RD at that time*" (*Deuteronomy 3:23*). What time is this referring to? I have read in the name of the gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal that here we learn that a person must not say, "*This time is suitable for Torah and prayer, but that time is not. I can therefore relax in my service of Hashem, for I don't have the strength, the mind, or the time to study. However when I have the time, then I'll study.*" No! All times are good for prayer and Torah study. All times are suitable, and now is the best time. We must not neglect any opportunity to pray and study.

Why is this so? If a person sets aside a certain time by saying, "*Such and such a time is suitable for me,*" it may come and go without him, for whatever reason, having studied or prayed. In that case he will have wasted everything. This is why Rabbi Israel Salanter said that all times are equally suitable. Perhaps it is precisely when we will be free that an accusation will arise without anyone annulling it. Therefore when we have time, we must occupy ourselves with Torah and prayer. This is the meaning of "*at that time,*" an expression that has the same numerical value as the word *tov* ("good"). All times are good for Torah and prayer, and there is nothing good but Torah, as it is written: "*I have given you a good teaching, do not forsake My Torah*" (*Proverbs 4:2*). If Hashem enables you to find a time for Torah and prayer, you must not put it off – "*do not forsake My Torah.*"

There is something else that we must learn from this week's parsha. Moses pleaded and prayed to be allowed into Eretz Israel after the war with Midian, concerning which he was told: "*Afterwards you will be gathered to your people*" (*Numbers 31:2*). Now when a person hears that he is going to die, he is usually too overwhelmed to pray. Yet here Moses prayed in a very lucid way. This teaches us that it is precisely in a time of anguish and danger that we must focus our thoughts on serving Hashem and praying to Him. In this way we will not lose hope in the face of misfortune.

Parsha Va'etchanan is always read on Shabbat Nachamu, just after Tisha B'Av. The primary consolation that we receive over the destruction of the Temple is therefore Torah and prayer. This is because the exile, as we know, will end through the study of Torah. I have read that the disciples of the holy Rebbe of Sanz asked him what he did before prayer. He replied that before praying, he would pray "*to be able to pray at the time of prayer.*" This is what Moses did: "*I implored the L-RD*" – what supplication comes before prayer? "*At that time, saying*" – to be able to pray at the time of prayer. We find support for this idea in the Haftarah of Chazon Yeshayahu. In it, Hashem becomes angry and states that He does not desire offerings, nor the holidays or Sabbaths of the Children of Israel. Why? It is because they were content on simply setting aside time for themselves to study Torah, acting in accordance with the simple dictates of the law and not doing more than what was asked of them. In other words, they did not devote their spare time to the Torah. They did not use their spare time to study Torah, which is what led them to the three cardinal sins and the destruction of the Temple. This teaches us that a person must fix times for studying

Torah and add every moment of spare time to his study. He must not content himself on having set aside a certain time, for the world rests upon Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness. We know that a person is a world in microcosm, and he must tell himself: "*The world was created for me.*" Hence he must constantly study Torah and pray, for otherwise the world – his world – will be destroyed.

The Sages say, "*Why did Moses our teacher yearn to enter Eretz Israel? Did he want to eat of its fruit or satisfy himself from its bounty? However Moses said, 'Many mitzvot were commanded to Israel, and they can only be fulfilled in Eretz Israel'* " (*Sotah 14a*). This is difficult to understand. The entire Torah carries the name of Moses, as it is written: "*Remember the Torah of My servant Moses*" (*Malachi 3:22*) and "*The Torah that Moses commanded us*" (*Deuteronomy 33:4*). It is his heritage. Therefore when anybody studies Torah and performs a mitzvah, it is as if Moses himself was performing it. The disciples he formed for the generations to come and who fulfill the Torah especially carry his name, and he has a part in the entire Torah. That being said, why did he so greatly implore Hashem to enter Eretz Israel to perform mitzvot?

The answer is that Moses knew everything that a talmid chacham would ever be called upon to discover. Now there are 70 aspects to the Torah, which is the precisely why Moses wanted Hashem to let him enter Eretz Israel. He wanted to perform all that would be discovered in the Torah; he wanted to personally carry out all the mitzvot according to these 70 aspects. This is the meaning of the verse, "*I implored the L-RD at that time, saying*" – by saying each mitzvah in the way that every disciple would say and explain it. That is why he wanted to enter Eretz Israel so greatly. How can we arrive at such a lofty level? It is solely by regarding all moments as being equally suitable for studying Torah and for prayer. It is by seeing the entire world as being contained in the Torah. We can then attain the truth of the Torah, in which case we can also compare all the explanations and opinions on each mitzvah, seeing that there is no difference on the way to perform any mitzvah whatsoever. The Torah will be fully understood without any divergent views in Halachah. Even in the novelties that will be discovered, there will be no doubts. That is what Moses wanted. From here we see just how much we must pray in order to plumb the depths of the Torah without stumbling.

This enables us to understand why Moses wanted the Torah as a free gift like the tzaddikim. Understanding Torah (which is called "good") depends on the goodness of Hashem, Who gave it to us as a gift. Hence we also ask for understanding as a free gift. It was given to Israel through goodness, as it is written: "*One with a good eye will be blessed*" (*Proverbs 22:9*) – this is Moses, who conducted himself in regards to the Torah with a good eye, and who gave it to Israel. Therefore it is impossible to make the understanding of the Torah depend on merit and to say, "*It is by my merit that Hashem helped me to understand the Torah.*" This is because we may not possess such merit. Furthermore, how do we know that we are doing everything for the sake of Heaven, without any selfish interests at play, and that we possess such merit?

With regards to Moses himself, we see that he made nothing depend on good deeds. How much more should this apply to us, we who are but dust? We must therefore not make anything depend on merit, but simply put a great effort into studying Torah. We will certainly attain it in that case.

Leave No Place for the Evil Inclination

It is written, "*You shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for tatafot between your eyes*" (*Devarim 6:8*). The Torah mentions the tefillin of the arm before that of the head, whereas the Rambam adopts the reverse order, stating: "*These four parshiot – Kadesh Li, Vehaya Ki Yeviecha Hashem in the book of Shemot, and Shema, Vehaya Im Shamoa – are written separately, and we cover them with leather. This is called tefillin, and we place them on the head and attach them on the arm*" (*Hilchot Tefillin U'Mezuzah 1:1*). Hence the Rambam mentions the tefillin of the head before that of the arm, contrary to the order appearing in the Torah. This difference needs to be explained.

Let us first cite a statement made by the Tur regarding the intentions one must have when donning tefillin: "*We should bear in mind that G-d commanded us to place these four parshiot, which contain the unity of His Name and the exodus from Egypt, upon the arm to correspond to the heart, and upon the head to correspond to the brain, in order that we may recall the exodus from Egypt by the miracles and wonders that He did for us, and which demonstrate His unity. He is the only one in the universe, and to Him belong power and dominion over higher and lower beings, to do with them according to His will*" (*Tur on Orach Chaim 25*).

In the Gemara the Sages also say, "*The evil inclination resembles a fly, and it dwells between the two entrances of the heart*" (*Berachot 61a*). Commenting on the verse, "*I will distance the northern one [tzfoni] from you*" (*Joel 2:20*), the Sages state: "*[This] refers to the evil inclination, which is constantly hidden [tzafun] in the heart of man*" (*Sukkah 52a*). Why is the evil inclination described as "*hidden*"? It is because it enters a person's heart little by little. In fact it cannot tell a person, "*Stop serving Hashem and go serve idols,*" for he would not listen to it.

Likewise, the evil inclination will not try to entice a person to commit a grave sin, for he will certainly not listen to it. However it begins with something very small, until eventually it tells him: "*Go serve idols.*" Thus we read, "*He who tears his garments in anger, he who breaks his vessels in anger, and he who scatters his money in anger, regard him as an idolater. Such are the tactics of the evil inclination: Today it says to him, 'Do this,' tomorrow it tells him, 'Do that,' until it tells him: 'Go and serve idols,' and he goes and serves them*" (*Shabbat 105b*).

In order to be saved from the tricks of the evil inclination, the Holy One, blessed be He, told the Children of Israel: "*I am giving you an easy mitzvah, that you may be protected from the evil inclination found in the heart, the mitzvah of tefillin. One*

is placed on the arm, which corresponds to the heart, in order to subdue the evil inclination found therein, and the other is placed on the head, to prevent it from entering the heart and making its way to the head, for the evil inclination cannot enter the head first and entice a person to commit grave sins. Instead, it first enters the heart and entices him to commit small transgressions that seem unimportant to him, hiding its real intentions. It simply tells him to take this or that mitzvah lightly – one day this one and the next day that one – until it finally says to him: "Commit all the sins of the Torah."

What Did David Fear?

Our Sages have said, "*At first the evil inclination is like a spider web, but ultimately it becomes like wagon ropes, as it is said: 'Woe to those who pull iniquity upon themselves with cords of falsehood, and sin like the ropes of a wagon' [Isaiah 5:18]*" (*Sukkah 52a*).

We also find something similar in Parsha Eikev, where it is written: "*Eikev* [if] *you hearken to these ordinances and observe and perform them*" (*Devarim 7:12*). In the Midrash the Sages have said that David always feared the day of judgment, saying: "*Master of the universe, I do not fear the difficult mitzvot, but those which are easy [which people tread upon with their heel, eikev], lest one transgress them without knowing it, for they seem easy. Now You have said that we must pay attention to both easy mitzvot and difficult mitzvot.*"

Hence David was not afraid of grave sins, for he knew that he would not commit them. What was he afraid of then? He feared minor sins, which people secretly allow themselves to commit.

What Can a Person Do to Become Wise?

This is why the Rambam reversed the order written in the verse, starting with the tefillin of the head, so as to tell us that if a person allows the evil inclination to enter his heart, it will end up reaching his head. It will not remain hidden in his heart, and it will begin to tempt him to openly commit sins. We must therefore be careful not to neglect easy mitzvot – and especially not difficult mitzvot – for by neglecting the easy ones, we will end up neglecting the difficult ones.

We find a similar idea with regards to Adam, to whom G-d said: "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, you must not eat thereof, for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die*" (*Bereshith 2:16-17*). Adam did not overcome this trial, however, for he ate from the Tree of Knowledge through his wife Eve, whom the serpent seduced.

How did the serpent manage to seduce Eve? It was by transgressing something minor before her, as our Sages cite the serpent as saying: "*If you say that the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered you not to touch it, I will touch it and not die. You can also touch it and not die*" (*Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan 1:1*). What did the serpent do at that point? It touched the Tree of Knowledge with its hands and feet, shaking the tree until its fruits

fell to the ground. It then said to her, "*If you say that the Holy One, blessed be He, forbid the eating of it, I will eat it and not die, and you can also eat it and not die.*" Eve replied, "*All that Adam told me was a lie,*" and then she took the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate it.

I believe that this is why the first paragraph of the Shema appears in Parsha Va'etchanan. In fact the term va'etchanan has the same numerical value as the words rosh yad (*"head, hand"*), telling us that a person is only protected from the evil inclination because he prays to Hashem to save him. Thus it is written, "*Prayer is even more effective than good deeds, for none was greater in good deeds than Moshe our teacher, and yet he was answered only after prayer*" (*Berachot 32b*). We also read about the question that the people of Alexandria put to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania: " *'What must a man do that he may become wise?' He replied, 'Let him engage much in study, and little in business.' They said, 'Did not many do so and it was of no avail to them?' Rather, let them pray for mercy from Him to Whom wisdom belongs, for it is said: 'For Hashem grants wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding' [Mishlei 2:6]*" (*Niddah 70b*).

When One Sanctifies Himself Below, He is Sanctified Above

It is written, "*You have been shown to know that Hashem, He is G-d; there is none beside Him. From Heaven He caused you to hear His voice to teach you, and on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire*" (*Devarim 4:35-36*). In the Midrash the Sages say, "*On the day that the Torah was given, the Holy One, blessed be He, tore the Heavens and showed the Children of Israel the seven firmaments. Just as he tore the upper firmaments, He tore the lower firmaments. He said to them, 'See that there is none besides Me,' as it is written: 'You have been shown to know,' 'Know this day.'*"

We need to understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, found it necessary to tear open the upper and lower firmaments for the Children of Israel so they could believe in Him. Why did He not order them to simply trust in Him with regards to His oneness? The answer is that the Children of Israel had practiced idolatry in Egypt, and they thought that Pharaoh was a god because that is what he claimed. Hashem therefore wanted to reveal Himself to the Children of Israel, in order for them to see with their eyes and realize with complete clarity that there is none but Him. He wanted to free them of these false convictions and have them no longer believe in Pharaoh or anyone besides G-d, Who created the world.

The Children of Israel of that time were known as the "*generation of knowledge*" (*Zohar II:62b*), for they were fully aware of the fact that there is none but G-d. We find no other generation in history called the "*generation of knowledge,*" and only in regards to the Messianic age is it said: "*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem*" (*Isaiah 11:9*). Why? Because elsewhere it is said of the Messianic age: "*They will no*

longer teach – each man his fellow, each man his brother – saying 'Know Hashem,' for they will all know Me, from their smallest to their greatest" (*Jeremiah 31:33*). As a result, the entire world will clearly know Hashem in the Messianic era, and there were will be no doubts in this regard.

Just as at Mount Sinai, when Hashem tore open the seven firmaments to the Children of Israel after they left Egypt, likewise through Ruach HaKodesh Moshe showed their children – the generation that would go into Eretz Israel – something similar when he reminded them of the giving of the Torah on Sinai. The verse explicitly states, "*Know this day*" (*Devarim 4:39*), and as we said earlier, the Sages explain that Hashem tore open the seven firmaments for the Children of Israel, both upper and lower. From here we learn that just as Hashem showed this to the generation that left Egypt, Moshe showed it to the generation that would enter Eretz Israel.

This is why Moshe told the Children of Israel, before reviewing the Ten Commandments for them: "*Not with our forefathers did Hashem seal this covenant, but with us – we who are here, all of us alive today. Face to face did Hashem speak with you on the mountain, from amid the fire*" (*Devarim 5:3-4*). Despite telling them that Hashem had torn open the upper and lower firmaments on Mount Sinai, and that all the Children of Israel who stood by the mountain had seen that there none but Him alone, Moshe was afraid that the Children of Israel would ask him how they could know that there is one G-d, thinking that perhaps there were two or more. They could have thought that it was only their fathers – those who had left Egypt – who had seen this, not they themselves.

Their fathers all died during the 40 years that had passed since that time, which is why Moshe wanted to teach them as Hashem had taught their fathers. He said to them, "*You have been shown to know*" – just as in the past, when your fathers had a clear understanding that Hashem is G-d and there is none but Him in the upper and lower worlds, likewise today you will clearly understand: "*Know this day and take it to heart that Hashem is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth below; there is none else*" (*Devarim 4:39*). He opened the upper and lower worlds for the Children of Israel, in order for all of them to know that there is but one G-d.

This Stone is Like Mount Sinai

In truth, no great miracle took place there. Every place that a Jew studies Torah is like Mount Sinai, and he thereby merits great things. The Sages have said, "*The Beit HaMidrash of Rabbi Eliezer was shaped like an arena [i.e., oblong with seats on both sides], and in it was a stone that was reserved for him to sit upon. Rabbi Yehoshua once came in and began kissing the stone, saying: 'This stone is like Mount Sinai, and he who sat on it is like the Ark of the Covenant'*" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:20*). From here we learn that every place where a person studies Torah resembles Mount Sinai, and the Holy One, blessed be He, again concludes a covenant with him.

When did the generation of the desert merit seeing the glory of G-d with their own eyes? It was after detaching themselves from this world, as it is written: "*Moshe*

descended from the mountain to the people. He sanctified the people and they washed their clothing. He said to the people, 'Be ready after a three-day period; do not draw near a woman'" (*Shemot 19:14-15*). The same applies to every generation: When a man detaches himself from materiality and sanctifies himself in what is permitted, he can sense the covenant that the Holy One, blessed be He, concludes with him each day. Hence it is written, "*Know Him,*" in order to teach us that when a man sanctifies himself in what is permitted – when he studies Torah throughout his life and cleaves to the supernal light, as we mentioned above – then the Sages in the Gemara say of him: "*If a man sanctifies himself a little, he becomes greatly sanctified. [If he sanctifies himself] below, he becomes sanctified from above*" (*Yoma 39a*). They also say, "*If one comes to purify himself, he is given help*" (*Shabbat 104a*).

If a person were to object by saying, "*How can I sanctify myself in what is permitted and detach myself from what the Torah has allowed me to have, since the Holy One, blessed be He, has created the evil inclination? It seeks to kill me, and it grows stronger every day [Sukkah 52b]! How can I separate myself from this world?*" The answer is that a person is only saved from the evil inclination when he enters the Beit HaMidrash to study Torah, as the Sages have said: "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote. If you occupy yourselves with Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand. ... If it is of stone, it will dissolve; if [it is of] iron, it will shatter*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). The Aggadah cites King David in saying, " *'Prepare my steps with Your word, and do not allow any iniquity to rule over me' [Tehillim 119:133]. Do not allow my feet to go where they wish, but [only] towards Your Torah all day long, towards the Beit HaMidrash.*" This is because the evil inclination cannot enter the Beit HaMidrash. It will accompany a man there, but once he arrives, it cannot enter.

The Main Thing is to Fear G-d, Not Punishment

It is written, "*I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery*" (*Devarim 5:6*).

Why did Hashem now tell the people, "*I am Hashem your G-d*"? To what can this be compared? It is like a king who liberates some prisoners and brings them to his royal palace, giving them to eat and drink. On the following day he comes to them and says, "*I am the king.*" Did they not know that he was the king who liberated them? In that case, why did G-d say: "*I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery*"?

Not only that, but in Parsha Shemot we read: "*He said to the people, 'Be ready after a three-day period; do not draw near a woman.' On the third day, when it was morning, there was thunder and lightening and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful, and the entire people in the camp shuddered. Moshe brought the people forth from the camp towards G-d, and they stood at the bottom of*

the mountain. All of Mount Sinai was smoking because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly" (*Shemot 19:15-18*). Hence the Children of Israel already knew that G-d had descended upon the mountain, and they feared Him. Therefore why did He need to tell them, "*I am Hashem*"?

What is the Fear of Heaven?

The philosophers (*mentioned in Toldot Yaakov Yosef, Eikev 2*) ask why a king of flesh and blood does not need to command his servants to fear him, since they fear him without being ordered to. However the Holy One, blessed be He – the King of kings – orders us to fear Him!

The explanation is that here, Hashem wanted to teach the Children of Israel what the fear of G-d means. The author of Reshith Chochma explained it well in stating: The nature of fear must be explained, followed by the ways in which a person can manifest this fear in his heart. Fear, which the Torah on several occasions has commanded us – as it is written: "*Now, O Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to fear Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 10:12*) and "*Hashem your G-d shall you fear*" (*ibid. 6:13*) – consists of man recognizing that the world has a single Creator Who created all that exists, and Who directs His creations according to His will. If He were not to sustain them, they could not exist, as it is written: "*You give them all life*" (*Nehemiah 9:6*). If we could possible imagine Him not spreading His abundance upon all the worlds for even an instant, everything would disappear and become as if it never were. This is because all things need Him, whereas He needs nothing. We must fear Him and take upon ourselves the yoke of Torah and the yoke of mitzvot, like a servant who knows that he has a master whom he must serve, as it is written: "*Know the G-d of your father and serve Him*" (*I Chronicles 28:9*).

In the Zohar, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: "*This [Bereshith 1:1] contains the first precept of all, namely the fear of Hashem, as it is written: 'The fear of Hashem is the beginning of wisdom' [Tehillim 111:10] as well as, 'The fear of Hashem is the beginning of knowledge' [Mishlei 1:7]. ... The genuine type [of fear] is that which makes a man fear his Master because He is a powerful ruler, the rock and foundation of all the worlds, before Whom all existing things are as nothing, as it is said: 'All the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing' [Daniel 4:32]*" (*Zohar 1:11b*). It says that "*the fear of Hashem*" – not "*the fear of punishment*" – is the beginning of wisdom, for that is the main thing. The fear of punishment is only secondary, not essential in any way. Hence when the Children of Israel were frightened, G-d said to them: "*I am Hashem your G-d*" – be careful that your fear is not of great thunder and punishment, but of Me, for I am great and powerful. I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, and I have done for you what no one else could.

In fact the Sages say, "*Previously, no slave could escape from Egypt, which was sealed tight. Yet now, G-d brought out 600,000 men from Egypt*" (*Mechilta Yitro, Amalek 1*).

No Other Fear in the Heart

This is why G-d ordered us to fear Him, whereas a king of flesh and blood does not need to do so, for the fear that he arouses is not the same as the fear of G-d. People only fear and respect a mortal king because of the possibility of punishment. Such is not the case with the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. The fear of punishment is not so important with G-d, the main thing being to fear Him to such an extent that no other fear can exist in the heart. The Sages have said, "*A certain disciple was once following Rabbi Yishmael, the son of Rabbi Yossi, in the market place of Zion. The latter noticed that he looked afraid, and he said to him: 'You are a sinner, for it is written: "Sinners in Zion are afraid*" [Isaiah 33:14].' He replied: 'But it is written: "*Happy is the man who always fears*" [Mishlei 28:14].' He replied, 'That verse refers to words of Torah' " (*Berachot 60a*).

King David said, "*Even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me*" (*Tehillim 23:4*). Hence G-d told the Children of Israel: "*What does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to fear Hashem your G-d*" – I ask that you remove fear from your heart and that you fear Me alone. This is not a fear of punishment, but a fear of Hashem. You must only fear Hashem your G-d without worrying about anything else in the world.

This is why the Sages say, "*Is the fear of Heaven such a small thing? ... Yes, for Moshe it was a small thing!*" (*Berachot 33b*). The commentators object to this, nothing that the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to the Children of Israel, not just to Moshe. Therefore why say "*only to fear,*" which implies that it was a small thing? The answer is that since Moshe removed all fear from his heart and left only the fear of G-d, for him it was a small thing. If the Children of Israel had done the same, this fear would also have been a small thing for them. Hence Moshe told them, "*What does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to fear Hashem your G-d, to go in all His ways, and to love Him and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.*"

Gratitude Leads to Cleaving to G-d and Mitzvot

It is written, "*You who cleave to Hashem your G-d, you are all alive today*" (*Devarim 4:4*).

The Sages have asked, "*Is it possible for a human being to walk after the Shechinah, for has it not been said: 'Hashem your G-d is a devouring fire' [Devarim 4:24]? However [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: 'Hashem G-d made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them' [Bereshith 3:21], so should you clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, as it is written: 'Hashem appeared to him by the plains of Mamre' [ibid. 18:1], so should you visit the sick*" (*Sotah 14a*).

This requires an explanation, for how is it possible to ask a person to attain the same level of compassion that Hashem has towards His creations?

It seems that due to our numerous sins, a person is always in a state of change and flux. Sometimes he prays well and with great concentration, which has an immediate influence on the rest of his activities during the day, such as when he returns home from synagogue in joy. At other times, however, he gets up "*on the wrong side of the bed,*" and is sad throughout the day, feeling tired despite having slept for the entire night. At that point, he will also start praying without motivation and concentration, looking at his watch every few minutes to see when the service will finally be over. It seems to him like an intolerable burden.

Likewise, in regards to learning Torah, a person's behavior is also constantly changing. Sometimes he adheres to a fixed learning schedule, and sometimes he has a tendency to ignore it. The same applies to the observance of mitzvot as well, for sometimes he fulfills them with great enthusiasm, appreciating and valuing their importance, yet at other times he pays no attention to them – and worse still, he may even reject them.

We really need to examine this issue in detail. How is it possible for a person – for whom it is as clear as day that there is a Creator of the universe, and that it is proper to serve and revere the Ruler of the world – to change his behavior so often by vacillating from one point of view to another?

We shall attempt to explain. Cleaving to G-d means being devoted to Him and trying to emulate His ways. This is only possible when a person is grateful for all the benefits that he receives from Him. However gratitude towards the Creator of the universe must be sincere, not just expressed superficially. It should be exactly as if a person were sincerely thanking someone who had saved the life of his son. In that case, he would be ready to kiss his feet out of gratitude.

This is how a person should behave when he feels gratitude for the benefits that the Holy One, blessed be He, has granted him and his family at every instant. In that case, there will never be enough time to thank the Creator of the universe, the result being that he will always cleave to G-d and never change.

For example, several times a day we say a polite "*hello,*" "*how are you,*" or "*goodnight,*" to people around us, since they also say the same to us. How much more should we thank, praise and make the Creator our king, the One Who from morning till night grants us innumerable benefits at each instant!

This is what Moshe Rabbeinu told the Children of Israel: "*You who cleave to Hashem your G-d, you are all alive today,*" meaning that when we constantly thank the Creator for all of His kindnesses, we will automatically merit living before Him constantly, in this world and in the World to Come, and to remain attached to Him.

In fact a man who is grateful to the Creator of the universe – Who dwells in him and helps him each day in all his ways and endeavors – will merit to cleave to Him. This is a very simple concept: A man who thanks Hashem for all of His kindnesses, and who is grateful to Him, will necessarily resemble Him, for he cleaves to His middot [attributes] on his own.

This idea is alluded to in the verse, "*You who cleave.*" The term *hadevekim* ("who cleave") contains the letters forming the words middah and modeh. This means that it is precisely when a person possesses the *middah* (attribute) of *modeh* (thanking) the Holy One, blessed be He, that he will merit to constantly cleave to Him. Such a person will always live before Him, as it says: "*you are all alive today.*" As we have said, it is only in this way that man can acknowledge the benefits of the Creator and thank Him for all His kindnesses, and that he can continuously cleave to Him. In that case, he will automatically stop vacillating, and will constantly remain in the same path. In every situation, be it good or bad, in his heart he will constantly believe in Hashem.

The Greatness of Prayer in the Land of Israel

"*I beseeched Hashem at that time, saying: '...Let me now cross and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon'* " (*Devarim 3:23-25*).

The words of our Sages are well known in this regard: The term "*I beseeched [va'etchanan]*" has a numerical value of 515, and it alludes to the 515 supplications that Moshe addressed to G-d in the hope of allowing him to enter the land of Israel. Yet G-d answered him: "*Enough! Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter!*" (*v.26*).

Such abundant prayers allow us to understand just how important it was to Moshe that G-d forgive his sin and allow him to enter the Holy Land. Why was it so important to him? Actually Moshe, the faithful shepherd, fervently yearned to fulfill the mitzvot connected to Eretz Israel: Allowing the land to lie fallow, tithes and offerings, the crowning of a king over Israel, etc. It is because these mitzvot are achievable only in Israel that Moshe insisted so greatly and beseeched G-d to grant his request. Moshe's goal was in fact to reach a state of perfection, which was only possible by fulfilling the mitzvot commanded by G-d. Whoever does not practice all the mitzvot of the Torah cannot attain this ideal state. Hence each of us must constantly strive to give ourselves the means of reaching this level by always carrying out ever more mitzvot. We now have a better understanding of why Moshe beseeched G-d so much to let him enter the land of Israel.

This is why Jews living elsewhere turn towards the land of Israel to pray – to create a connection with the land chosen by G-d. Prayers go towards Eretz Israel, reach the Kotel, and then rise directly to G-d, as our Patriarch Jacob said: "*This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of the heavens*" (*Bereshith 28:17*). However Moshe did not want to attain perfection via an intermediary. He wanted to establish a direct link with G-d and hoped to see his prayer rise to the heavens starting from Eretz Israel, without taking any detours.

Yet in our days, to our great regret, the Jewish people are in exile and we must connect ourselves to G-d through the mitzvot that remain available to us. Obviously, it

is incumbent on each of us to ask for peace to reign over our land. We must abundantly pray for Hashem to send His blessing, bring peace to the kingdom of the house of David, and rebuild the Temple. Mourning the loss of our Temple is a way of showing Hashem that its loss is painful to us, something that may cause Him to hasten the Final Redemption, quickly and in our days.

By the Great Love of His Children

During the times of the Temple, the prayers of the Jewish people rose directly to the heavens and had an effect, without any obstacles or accusers in the way. Yet nowadays, since its destruction, we must insist that our prayers be granted. A son who requests a favor from his father cannot be compared to one who requests a favor from his stepfather. The former will have his request easily and generously granted, whereas the latter's request will not necessarily be granted. Even if the request is ultimately answered, it will only be after much petitioning, since the stepfather does not feel any obligation towards a boy who is not his own flesh and blood. He simply has a duty towards the woman he married. The same applies to the Jewish people: As long as the Temple was firmly established, the Children of Israel merited the answering of their prayers naturally and easily. Yet since the Temple's destruction, we must pray abundantly before being heard because the Attribute of Justice is more active and accusers are at work.

Moshe insisted so greatly because he wanted to recite at least one prayer from the Holy Land. Yet G-d refused because He knew that if Moshe entered Israel and asked that the Temple not be destroyed, it would have been enough to save it. In fact Hashem knew that the Children of Israel would later arouse His anger, and He did not want to pour out His anger on the people and wipe them out. He preferred to pour it out on wood and stone. Had Moshe's prayer from the Holy Land been granted, G-d would not have destroyed the Temple, but instead would have been constrained to punish the Jewish people. And yet He loves His people! This is why G-d arranged things in such a way that Moshe could not enter the land. At the same time, He did not want the fate of the Temple to depend on Moshe's prayer alone, for in that case the people would have exempted themselves from this responsibility and not have felt compelled to fulfill it. They would have believed that only Moshe's prayer in the land of Israel had the power to sustain the Temple. Since Hashem wants every Jew to feel personally responsible for sustaining the Temple and to act accordingly, He prevented Moshe from entering Israel.

Whoever meditates on these words will discern a fundamental principle that stresses the great importance of prayer from the land of Israel. Indeed, Moshe addressed 515 prayers to G-d in order to enter the land, and yet his request was not granted! On the other hand, a single prayer originating from the land of Israel – a prayer for the Temple not to be destroyed – would have been immediately answered. That is why G-d did not allow Moshe to enter the land. All this demonstrates the tremendous power of prayer in the land of Israel. As a result, we are obligated and should take advantage of this opportunity to pray for the Final Redemption.

We Hold the Key to Repairing the World

It is written, "*Please let me cross over and see the good land*" (*Devarim 3:25*).

Moshe implored Hashem to let him enter the holy land, beseeching Him 515 times, which is the numerical value of va'etchanan. Nevertheless, his prayers were not answered, for the Holy One, blessed be He, did not allow Moshe to enter the promised land. In reality, why did He so adamantly refuse to grant Moshe's prayer, given that the Sages have said (*Yebamot 54a*) that G-d yearns to hear the prayers of the righteous? In fact G-d ended Moshe's prayers by saying: "*Rav lecha* [Enough for you]. *Speak to Me no further of this matter*" (*v.26*), which is very surprising. Even if it had been decreed that Moshe would not enter the land due to the sins at the waters of Meriva, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not allow him to pass through a small portion of the land, just to look upon its beauty and fulfill mitzvot that depend upon living in the land, even if it meant taking him out immediately afterward?

We must learn a very important principle here that is crystal clear: Absolutely no one can understand the reasons of the Holy One, blessed be He, and none of us has the slightest notion or inking of the Creator's deep thoughts, praised be His Name. Since He did not agree to Moshe's request, it was certainly for his own good and benefit. In fact the ways of Hashem are hidden from us, and He alone knows exactly what is good and not good for man. This represents a sharp admonishment to us all, for sometimes we constantly pray and beseech the Holy One, blessed be He, to give us what we ask, but to our great disappointment we see that our prayers yield no result and that we have received nothing. We even get the impression that the gates of Heaven, so to speak, are tightly sealed before us, and we erroneously begin to lose hope, thinking that the Creator is far from us and not interested in our prayers. Such a belief is founded in error, for He truly yearns to hear our prayers and listen to our voice. If we notice that our prayers are not answered and deliverance has not yet arrived, we must realize with certainty that it is for our own good, since only Hashem knows what is good for man and what is harmful for him. Who was greater than Moshe, whose prayer the Holy One, blessed be He, did not answer for reasons known only to Him, reasons that are hidden to us.

This is the meaning of Hashem's words to Moshe: *Rav lecha* ("Enough for you"). The term rav means that Moshe would be a Rav, meaning that he would teach the Children of Israel what there is to know about prayer, and from him they would learn that prayer is not always answered, for sometimes we ask for things that are not for our own good. And just as Moshe's prayer was not granted, likewise a Jew's prayer is sometimes not granted because it is not for his own good.

I traveled to Toronto once to encourage the local community there, when I suddenly thought of traveling to New York to spend Shabbat. It made absolutely no sense, because logically it was better to remain in Toronto for Shabbat on account of a wedding of someone who financially supported our institutions. It was therefore better to remain

in Toronto for the sake of our institutions and the Torah world. However Hashem compelled me to travel to New York, and the Sages have said: "*A man's feet…lead him to the place where he is wanted*" (*Sukkah 53a*). In fact when I arrived in New York, I was welcomed with great honor, and I gave a class on strengthening Jewish observance, supporting them with the words of the living G-d. During this class, I noticed that although the synagogue was a beautiful building, it did not yet contain a heikhal [ark] that was suitable for housing Torah scrolls in a dignified way. When I asked why, the leaders of the synagogue told me that they intended on building a beautiful and imposing heikhal, one that befitted such a magnificent synagogue, but didn't yet have the funds to do so. I immediately thought that it was for this reason that Heaven had sent me there. I instantly proceeded from thought to action, gathering together the entire congregation and speaking to them about the honor of the Torah, saying that it was a tremendous and very important mitzvah to give money for the heikhal. To my great surprise, it only took a few minutes for the necessary funds ($150,000) to be collected.

Since I had merited such an important mitzvah, the mitzvah to beautify and honor the house of Hashem, He gave me a wonderful gift that was absolutely priceless. It was an important and precious spiritual gift, for as soon as I left, I had a beautiful solution to the problem mentioned above: Why the Holy One, blessed be He, adamantly refused to grant Moshe's request. What could have happened if Moshe had entered the land and seen a little of it? With G-d's help, I would like to explain this concept as follows: The Sages have said (*Zohar Bereshith*) that the Holy One, blessed be He, used the Torah as the blueprint for creating the world. They also said (*Bereshith Rabba 11*) that He planned on creating the souls of the Children of Israel even before creating the world. This means that the Jewish people were witnesses to Creation, and they were worthy of seeing how Hashem created the world using the holy Torah. The center of Creation and the universe began with Even HaShetiya, the Foundation Stone that is found in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred of places. As the Sages have said (*Yoma 54b*), there was a rock there, and it was called the Foundation Stone because the world was founded from it. Consequently, when the Holy One, blessed be He, first looked into the Torah, He created the Foundation Stone, which was the start of Creation. That being the case, there is an incredible abundance of holiness and purity in that place, for it was the first time that the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah to create something in the world. Thus when Moshe said, "*Please let me cross over and see the good land,*" he did not just want to walk through it. Rather, what he really wanted was to reach that most sacred place, the Foundation Stone, and by touching it he would have brought about the rectification of the world, meaning that the Final Redemption would have occurred. That is what Hashem did not agree to, for He wants the rectification of the world to occur through the personal efforts of the Children of Israel, meaning by strengthening themselves in the performance of mitzvot, studying the holy Torah, and drawing closer to Hashem. That is how they must repair the world – through their own efforts – without Moshe doing this work for them. Hence Hashem said to him, "*Enough for you. Speak to Me no further of this matter.*"

Eikev

Serving Hashem Solely in Joy!

It is written, "*And it will be [vehaya], because you will hearken to these ordinances…the L-RD your G-d will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your fathers*" (*Deuteronomy 7:12*). We know what the Sages have taught, namely that the term veyehi denotes trouble, whereas vehaya denotes joy (*see Bereshith Rabba 42:3*). In the Shema it is written: "*And it will be [vehaya], if you will diligently obey My commandments…I will give rain for your land in its proper time*" (*Deuteronomy 11:13-14*). Here too we have a term that denotes joy. This means that there is joy in serving G-d, and that the Torah and its mitzvot are performed in the joy of being able to serve such a great King. This attitude brings us an abundance of good from the Creator. In this week's parsha as well, if the Children of Israel observe all the mitzvot of Hashem in joy, He will protect them from all illnesses and they will succeed in everything they do.

On the other hand, we need to realize that the opposite may also happen. That is, evil decrees come upon the world when joy is lacking in the service of Hashem, as it is written: "*Because you did not serve the L-RD your G-d amid gladness and goodness of heart*" (*Deuteronomy 28:47*). To what can this be compared? It is like the useless pursuits of this world, for when someone wins the lottery, he becomes ecstatic even before receiving or seeing his money. In fact he already begins to plan what he is going to do with so much money. Similarly, and to an even greater extent, a person should constantly rejoice at being able to perform numerous mitzvot and merit eternal good in the World to Come. There are also many mitzvot whose rewards are given is this world, as the Sages have mentioned (*Peah 1:1*).

Examining the opening verse in this week's parsha, we see that the Torah indicates that the joy which must accompany a mitzvah need not apply just for great or exceptional mitzvot, ones that rarely present themselves to us. Instead, the parsha is speaking about all mitzvot, including those described as *eikev* ("heel"), meaning the ones a person tends to trample on, as Rashi explains in citing the Sages (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 758*). These too must be carried out in joy, as the Mishnah states: "*Be as careful of a minor mitzvah as of a major one, for you do not know the reward given for the mitzvot*" (*Perkei Avoth 2:1*). Therefore even a mitzvah that seems unimportant to a person, one that he may trample on, is very important in the eyes of Hashem. The proof is that the Torah does not allude to the reward of performing mitzvot.

If a person were to ask: What is the best way to perform a mitzvah in joy if it is one that people tend to do out of habit? The answer is to think about how the material world operates, and then to draw a lesson from it that we can apply to performing such mitzvot. For example, although people earn money each day, does anyone ever say that

they don't enjoy their money because they earn it on a daily basis? Obviously not! As the Sages have said on the verse, "*It is a sorry task that G-d has given to the sons of man with which to be concerned*" (*Ecclesiastes 1:13*): "*This is the nature of wealth. ... If one has a hundred, he wants to turn them into two hundred*" (*Kohelet Rabba 1:32*). The more a person's wealth increases, the happier he becomes, even if he becomes wealthier each and every day.

If such is the case for frivolous pursuits, of which a person brings nothing with him in the World to Come, how much more does it apply for mitzvot that he brings with him in the World to Come – mitzvot that are eternal, and whose reward cannot possibly be given in this world alone? He should obviously rejoice to no end in performing them, even though he is constantly doing so out of habit. In fact mitzvot protect a person in this world and in the World to Come after his death. When one reflects on this fact, his heart will be filled with infinite joy, and he will run to perform all the easy mitzvot with joy and enthusiasm.

The book Pituchei Chotam, from the holy kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Abutzteira, offers an explanation for why Parsha Eikev is juxtaposed to Parsha Re'eh. He states that when a person reflects on his end (for eikev denotes the end) and sees (*roeh*) the day of death, he will put an effort into observing mitzvot and the blessing, as the Sages have said: "*Repent one day before your death*" (*Perkei Avoth 2:10*). Thus: Look at the end (*re'eh eikev*) of your life and see what will happen to you.

This requires an explanation, for a person is liable to become depressed when thinking about the day of death. Therefore how can he fulfill vehaya, which denotes joy, and perform mitzvot in joy, as we explained earlier?

Yet it is precisely when we realize that all the possessions of this world are but vanities – that only Torah and mitzvot are precious and eternal, and that this world is but a corridor before the palace of the World to Come (*Perkei Avoth 4:16*) – that we will have no reason for sadness when reflecting upon our end. Man must die in the corridor in order to enter eternal life in the palace, where the soul can shine only through Torah and mitzvot.

In fact the reverse is true: Thinking about death will lead a person to unlimited joy, as it is written: "*Your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the L-RD will gather you in*" (*Isaiah 58:8*) and, "*How great is Your goodness that You have stored away for those who fear You*" (*Psalms 31:20*).

I have had the opportunity to explain just how terrifying it is for a person to picture himself standing, after his death, before the Celestial Court. The books will be opened, and he will be told that he never prayed, fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin, the mitzvah of Shabbat, and so on. Hearing this, he will protest and cry out that he observed every Shabbat, put on tefillin, and prayed with the community. He will then be told, "*It is true that you did all these things. However you did not perform them with joy. On the contrary, you performed them in sadness and without concentration.*"

This is what the verse is saying: When we perform a mitzvah with joy (*vehaya*), this will bring about good things. In the same way that a person desires food and drink, how much more should he desire Torah and mitzvot, which are eternal possessions. He should certainly desire them and fulfill them in joy!

Humility is the Source of Peace, Joy and Torah

In this week's parsha we read, "*And it will be, if you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them, the L-RD your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your fathers*" (*Deuteronomy 7:12*). From here we learn that it is not enough to simply hear words of Torah from a person who is greater than us in Torah and wisdom. The essence of Torah success lies in annulling ourselves and going to study Torah from a person who is not as great as ourselves, for we automatically tend to not listen to people at a lower level than ourselves in Torah and wisdom.

This idea is alluded to in the verse, where the term *vehaya* (*"and it will be"*) is used, a term that always denotes joy (*Vayikra Rabba 11:7*). The expression "*if you hearken*" means that the essence of self-annulment and humility lies in listening to words of Torah from people who are at a lower level than us in Torah and the fear of Heaven. The result is that we will annul our opinion before theirs so that strife does not increase, which will please and bring satisfaction to Hashem. We find something similar to this in Rashi's commentary on the verse in question: "*If you hearken to the minor mitzvot that one tramples upon with his heels.*"

It seems that this is referring to a person who feels that he is great and powerful because he is truly competent in all fields of Torah; it is as if he were actually trampling upon it with his heels. If he senses this, he will never heed the voice of the Torah because the Torah is only acquired through humility. On the other hand, when he conducts himself with joy and humility, listening to the words of each person and accepting them with joy, then the Holy One, blessed be He, "*will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness.*" In his book Pituchei Chotam, Rabbeinu Yaakov Abuhatzera Zatzal explains the juxtaposition of Parshiot Eikev and Re'eh. The idea behind it is that a person must always have the end in sight, for the primary thing that prevents him from growing in Torah and the fear of Heaven is a failure to reflect upon the fact that he will eventually die and leave his possessions to others. When he reflects upon it, he will see (*re'eh*) the heel (*eikev*), meaning his end, which is to heed every word of Torah.

According to this explanation, it seems that we do not understand the order of the parshiot. They should have been reversed, meaning first Parsha Re'eh and then Eikev, for according to the above explanation we must first "*see*" the "*end.*" Therefore why are the parshiot not arranged in this order?

It appears that the Torah is teaching us a great and important lesson here. We know that in serving Hashem, a person has two ways to spiritually awaken himself and come

closer to the Creator. The first is to realize that a miracle has been done for him, for him or someone close to him, in which case he will experience a great awakening and repent. He will sense G-d's greatness and his own insignificance.

There is another way for a person to awaken himself by his own strength, which is to find a path that does not depend on external factors. Instead, by yielding and annulling himself before G-d, he will sense just how insignificant he is, and he will constantly recall that his final day is approaching. The result is that he will merit seeing the perfection of Hashem, which will enable him to grow.

This is why the order of the parshiot is Eikev followed by Re'eh. This teaches us that bringing satisfaction to the Creator lies mainly in the fact that a person undergoes a spiritual awakening by his own strength, without having to perceive miracles, and by returning to Hashem with all his heart. By the strength of his own humility, he will see the greatness of G-d.

To achieve such a degree of self-annulment, a person must set aside a fixed time for studying Torah. Thus it is written *eikev*, a term formed by the same letters as *kava* (permanence). This means that we must permanently fix a time for studying Torah. It also requires a person to realize that the Torah must be accompanied by "*his hand grasping the heel*" (*Genesis 25:26*). In other words, it is not enough to study alone – a person must encourage others to participate in it as well. It must be as if he were "*grasping*" and supporting others, watching over and teaching them Torah. As such a person can attain humility and bring joy and satisfaction to the Creator.

In this way we will be ready to give our lives for the performance of every mitzvah, even one of rabbinic origin, which was common among the Sages. Rabbi Akiva was once imprisoned, and his servant Rabbi Yehoshua was allowed to bring him a small quantity of water every day. One day the prison guard said to Rabbi Yehoshua, "*You're bringing too much water today. Maybe you're trying to dig a tunnel!*" He then spilled half of his pitcher of water to the ground. When Rabbi Yehoshua reached Rabbi Akiva, the latter said to him: "*Don't you realize that I'm old and that my life depends on you?*" When Rabbi Yehoshua explained what had happened, Rabbi Akiva replied: "*Give me the remaining water so I can wash my hands*." He said, "*There's not enough water to drink, and you want to wash your hands with it?*" Rabbi Akiva responded, "*What can I do? Better that I should die than transgress the words of my colleagues!*" Rabbi Akiva therefore didn't touch any food until he was given water to wash his hands.

If we fail to set aside a fixed time for learning Torah, but simply listen to what other people say we should do or not do, we will always have doubts in our service of Hashem, for we will sometimes do things one way, and sometimes in another.

In truth, all of King David's joy came solely from the holy Torah, as it is written: "*Had Your Torah not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction*" (*Psalms 119:92*). He sensed that without a fixed time for the study of Torah, he would not have experienced joy in life. He would have been like a poor person who has nothing. What gave him joy was fixing times for the study of Torah in every difficult situation that

he faced. Actually, we see some people who study Torah and yet feel so overwhelmed by their problems that they become depressed, and they wonder why the merit of the Torah has not helped them. The answer is quite simple: They are content on learning Torah without fixing regular times for studying it. If they had fixed such times for themselves, they would have experienced self-annulment before Heaven, and even when faced with difficult problems, they would have accepted them with joy, without protesting in any way.

The Torah's power demonstrates itself when words enter the ears with humility through a fixed program of Torah study, in which case a person will not feel any material lack. As the Sages said, "*The whole world draws its sustenance due to [the merit of] Chanina my son, and Chanina my son suffices himself with a kab of carobs from one Shabbat eve to another*" (*Taanith 24b*).

A Great Reward for Performing Mitzvot with Joy

It is written, "*And it will be, if you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them, Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your fathers*" (*Devarim 7:12*). We need to explain how the Holy One, blessed be He, will reward us for mitzvot in this world, since the Sages have explicitly taught: "*There is no reward for mitzvot in this world*" (*Kiddushin 39b*)!

On the expression, "*And it will be, eikev [if],*" the Sages in the Midrash state: "*This is the meaning of, 'Why should I fear in days of evil, when the injunctions akeivai [that I trod upon] will surround me?' [Tehillim 49:6]. Blessed be the Name of Hashem, Who gave the Torah to Israel! It comprises 613 mitzvot, some easy, others difficult. Yet because they include easy mitzvot that people pay no attention to, but neglect as if they were walking upon them, they are considered insignificant.*" David feared the day of judgment, saying: "*Master of the universe, I do not fear the difficult mitzvot. What do I fear? The easy mitzvot, lest I transgress them unknowingly because they are easy. Now You have said that we must pay attention to both easy and difficult mitzvot.*"

Performing Mitzvot With Joy

When we perform mitzvot with joy, they will not seem old to us, but will constantly appear as new. Such is the nature of man, who rejoices in what is new, not in what is old. Hence the Sages explain that the expression "*which I set before you today*" (*Devarim 4:8*) means that they must not seem like an old letter from the king, which nobody cares about, but like a new letter, which everyone wants to read.

The same applies with regards to words of Torah: They should seem as if they have been given today by the King, the King of the universe, for otherwise people become accustomed to mitzvot and perform them out of habit. We will not reach such a point if we fulfill them with joy, for one thing depends on the other.

The Sages tell us that the expression *vehaya* denotes joy (*Bereshith Rabba 42:3*). Here we read, "*Vehaya [*And it will be*], if you hearken,*" which teaches us that a person must

perform all the mitzvot with joy, as it is written: "*Serve Hashem with joy, come before Him with joyous song*" (*Tehillim 100:2*), as well as: "*All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you…because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy*" (*Devarim 28:45-47*).

If a person does not perform mitzvot with joy, he will eventually do them out of habit and ultimately neglect them, in which case he will experience numerous misfortunes. This will happen for two reasons, one of which is because he did not serve Hashem in joy. These are the curses mentioned in the book of Devarim, in addition to one more, since he performed mitzvot out of habit. The prophet Isaiah said, "*Since this people has drawn close, with its mouth and with its lips it has honored Me, but it has distanced its heart from Me – their fear of Me is like rote learning of human commands. Therefore behold, I will continue to perform more wonders against this people, wonder upon wonder. The wisdom of its wise men will be lost, and the understanding of its sages will become concealed*" (*Isaiah 29:13-14*).

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, only rewards the Children of Israel for mitzvot performed with joy, not when they grow accustomed to mitzvot. In such a case, He sends misfortunes upon them, as it is written: "*I will continue to perform more wonders against this people, wonder upon wonder.*"

The Reward Grows as Our Joy Increases

We can now properly understand the subject. Although the Sages have said, "*There is no reward for mitzvot in this world,*" what exactly is no reward given for? It is for the mitzvah itself, since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not give a reward in this world for it. For the joy of the mitzvah, however, He gives a great reward.

Thus it is written in Sefer Charedim (*conditions for performing mitzvot, fourth condition*):

The fourth condition is the great joy of the mitzvah. Each mitzvah that we can perform is a gift from the Holy One, blessed be He, and the reward grows in proportion to our joy. The saintly kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Ashkenazi Zatzal revealed to a close friend that everything he had attained – when the gates of wisdom and the holy spirit were opened before him – was a reward for having greatly rejoiced over the performance of every mitzvah. Along the same lines, the Noam Elimelech states: "*There is no reward for mitzvot in this world. A person only eats the fruits of a mitzvah in this world (Peah 1:1), and the fruits of a mitzvah come because he performs it in joy and happiness.*"

A Treasure Trove of Gifts

The Patriarch Jacob went back to retrieve some small jars, as we read: " *'Jacob was left alone' [Bereshith 32:25]. Rabbi Eleazar said: He remained behind for the sake of some small jars*" (*Chullin 91a*). Although everyone considers such objects as being of little value, the Sages say: "*The Torah has consideration for the money of Israel*" (*Rosh Hashanah 27a*). Thus one who loses small jars transgresses the prohibition against wasting. Jacob therefore returned to look for these small jars, for he fulfilled both the easiest and most difficult mitzvot.

This is why the verse in question states, "*And it will be, eikev* [if]," for G-d wanted to tell the Children of Israel that if they observed the mitzvot as Jacob did – paying attention to the easy as well as the difficult ones, including those which people tend to walk upon with their heel (*eikev*) – He would give them a generous reward. In fact Jacob asked Hashem for a gift, without appealing to his own merit, as we read: "*I am too small for all the mercies and all the truth*" (*Bereshith 32:11*), and He granted it to him. If the Jewish people act as Jacob did, Hashem will open His treasure trove of gifts to them as well.

Jacob was given his name on account of the heel (*eikev*), as it is written: "*After that, his brother emerged with his hands grasping the heel [eikev] of Esau, so he called his name Jacob*" (*Bereshith 25:26*). G-d told them by allusion how they could fulfill mitzvot without falling into the trap of habit, namely by fulfilling them with joy, as well as by fulfilling the easy mitzvot. In that case they would reign over habit, which takes hold of people in the performance of mitzvot.

Earning Money at a Time Meant for Torah Study Brings an Abomination into the Home

It is written, "*The graven images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver and gold upon them and take it for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to Hashem your G-d. You shall not bring an abomination into your home and become banned like it. You shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is banned*" (*Devarim 7:25-26*).

For those who entered Eretz Israel, the Torah imposed the duty of destroying the idols of the peoples, which they fashioned out of gold and silver. If anyone ever thought, "*I will burn their idols but take their silver and gold,*" the Torah states: "*You shall not covet the silver and gold upon them and take it for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it.*" This teaches us that if a person takes them, they will do him harm. One must not say, "*I will take the silver and gold and distribute it to the poor,*" or "*I will put it aside for the yeshiva.*" One who acts in this way desecrates Hashem's Name, for the nations will say: "*The Children of Israel did not destroy idols, but changed their shape: They worship them as we worship them.*"

It is a basic principle that it is forbidden to benefit from idolatry in any way, even if our intentions are good. What is idolatry? It is anything that Hashem did not command. If we conduct ourselves in this way, trying to be smarter than Hashem's word, misfortune will eventually come upon us, as it did to Saul. In the Gemara our Sages say, "*When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Saul: 'Now go and smite Amalek' [1 Samuel 15:3], he thought: 'If on account of one person the Torah said to perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is to be broken, how much more for all these people? If the people have sinned, what have the cattle done, and if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done?' A celestial voice came forth and said,*

'Be not be overly righteous' [Kohelet 7:16]" (*Yoma 22b*). From here we learn that although Saul's intentions were pure, Hashem still punished him and took his kingship away, for he could have fulfilled G-d's command and done nothing that did not adhere to His will.

When we modify G-d's word, we end up losing, which is what happened to Saul. Hence the Torah forbids us from taking anything pertaining to idolatry, lest the nations say: "*These people succeed only because of the silver and gold from our idols, which they took.*" Furthermore, the Torah has warned us: "*You shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is banned.*" Just as we do not bring an abomination into our home, we must not bring silver and gold that comes from idolatry into our home, for Hashem has commanded us to burn them. Even if our intention is to give this money to tzeddakah, it is like a sin because this tzeddakah stems from a sin, as the Torah states in regards to another issue: "*You shall not bring a harlot's fee or the price of a dog to the House of Hashem your G-d for any vow, for both of them are an abomination to Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 23:19*).

From here we learn that when a person excessively seeks out money – which is like idolatry (*see Iggeret HaKodesh at the end of the book Noam Elimelech*) – and he engages in business when he should be studying Torah, Scripture regards him to have taken silver and gold from idols. How so? For example, suppose that a person has set aside a time during the day in which to study Torah at the Beit HaMidrash. If a business opportunity presents itself to him during this time, and passing it up may prevent him from earning a great deal of money, the Torah tells him: "*You shall not bring an abomination into your home.*" In other words: Let this profitable deal go and lose the benefits, but do not forsake your Torah study. Better to lose the life of this temporary world than to lose the life of the World to Come.

A person must not say, "*I will put a portion of this money aside for tzeddakah, and so it will be for tzeddakah that I will have neglected my Torah study.*" Even then, since he left the Beit HaMidrash for his business and not for tzeddakah, Hashem says: This money cannot be accepted, for it was earned during a time that should have been devoted to learning Torah. This money stems from theft; it is banned and abhorrent, considered like the gold and silver derived from idols, for you have neglected eternal life. You have also neglected G-d, Who awaits your Torah every day, all so you could occupy yourself with this fleeting life. Since you acted in this way, it is clear that you worship your money, not G-d. You will therefore not derive any blessing from this money, just as one derives no blessing from a banned and abhorrent object. Although you want to give it to the poor, you have no right to modify Hashem's word. If you tell yourself, "*I will modify it and give this money to the poor,*" much in the same way that Saul acted, Hashem will loathe you in the end.

Along the same lines, we learn that one who works on the eve of Shabbat or holidays, from Mincha onwards, or at the end of Shabbat or holidays, or at the end of Yom Kippur – in every situation where there is a slight risk of sin, such as during

public fast days – such a person will never see any blessing (*Pesachim 50b*). Why is this so? Since he seeks to earn money dishonestly, his sustenance will not be blessed by money earned in such a way.

A Poor but Wise Child

If a person does not neglect his Torah study for money, what will his reward be? "*He shall deliver their kings into your hand*" (*Devarim 7:24*). Hashem says, "*Since you have devoted yourself to words of Torah, and you have not gone off to earn money when you should be studying, I am placing the evil inclination under your control.*" The king designates the evil inclination, as it is written: "*An old and foolish king*" (*Kohelet 4:13*), and our Sages have taught: "*Do not associate with a wicked man*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:7*). When a person wants to commit a sin, the evil inclination brings all his members into submission, for it reigns over them. In that case the good inclination is like someone who finds himself in prison. Yet when a person wants to perform a mitzvah, he encircles all his members so they do the will of their Father in Heaven and please Him. Here Scripture states: "*Better is a poor but wise child*" – the good inclination; "*than an old and foolish king*" – the evil inclination.

Since this person has controlled all his members and did not neglect his study, Hashem will reward him measure for measure. From then on, the good inclination will control all his members and the evil inclination will be placed under his control, becoming like a prisoner who cannot break his bonds. This is what constitutes, "*He shall deliver their kings into your hand.*"

To Observe Torah, You Must be Humble When Admonished

It is written, "*And it will be, when [eikev] you listen to these ordinances and you observe and perform them, Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your fathers*" (*Devarim 7:12*).

I would like to explain why the verse uses the term eikev by referring to what the wisest of men said: "*Stern discipline awaits one who forsakes the path. He who hates admonishment will die*" (*Mishlei 15:10*). Rabbeinu Yona explains: "*Your sin becomes compounded if you are not moved by what those who admonish you say, for they would have warned you, but you hardened your heart and did not take heed. As it is said, 'Admonishment enters more deeply into one who understands than a hundred blows into a fool. A wrongdoer wants only to rebel, so a cruel angel will be sent against him' [Mishlei 17:10-11]*" (*Sha'arei Teshuvah 2:11*). This means that a wicked man does not humble himself before those who admonish him, but on the contrary rebels. Since he did not yield before the words of those who admonished him, a cruel angel will be sent against him. This punishment is measure for measure, for those who issue admonishments are called angels, as it is written: "*They insulted the messengers [lit. 'angels'] of G-d and scorned His words and taunted His prophets*" (*II Chronicles 36:16*). As King Solomon said, "*Stern discipline awaits one who forsakes the path. He who hates admonishment will*

die" (*Mishlei 15:10*). It is true that one who leaves the right path and transgresses the Torah deserves to be sternly disciplined. However there is still hope that he will eventually listen and turn from his evil ways. Still worse is one who despises admonishment, in which case there is no chance that stern discipline will return him to the right path, meaning that he will inevitably head towards death. When someone commits a sin, desire overtakes him and he may regret not having had the strength to resist his desires. He may then yearn for admonishment and hope for it. However a person who hates admonishment is already in a hopeless state, and such hatred testifies that he detests the words of Hashem!

We therefore learn that a person is forbidden from hating admonishment, for the Torah is only acquired through a love of admonishment (*Pirkei Avoth 6:6*). As our Sages have said, "*When you have friends, some of whom admonish you while others compliment you, love those who admonish you and hate those who compliment you. In fact those who admonish you lead you to life in the World to Come, while those who compliment you lead you out of this world*" (*Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan 29*). The Sages count a hatred for admonishment among those things which impede teshuvah (*Derech Eretz 2*).

This is why the Torah states, "*And it will be [vehaya], when [eikev] you listen,*" and we know that the term vehaya always denotes joy (*Bereshith Rabba 42:3*). Furthermore, the term eikev evokes the heel, alluding to the fact that a person must yield before those who admonish him and listen to what they have to say. He must be like the heel, which is lowest part of the body, and rejoice in complying with their words.

My Heart Did Not Grow Proud

When a person rejoices in hearing admonishment, and he listens to those who give them – as it is written: "*And it will be, when you listen to these ordinances*" (*Devarim 7:12*) – G-d says: "*For them I will fulfill the oath that I made to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who conducted themselves with humility.*" Regarding Abraham it is said, "*I am but dust and ashes*" (*Bereshith 18:27*). Regarding Isaac it is said that great is humility, which constituted the glory of our father Isaac. In fact Avimelech chased him from his kingdom, and when he returned to find him, Isaac's heart did not grow proud, nor did he repay Avimelech according to his deeds. Rather, in Isaac's great humility he welcomed Avimelech with love and provided him with food and drink, both him and his men. The same occurred with Jacob, as we read: "*I am too small for all the kindnesses [that I have received]*" (*Bereshith 32:11*).

The Holy One, blessed be He, promised our fathers abundant descendants by the merit of eikev, as it is written: "*I will surely bless you and greatly increase your descendants like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore, and all your offspring shall inherit the gate of its enemy. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, for you have listened to My voice*" (*Bereshith 22:17-18*). We also read, "*Eikev* [Because] *Abraham listened to My voice*" (*ibid. 26:5*).

We should be surprised by this and ask the following question: If Abraham's offspring will be like the stars of the heavens, then why is the sand on the seashore

mentioned, and vice versa? The answer is that G-d promised Abraham that by the study of Torah, his offspring would shine like the stars. Since Abraham was afraid that this would lead them to pride, G-d said to him: Because you lowered yourself before Me like a heel, conducting yourself with humility, I will surely infuse them with humility and a love for admonishment, and they will be like the sand, which is trodden upon by everyone and which feels nothing.

Generally speaking, the Torah can only acquired and endure with someone who loves to hear admonishment. In fact he can only take action by listening to admonishment, which is why the verse says: "*When you listen to these ordinances and you observe and perform them*" (*Devarim 7:12*). When a person listens to admonishment, he will take action, as Rabbeinu Yona writes: "*Listen well, surrender yourself, and return in teshuvah when admonished by sages and those who admonish you. Take each word of admonishment to heart without exception. By doing so, you will go from darkness to great light in an instant. For if you listen and internalize, and you understand in your heart and do teshuvah – taking the words of those who admonish you to heart as soon as you hear them, taking it upon yourself from that day on to fulfill all you are taught by those who grasp Torah, and being cautious about the things which those who know alert you about from then on – then your teshuvah will take effect and you will become an entirely different person. In fact from the instant you accept these words in your mind and take them to heart, you will earn the merit and reward for all the mitzvot and admonishments. How happy you will be, for you will have exonerated yourselves in a brief instant*" (*Sha'arei Teshuvah 2:10*).

On the verse, "*The Children of Israel went and did*" (*Shemot 12:28*), our Sages say: "*Did they already do? Was this not said to them on Rosh Chodesh? However since they accepted this upon themselves, Scripture credits them for it as if they had already done so*" (*Mechilta, Bo*). It is said, "*One whose deeds are greater than his wisdom, his wisdom will endure, as it is said: 'We shall do and we shall hear' [Shemot 24:7]*" (*Avoth D'Rabbi Nathan 22*). A person who wholeheartedly commits himself to observing and doing, according to what he has been taught and according to the laws given to him, from that day on he has a reward for all the mitzvot because he carefully listened to words of Torah, arraying himself with justice and acquiring the merit of what was revealed to him and what was hidden from him. He will then constantly knock at the door of those who admonish him, thereby learning from everything he is told. His deeds will be more numerous than his wisdom, for there are certain things which he does not understand, and he will be rewarded for them.

As the Children of Israel said at Sinai, "*We will do and we will hear*" – they decided to do before having heard. Otherwise, it is impossible for a person's deeds to be greater than his wisdom.

The Manna Awakens Faith in Divine Providence

When the Torah describes the manna that descended for the Children of Israel, it states: "*He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the manna that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, but from the mouth of Hashem does man live*" (*Devarim 8:3*).

We need to think about this. The Children of Israel journeyed in the desert for 40 years, and during all that time – every day, morning after morning – Hashem sent them the manna, food described as "*the bread of the mighty*" (*Tehillim 78:25*). The manna descended at the entrance of their tents, meaning that all they had to do was to go out and gather what they needed to eat. The manna possessed extraordinary qualities: It was digested entirely by the body, and a person eating it could perceive any flavor that he desired in it, as the Gemara tells us: "*Rabbi Abahu said: Just as the infant finds very many flavors in the breast, likewise Israel found many flavors in the manna as long as they were eating it*" (*Yoma 75a*). It was truly spiritual nourishment.

As a result of this spiritual nourishment, the Children of Israel merited, as the Sages say, for "*the Torah [to] only [be] given to those who eat the manna.*" The Ba'al HaTurim points out an allusion in the verse: "*He made them eat the manna to make them understand – this teaches us that when they ate the manna, it gave them discernment. It is said in Ezra, 'You gave them the manna to teach them.' This signifies the concept that the Torah was only given to those who eat the manna.*" In fact the manna, since it was spiritual food, rendered the Children of Israel fit to receive the Torah. Only after eating it did they became worthy of receiving the Torah.

This means that spiritual abundance descended from heaven and took the form of the manna. Spirituality donned physicality, all so that men could be capable of eating it in this world. The Torah was only given to those who ate the manna, for by the constant spiritual abundance that it provided, the manna rendered them fit to receive the Torah.

In that case, why does the verse state that the manna was given "*in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, but from the mouth of Hashem does man live*"? Was there no other objective in sending them the manna, such as to prepare them for receiving the Torah, and to give them discernment, as the Ba'al HaTurim says? Furthermore, what is the significance of the Torah being given only to those who eat the manna? Have we, who do not eat manna, not received the Torah? Therefore what does it mean that "*the Torah was only given to those who eat the manna*"?

It seems that everything results from the same thing. When they left Egypt, the Children of Israel were in a difficult spiritual situation, having breeched the 49 gates of impurity. Just a little more, and they would have breached the 50th gate. In fact their spiritual situation was so bad that the ministering angels asked the Creator of the universe how the Children of Israel differed from the Egyptians, since "*these are idolaters, and those are idolaters.*" However the Holy One, blessed be He, was aware of and understood their virtues. They were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob, which is why He chose them from among all the peoples and wanted to give them the Torah. Since in their present condition – despite having witnessed the ten plagues in Egypt, and despite the fact that they saw the sea split, experienced prophesy, and sang the song by the sea – they were still not worthy of receiving the Torah. He therefore led them for 40 days, and on each of these days they proceeded from a gate of impurity to a gate of purity. Hence they worked to strengthen the principles of Judaism within themselves, the principles of Torah. It was only after 49 days, on Sivan 6, that they became worthy of receiving the Torah. During that time, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent them an additional gift that would make them fit to receive the Torah, namely the manna. The manna prepared the Children of Israel by infusing them with faith in the Creator of the universe. By eating the manna day after day, the Children of Israel filled themselves with the knowledge that "*not by bread alone does man live.*" That is, we are not our own masters in this world, definitely not, for there exists a Creator, One Who directs all there is. Everyone benefits from individual providence – "*from the mouth of Hashem does man live*" – and no one lifts a finger on earth without cause. Everything results from the extraordinary providence of the Creator of the universe. This is what the Holy One, blessed be He, infused into the Children of Israel by means of the manna, the bread of heaven, the bread of the mighty, which by its very nature contradicts all the laws of nature. That is, how could something physical be completely absorbed by the human body, being here one minute and gone the next? How could it change taste according to a person's thoughts? If it were physical, it had to be limited to a single taste, and if it were spiritual, how could it possess size and shape?

This occurred solely because the physical is also spiritual by nature, solely because the Holy One, blessed be He, directs the world and is the One Who gives life to all His creatures. He is the One Who, in His goodness, renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation.

The Creator of the universe infused this understanding into the Children of Israel, which is precisely why the Torah was given to those who recognized this truth. This was the special understanding that was given to them by having eaten the manna, for if a person realizes that his entire life depends on G-d's will – if he believes with complete faith that the Creator watches over all of His creations, and that everything happens according to His will – he will then realize that if G-d so desires, he will live, and otherwise…. With that understanding, a person will certainly do the Creator's will as he should, so that He may grant him life. Hence this understanding preceded the giving of the Torah, taking place in a way that was conducive to complete obedience to the Creator of the universe. Furthermore, the point is not that the Torah does not belong to us – to us and to our descendants – just because we did not merit eating the manna. Rather, it is that the giving of the Torah must only come after this incredible realization, a realization that was the privilege of those who ate the manna, namely that "*from the mouth of Hashem does man live.*" In fact man's task is to carry out

the Creator's will, for He is the One Who governs the world. Thus a person who acknowledges everything that we have said will stand at the same level as those who ate the manna, and as a result he is worthy of receiving the Torah and studying it. As the Sages have said, a person must acquire the fear of G-d before learning Torah, for "*the fear of Hashem is the beginning of wisdom*" (*Mishlei 1:7*).

The Greatness of Modesty

It is written, "*Vehaya eikev [And it will be, when] you hearken to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them, Hashem your G-d will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers*" (*Devarim 7:12*).

The teachers of Mussar explain that the expression vehaya eikev (*eikev means heel*) signifies that man needs to yield and demonstrate humility before Hashem and the Torah. In this way, the Torah can reside in him and Hashem's Name will cleave to his own, as it is written: "*Words of Torah endure only with one who is humble*" (*Taanith 7a*). The characteristics of humility and modesty belong to the Holy One, blessed be He, for the very fact that He is patient and does not rush to punish sinners demonstrates to everyone how modest He is. In this regard it is written: "*You shall walk after Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 13:5*), which our Sages explain as an order for man to cleave to Hashem's attributes, in harmony with the principle: "*Just as He [clothes the naked, visits the sick, etc.], so should you*" (*Sotah 14a*). Hence just as Hashem is modest, it is incumbent upon us to acquire this extraordinary attribute and to cleave to it.

Praising His Name

The Midrash cites a well-known incident regarding King Solomon, who sought to bring the Holy Ark through the doors of the Temple. Because of an error in calculation, however, the doors were too narrow and the Ark was unable to pass. Faced with this difficulty, he immediately read the verse: "*Lift up your heads, O gates! Lift them up, O everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall enter*" (*Tehillim 24:9*). Despite saying this, the doors did not move. In fact not only did they refuse to open, they also wanted to crush him, believing that he was talking about himself while reciting this verse. It was only after King Solomon read the following verse (*"Who is this King of glory? Hashem, the L-rd of hosts"*), that the doors stopped threatening him.

Yet even once the anger of the doors was appeased when they realized who this King was, they still refused to open until King Solomon finally recited the verse: "*Remember the righteousness of David Your servant*" (*II Chronicles 6:42*). The doors then opened and the Holy Ark was able to enter and take its rightful place in the Temple. King Solomon merited the opening of the doors by mentioning his father David, since this represented an act of humility for him. It proved to the doors that King Solomon, when speaking of the "*King of glory,*" was sincerely thinking of Hashem and sought to praise Him (for if Solomon had demonstrated pride, he would not have humbled himself by mentioning his father David).

In light of this, we can understand why King Solomon – the wisest of all men – did not build the Temple doors to accommodate the eventual arrival of the Holy Ark into the Holy of Holies, but instead relied on a miracle to increase the size of the Temple's entrance.

We must explain that this situation was actually brought about by Divine Providence. Hashem wanted King Solomon to build doors that were too small precisely so he would reach this point and mention his father David. The dialogue between King Solomon and the Temple doors teaches us a lesson in ethics: We must realize just how important it is for a person to cleave to modesty and humility. If King Solomon, the wisest of all men, humbled himself by mentioning his father, then how much more should we – insignificant as we are – adopt the same attitude!

I thought of asking another question on this Midrash: Why did King Solomon decide to mention only the kindness of his father David, which obviously caused the doors of the Temple to open? The answer is that throughout his life, King David constantly devoted himself to others by helping Jews in all situations and at all times. Our Sages say that David's hands were always full of blood, for he was constantly issuing rulings on cases of blood (*the blood of niddah*) for women in order to declare them clean for their husbands. Likewise, he was always deeply worried about the material situation of the Jewish people. When he saw that Jews were experiencing material difficulties, he instructed them to help one another.

From here we learn that David distinguished himself by this attribute of kindness on account of his tremendous sense of modesty. Indeed, as the leader of the Jewish people, he invested his energies into worrying about all their needs without feeling superior to others because of his privileged position.

The Kindness of David

Our Sages teach, "*The world stands on three things: Torah, Divine service, and deeds of kindness*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:2*). This means that the basis and foundation of the world depends on Torah, the offering of sacrifices (replaced today by prayer), and deeds of kindness. According to this saying, we can more easily understand why the doors of the Temple did not open until they heard King David's name. King Solomon had built the Temple, where the Torah was located (since the Holy Ark contained a Sefer Torah and the broken pieces of the Ten Commandments), and it was also where sacrifices were offered, meaning that the only thing missing was the third pillar, deeds of kindness.

In his great humility, King Solomon understood his error and did not hesitate to acknowledge it in public. Hence he evoked the third pillar – deeds of kindness – represented by King David. When the doors saw that King Solomon recognized his error and mentioned his father David, a symbol of the pillar of kindness, they immediately opened. Hence in the final analysis, the Temple rests on the three pillars that constitute the very foundation of the world.

The Missing Description in Sefer Devarim

It is written, "*Do not say to yourself, when Hashem your G-d has repelled them from before you, saying: 'Because of my righteousness, Hashem has brought me to possess this land' – but for the wickedness of these nations, Hashem drives them out from before you. Not because of your righteousness, or because of the honesty of your heart, do you come to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations [does] Hashem your G-d drive them out from before you, and in order to establish the word that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*" (*Devarim 9:4-5*).

In the book Degel HaMussar, my teacher Rabbeinu Gershon Liebman asks why it would have been wrong for the Children of Israel to think that their righteousness is what earned them the land of Israel as a heritage. They obviously knew that the wicked conduct of the foreign peoples who lived in it justified their expulsion from the land. Yet why did this mean that Israel's worthiness had to be disregarded? Admittedly, the warnings contained in these verses ask us not to yield to the attitude described in the verse, "*My strength and the might of my hand has made be all this wealth*" (*Devarim 8:17*). Instead, we must never lose sight of the fact that "*it was [G-d] Who gave you strength to make wealth*" (*v.18*). Even our strength and abilities stem from Him, and therefore we must not grow proud.

Nevertheless, what harm is there in thinking that due to their merit and piety, G-d helped the Children of Israel to inherit the land? On the contrary, it would be beneficial to view things this way! As the Alter of Novardok once said, anybody who wants to strengthen his faith in G-d can proclaim that he is personally infused with faith. Likewise, if the Children of Israel felt and declared that they were tzaddikim, they would strengthen themselves in this path. Therefore why would it be incorrect to think along these lines?

We have heard our teachers affirming that they are always filled with faith in G-d. Even my teacher, my father Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon, had the custom of saying: "*I have faith in Hashem*" in order to strengthen his faith still more. That being the case, why does the Torah here demand that we distance ourselves from all such sentiments, whereas everyone can use it to strengthen themselves in their own service of G-d? I would like to point out that there is an essential difference between faith in G-d (which is very important to cultivate) and faith in our own piety. Let us expand upon this issue: Whoever affirms that he has faith in Hashem will demonstrate neither conceit nor pride. He will only seek to augment this sacred virtue and strengthen his faith in G-d. He will obviously not want to signal that he has attained perfection in this area, which is comprised of many levels. As the author of Chovot HaLevavot notes, faith in Hashem is comprised of ten primary levels, each of which in turn is composed of numerous elements. Thus a person who has attained a certain level has still a long way to go before being able to consider himself a perfect believer. Therefore when we regularly repeat that we have faith in Hashem, we must not brag about it or demonstrate pride.

We must not claim that we have already reached the summit of faith, but instead we must simply strengthen ourselves. This is the good and proper approach that will prove only beneficial: Because we speak about it, faith in Hashem will be rooted in us, as King David said: "*I believed when I spoke*" (*Tehillim 116:10*).

On the other hand, whoever is convinced of his own piety and the righteousness of his heart – whoever boasts of his own good deeds and claims to have numerous and powerful merits that even allow him to inherit the land – demonstrates by such an attitude that he thinks he has already attained spiritual perfection. However he is wrong. Who can claim to be so righteous and just and that he merits goodness and blessing by virtue of his piety? This is nothing but pride and self-importance. He even demonstrates conceit by thinking that he has already rectified all his faults and is now a righteous and pious person.

It goes without saying that such an attitude will seriously damage his service of G-d and lead him to a precipitous spiritual fall. Since he considers himself perfect in all his ways and upright and all his deeds, he will never think of examining his actions or questioning himself. That is why the Torah prohibited the Children of Israel from believing such ideas or thinking that it was their piety or the righteousness of their own hearts that allowed them to inherit this good land.

True piety consists of never glorifying ourselves during our time on earth. It means always feeling incomplete in our service of G-d, and being aware that the path leading to perfection is lengthy.

Thinking that we are perfect is a sin, a terrible demonstration of wretched pride, the only consequence of which is sin. That is why the Torah is very strict in regard to this subject.

In my opinion, it was for this reason that the Torah did not repeat the description of the Sanctuary's construction in Sefer Devarim. In fact the Sanctuary's construction is not considered a historical event that is over and done with. In reality, it is incumbent upon each of us to constantly work on the construction of our own sanctuary. In other words, we must push ourselves for Torah and make an effort to fulfill mitzvah, all while yearning for perfection, so that the Shechinah will seek to dwell in us. The only way to achieve this is not to be convinced of our own piety, nor to rely on our own righteousness, but to know deep down that we are still far from perfection and that only a great effort will allow us to draw closer to it. Thus by making an effort for Torah and fulfilling the mitzvot that are repeated (*nishnu*) in Sefer Devarim (which is also called *Mishneh Torah*), we transform ourselves into a dwelling place for the Shechinah.

Re'eh

The Pilgrimage to Jerusalem – A Beneficial Influence on Every Generation

It is written, "*Three times a year shall all your males appear before the L-RD your G-d in the place that He will choose: On the festival of Matzot, the festival of Shavuot, and the festival of Sukkot*" (*Deuteronomy 16:16*). We have received the commandment to make a pilgrimage to the Temple on each of the three festivals. However we need to understand the reason for the mitzvah to appear at the Temple three times a year, namely on Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

Throughout the year, a person must fight his evil inclination as it tries to make him forsake his service of Hashem, and especially to shun his faith. It tries to seduce him by saying, "*Why shut yourself in the Beit Midrash and cut yourself off from all the pleasures of the world? Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you will die.*" It says to him, "*Who says that there's a World to Come, so that it separates you from the pleasures of the world? Has anyone ever returned from the World to Come to tell you that it exists, a world other than the one you can see with your own eyes?*"

Thus the evil inclination instills all kinds of doubts in us and tries to shake our faith in Hashem and His Torah, as well as in the concept of reward and punishment. Furthermore, it comes forward each day with new arguments, especially against faith, which is the basis for all the mitzvot, as the Sages have said: "*It is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the tzaddik shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]*" (*Makkot 24a*).

This is the way that the evil inclination makes people stumble in regards to faith. Now without faith in Hashem, or with a faith that is imperfect, how can a person observe mitzvot? Even if he does observe them, they will not be considered as mitzvot because he does not believe in the One Who gave them. Although it is difficult for a person to overcome the evil inclination during the entire year, he must still wage a firm battle against it. Hence Hashem in His wisdom commanded that we present ourselves during the three festivals, that Jews ascend to Jerusalem and the Temple three times a year, in order for their hearts to be stirred upon seeing the priests, the servants of Hashem, as they serve Him. They will also see the Levites singing, which will further motivate them.

Similarly, when the pilgrims arrived at the Temple, they were shown the showbread, still hot after eight days, as the Gemara says: "*This teaches, therefore, that they used to lift up the showbread and show it to the festival pilgrims, saying to them: 'See how much love the Omnipresent has for you? It is taken away as it is set down'*" (*Chagigah 26b*). This also alludes to the sustenance of the Children of Israel, for just as the Holy One, blessed be He, ensured that the showbread remained hot, did not dry up, and did

not become moldy, He also ensures that everyone has enough food and that their needs are taken care of. According to one's faith in this area, he receives his sustenance in abundance.

Furthermore, as we well know, when the Children of Israel returned from Jerusalem following their pilgrimage, they saw that all their possessions were intact, for no thieves had touched them, as the Sages stated (*Yerushalmi, Peah 3:7*). Even the milk that remained in the udders of their cows did not turn bad during all the time that they were in Jerusalem, even though nobody was left behind to take care of their things. Certainly the thought of how the milk could have stayed fresh, even though the cows had not been milked for several weeks, led to a powerful strengthening of their faith in the Creator of the world, Who cared for them during all the time they were gone.

In reflecting upon this, we see that it is precisely during these three festivals (*Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot*) that people can best strengthen their faith in Hashem. On Passover our faith is strengthened because today, many generations after the miracles of the Exodus, we still believe in Hashem simply because of what the Torah states and what has been passed on to us by tradition, generation after generation, from the time of Moses, namely an account of all the miracles and wonders that Hashem did for our forefathers in Egypt. It is not only our forefathers that Hashem saved, but us as well, for all our souls were there.

This also strengthens our faith in all the mitzvot. Similarly, today there is faith in the coming deliverance, as it written: "*As in the days when you left the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders*" (*Micah 7:15*). We still hope and pray to merit being in Jerusalem, fully rebuilt, in the following year.

The same applies to the festival of Shavuot, the holiday of the giving of our holy Torah, when our faith is awakened as it was when Hashem's glory was revealed on Mount Sinai, when people heard His holy words amid flames. Celestial and terrestrial beings remained motionless as the people perceived the unity of Hashem, as it is written: "*You have been shown in order to know that the L-RD, He is G-d. There is none beside Him*" (*Deuteronomy 4:35*). Seeing the glory of Hashem face to face, they acknowledged the statement: "*Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds from the mouth of the L-RD does man live*" (*ibid. 8:3*). By making the pilgrimage during the festival of Shavuot, they rejoiced in the brilliance of the Shechinah and perceived that the only life is one of Torah and mitzvot, as it is written: "*Which a man shall do and by which he shall live*" (*Leviticus 18:5*). Furthermore, it is precisely during the festival of Shavuot that our faith is especially strengthened. In fact it is very close to the festival of Passover, and barely a few weeks earlier the people were celebrating Passover in Jerusalem. Therefore why did they have to exhaust themselves again by making another pilgrimage on the 6th of Sivan?

Finally, our faith is certainly strengthened on the festival of Sukkot, which is called "*the shadow of faith*" (*Zohar III:73a*). This is precisely when the evil inclination entices people by telling them that their fields are filled with wheat and their vineyards are

flush with grapes, that the storehouses are filled with produce because it is the harvest, and that now is the time to take advantage of the fruit of their work. The evil inclination whispers to people that the prayers they recited and the tears they shed during selichot were all a waste of time. It tries to make them waver in order for them to remain with their transgressions and prevent them from being atoned. Yet today, on account of our many sins and to our bitter regret – now when we have no Temple, and when we see neither priest nor Levite performing their service – we can still go to Jerusalem, to the Western Wall, and spill out our hearts in prayer to Hashem. We can still ask Him to quickly save us and to establish the Temple, so that in us will be fulfilled the prayer, "*May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in mercy.*" Amen, may it be so.

Humility Transforms Curses into Blessings

It is written, "*See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, that you hearken…and the curse, if you do not hearken*" (*Deuteronomy 11:26-28*).

There are several things that we need to understand about this passage: (*1*) Why does the Torah expand upon the concept of "*a blessing and a curse*"? It would have been enough to say, "*See, I set before you today a blessing.*" As such, we would have automatically understood that if we do not heed Hashem's mitzvot, we would receive a curse. (*2*) Why does the passage state "*a blessing and a curse*" together, since these seem to be two separate things? Why are they not mentioned separately? (*3*) Furthermore, why does the Torah use different expressions for describing the blessing and the curse? For the blessing it states, "*The blessing, that you hearken,*" yet for the curse it states, "*The curse, if you do not hearken.*"

The explanation seems to be that a person must realize that the primary light that emerges from his heart appears precisely when he embodies the concept of eikev, meaning when he annuls his pride before Hashem. In fact a person generally loves to speak about himself, saying such thing as "*I did this*" and "*I was able to acquire all these things on my own.*" He forgets that everything comes to him from Hashem, and that only He can say "*I*" or "*Mine*" – "*For all the earth is Mine*" (*Exodus 19:5*). Thus it is written, "*See, I*" (*Deuteronomy 11:26*). This means that if a person wants to merit the light by the expression re'eh (*"see"*), he must ensure that the essential thing – his study of Torah (the Torah being called light, as the Sages have said: *"The Torah is light"*) – is characterized by self-annulment. Only the Holy One, blessed be He, is called "*I,*" for He is the One Who gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, where He said: "*I am the L-RD your G-d.*" Hence when a person annuls himself before G-d and studies the Torah in humility – when he renounces pride and constantly senses this infinite light, constantly embodying the concept of *eikev* (heel) – he will even accept curses (not just blessings and goodness) with love. He will accept trials with love as well, and just as he says a blessing for the good, he will also say a blessing for the bad. This is a very significant lesson, which is why the Torah mentions the blessing and the curse together. The way to achieve a complete annulment of pride and the "*I*" is to reflect upon the greatness of the Creator, as it is

written: "*When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars that You have established, what is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You visit him?*" (*Psalms 8:4-5*). It is also written, "*How many are Your works, O L-RD. You have made them all with wisdom*" (*Psalms 104:24*). A person will then be able to annul all his desires before Hashem, constantly recalling the day in which the Torah was given to us. He will see the glory of the King, so elevated that He alone can say "*I.*" In this way he will take upon himself both the blessings and curses without protest, without saying: "*What did I do to deserve this?*"

Obviously, such a person clearly realizes the responsibility that he has to study Torah. He senses that without the Torah, the world would be unable to exist, as it is actually stated: "*If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth*" (*Jeremiah 33:25*). He is therefore obligated to not turn away from the study of Torah, either to the right or to the left.

We therefore read, "*The blessing, that you hearken,*" not "*if you hearken.*" This teaches us that when a person reaches a great level of annulling his own pride, he will automatically feel an obligation to constantly study Torah, without the possibility or the desire to neglect it. Although a person has free will, he has the possibility to renounce it by realizing his tremendous lowliness, as well as by considering the greatness of the Creator. The result is that he will feel obligated to constantly study Torah with humility, as it is written: "*Words of Torah endure only with him who is humble*" (*Taanith 7a*).

The Torah also states, "*The curse, if you do not hearken,*" meaning that if a person fails to obey Hashem's voice, that in itself will bring about a curse. Why is a person punished so greatly despite having a choice? In any case, Hashem warns man that his goal in this world is to obey His mitzvot. This is the objective behind man's creation, for the Sages tell us that before a person is sent into this world, he must take an oath to be righteous, never wicked (*Niddah 30b*). Before he comes into this world, man has no choice at all. The entire issue of free will only begins once he arrives in this world, where the Satan waits for him, as it is written: "*Sin is crouching at the door*" (*Genesis 4:7*).

When a person recalls the giving of the Torah on Sinai and what his eyes saw, this obligates him to annul his will before Hashem, as it is written: "*Annul your will before His will*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:4*), and to obey Hashem's word. There is another way to answer our previous question, namely why "*a blessing and a curse*" are mentioned together, since they seem to be two entirely different things. We know that a person will sometimes think that a blessing he has received from Heaven is really a curse (suffering and exile, for example). In reality, he must realize that it is only for his good, for no evil can emerge from the mouth of the Most High. It was given to him in order to improve his future. It is for this reason that the passage mentions them together (*"a blessing and a curse"*), for Hashem is telling us: "*Realize that I have actually given you a blessing, and it only appears like a curse to you. It is really a blessing, for suffering atones for the sins of man.*"

Similarly, people think that when the Holy One, blessed be He, provides them with riches, it is for their good, and when they lose them it is to their detriment. People must realize that this is an error on their part. When something is taken away from a person, it is certainly for his good. It is meant to awaken him so that he becomes aware of some deficiency on his part. In fact he has not fulfilled in himself what is mentioned in the verse, "*the blessing, that you hearken.*" This means that when you hearken, you will consider all things to be a blessing. We find something similar to this later in the parsha, where it is written: "*If there is among you a poor man, one of your brothers within any of your gates in your land…you will not harden your heart or shut your hand from your poor brother. But you will open your hand wide to him, and you will surely lend him enough for his needs*" (*Deuteronomy 15:7-8*). Here the Torah actually uses double expressions such as "*opening you shall open,*" meaning that we must not think that this commandment will harm us or that we will be losing out by giving, for this is precisely for our good. Likewise it is written "*giving you shall give,*" meaning that we should not think that we will lack money because we have given. We must realize that the opposite is true, that this donation will be the reason for our success, as it is written: "*For in return for this matter, the L-RD your G-d will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking*" (*v.10*).

Humans are Greater

It is written, "*You are children to Hashem your G-d – you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people from among all the peoples on the face of the earth*" (*Devarim 14:1-2*). From the fact that it says, "*You are children,*" followed by "*you shall not cut yourselves,*" we learn that if they had not been children, they would not have been given this order. However we need to understand the connection between these two concepts. Furthermore, what connection is there between not eating abominable things and the prohibition against cutting oneself for the dead? Why does the Torah juxtapose both things? The Sages have taught in the Mishnah, "*Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]. It is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d], as it is stated: 'For in the image of G-d he made man' [Bereshith 9:6]. Beloved are the people Israel, for they are called children of G-d, as it is said: 'You are the children of Hashem your G-d' [Devarim 14:1]*" (*Pirkei Avoth 3:14*). The Tanna chose these two things for the glory of man, since they are equal. In fact the image of the king is like the king himself, and a person who scorns the image of the king is not only scorning his image, but the king himself! If that person had no intention of denigrating the king, he would not have scorned his image. Hence it follows that one who scorns and denigrates the son of the king has harmed the king himself, which is why the Tanna repeated these two things for the love of man. From the fact that the Children of Israel were created in the image of G-d, it is forbidden for

them to harm themselves. This is because when a person cuts himself, he is damaging and scorning the image of the king. Since they are His children, Hashem forbid them from cutting themselves. This is because one who harms the son of the king is as if he has harmed the king himself. It is therefore written, "*You are children,*" as well as "*Hashem your G-d*" in the prohibition against cutting oneself. In other words: Be it because I am your Father, or because I am your King and your G-d, I forbid you from doing these things.

Furthermore, Hashem commanded His children not to make themselves abhorrent by eating forbidden foods. Because He is their father, He distances His children from things that harm body and soul, and there are no foods forbidden by the Torah that do not contain something harmful for body or soul. Rabbeinu Bechaye wrote that the distinction which the Torah established between permitted and forbidden foods is meant to purify the soul, for mitzvot are the life of the body and soul, as King Solomon said: "*They are life to one who finds them, and healing for all his flesh*" (*Mishlei 4:22*). "*They are life to one who finds them*" – this is the life of the soul; "*and healing for all his flesh*" – this is the life of the body. Food forbidden by the Torah damages the body and leads to cruel traits and other faults in the soul, for by nature such foods are coarse and contain moisture. Doctors are well aware of this. It is fitting for those who received the Torah to purify their minds through pure food and to guard themselves from cruelty. This is the meaning of the teaching, "*What does the Holy One, blessed be He, care whether a man slaughters an animal by the throat or by the nape of its neck?*" (*Bereshith Rabba 44:1*). The mitzvot were given solely to purify man!

Hashem paid so much attention to the honor of His children that He also prohibited them from eating blood, insects, and similar things, everything that makes the body abhorrent. This is because a person who respects the children of the king is respecting the king himself. Since they avoid food that renders the body contemptible, Scripture regards them as if they had honored the king himself, which is why He rewards them for this.

The Mishnah in Makkot notes that it is written, "*Only be strong not to eat the blood, for blood is the life*" (*Devarim 12:23*). The Sages add, "*If in the case of blood – which man's soul loathes – anyone who refrains from it receives a reward, how much more in regards to theft and debauchery – which man's soul craves and longs for – shall one who refrains from them acquire merit for himself and for generations and generations to come, to the end of all generations! Rabbi Hanania ben Akashia says: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to make Israel worthy, and so He gave them the Torah and many mitzvot, for it is said: "Hashem desired, for the sake of his righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious*" [*Isaiah 42:21*].' " The Rivan explains: This was done in order for us to receive a reward by avoiding sin, which is why He multiplied the mitzvot, for there was no need to give numerous mitzvot and warnings concerning crawling creatures and corpses, given that there is no one who is not disgusted by them. Rather, it was meant for us to receive a reward by avoiding them.

The Sages say in the Aggadah: "*If you want to know the difference between the actions of our G-d and the actions of the nations, [consider that] when a king enacts decrees, even evil ones, nobody can contest them. One who fulfills them receives no reward, but one who transgresses them is put to death. Yet when the Holy One, blessed be He, enacts decrees for the Children of Israel, they are rewarded if they observe them. Now it is written, 'you shall not cut yourselves…for a dead person,' whereas the nations cut themselves for the dead and harm themselves, as it is written: 'You have cut yourselves as they do.' What does the Holy One, blessed be He, say to the Children of Israel? 'I am Hashem' – Who rewards faithfully. He says to them, 'Do not hurt yourselves, and I will give you a reward.'*"

Furthermore, the Torah has also sanctified the Children of Israel in what is permitted, as it is written: "*Sanctify yourselves in what is permitted to you.*" G-d desired to separate the Children of Israel from animals, in order for them not to resemble beasts, as the Sages have said: "*In three ways are humans like the ministering angels: They possess understanding like the ministering angels, they walk erect like the ministering angels, and they can speak in the holy tongue like the ministering angels. And in three ways are they like animals: They eat and drink like animals, they procreate like animals, and they relieve themselves like animals*" (*Chagigah 16a*).

Since the areas in which humans are similar to animals are equal in number to the areas in which they are similar to the ministering angels, we do not know what humans resemble more. However when they distance themselves from forbidden foods and sanctify themselves in what is permitted, their food no longer resembles that of the animals, for animals eat whatever they find, and it does not matter to them if their food will give them harmful characteristics or not. We may therefore say that man resembles the ministering angels in four things and animals in two things. Hence he resembles angels more than animals.

The Aggadah says, "*You save both man and animal, O Hashem*" (*Tehillim 36:7*) – by the merit of the animal, You save man (*Bereshith Rabba 33:1*). How so? If we say that men are more precious in G-d's eyes than animals, why is the merit of an animal required to save man? When a man does evil, he becomes less than an animal, and he can only be saved by the merit of an animal, for animals do not commit evil. As for man, since he received Torah and mitzvot, he can ascend new spiritual levels if he is deserving, and he can resemble the ministering angels, as the Sages have said. If he is not deserving, however, he will lower himself and resemble an animal, at which point he can only be saved by the merit of an animal, which does not engage in wrongdoing.

Looking to the Past as a Warning for the Future

It is written, "*See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, that you hearken to the mitzvot of Hashem your G-d that I command you today. And the curse, if you do not hearken to the mitzvot of Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 11:26-28*).

We need to understand why this passage states, in regards to the blessings: "*The blessing, that you hearken,*" yet for the curses it uses an expression of uncertainty: "*The curse, if you do not hearken.*"

We must also question whether Moshe was pointing out something specific to the Children of Israel when he told them, "*See, I set before you today a blessing.*"

Constant Pleasure is Not Pleasure

Earlier in the Torah we read, "*And it will be, eikev [when] you hearken to these ordinances*" (*Devarim 7:12*). Here Rashi explains that eikev refers to easy mitzvot that a person steps on with his heel (*eikev*). In other words, we must not perform easy mitzvot like a person who does something habitually, without paying attention to it, as it is written: "*Like rote learning of human commands*" (*Isaiah 29:13*). Rather, the mitzvot should seem as if they were given today.

Hence the Torah states, Vehaya eikev (*"And it will be, when"*), teaching us that Jews must perform mitzvot with joy, for the term vehaya denotes joy (*Bereshith Rabba 42:3*). In fact when a person performs mitzvot with joy, it is a sure sign that they are not burdensome to him, that he is not doing them out of habit. Rather, he performs mitzvot because he loves them, because they are precious to him.

As a general rule, when a person gets used to something, even something that is enjoyable, it no longer seems enjoyable to him. In fact the Sages have said, "*Constant pleasure is not pleasure.*" Moshe therefore told the Children of Israel: Think about the fact that whoever distances himself from Torah, it is as if he were distancing himself from life itself, as it is written: "*It is a tree of life to those who grasp it*" (*Mishlei 3:18*). If a person were to object by saying that we see evildoers succeeding in life, he must realize that although they are succeeding in this world, they will lose out in the World to Come.

When Did the Problem Start?

Actually, the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes the wicked even in this world. Thus we read, "*Beware lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then Hashem's wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain, and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land that Hashem gives you*" (*Devarim 11:16-17*).

How do we know that this is correct, that the Holy One, blessed be He, removes evildoers from this world? Moshe said: "*See*" – you have seen the deeds of your fathers, for G-d desired to bring them into Eretz Israel as long as they did His will. However He made them wander in the desert for 40 years when they acted

improperly, until they died. When did the problem start? It was when they protested the decisions of Hashem by weeping, as it is said: "*Moshe heard the people weeping throughout their families, each at the entrance of his tent*" (*Bamidbar 11:10*). It is also said, "*The entire assembly lifted up their voice and cried aloud, and the people wept that night*" (*ibid. 14:1*). Here the Sages have said, "*That night was the night of Tisha B'Av. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'You have wept without cause, therefore I will set [this day] aside for weeping throughout the generations to come'* " (*Taanith 29a*). Hence this is what Moshe told the Children of Israel: If you want to be among those who enter Eretz Israel, be careful to do G-d's will in joy. From here we learn that when Moshe gave them "*the blessing,*" he used a term that denotes certainty – "*that you hearken.*" Yet when speaking of the curses, Moshe did not use the term "*that,*" but rather "*if*": If you act improperly, as your fathers did, know that it will lead to curses.

On the verse, "*See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse*" (*Devarim 11:26*), the Sages in the Midrash teach: "*Why is this said? It is because it is written: 'I have placed life and death before you' [Devarim 30:19]. The Children of Israel might think, 'Since G-d placed two things before us – the path of life and the path of death – let us choose the path that will please us. Hence it is written, 'Choose life'*" (*Sifrei, Devarim 11:26*).

This is like someone who finds himself at a crossroads, with two possible paths before him. One is smooth at the beginning but filled with obstacles at the end, while the other is filled with obstacles at the beginning but smooth at the end. He starts warning passers-by, saying: "*You see this road that starts out smoothly? You can be sure that a little further down, it will be filled with obstacles.*" He then gives them some advice: "*You see this road filled with obstacles at the outset? You can be sure that a little further down, it will be smooth.*"

The Tzaddikim Finish by Rejoicing

Likewise Moshe told the Children of Israel, "*See the wicked who succeed in this world? You can be sure that they will succeed only for a short while, and in the end they will lose out. See the righteous who experience misfortune in this world? You can be sure that they will end up rejoicing.*"

The Sages also compare the situation to a sick person who goes to a doctor. The doctor says to him, "*Don't eat cold things or sleep in a damp place.*" Another doctor warns him even more sternly: "*Don't eat cold things or sleep in a damp place, so as not to die like so-and-so died*" (*Torat Kohanim 16:3*).

Here too, Moshe told the Children of Israel: "*Do not act improperly as your fathers did, when they protested against G-d, for if you act in this way and fail to accept His mitzvot with joy, you will have no right to enter Eretz Israel, and you will die in the desert.*" This is why Moshe said, "*See.*" It was so the Children of Israel could see the deeds of their fathers and learn from what happened to them. Why did he say all this? It was so they would not emulate their fathers in any way.

The Mitzvah of the Pilgrimage Festivals: Strengthening our Faith and Confidence in the Creator of the Universe

It is written, "*Three times a year, all your males shall appear before Hashem your G-d in the place which He shall choose…. None shall appear before Hashem empty-handed*" (*Devarim 16:16*).

This verse obligates all Jewish men to travel to the Temple in Jerusalem three times a year. What is the exact meaning of this mitzvah? Why does it apply precisely for the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot?

Simply speaking, anyone who takes a closer look at this mitzvah will conclude that it rests upon the principle of faith in G-d. It requires a person to control his emotions and to leave his home, his field, and his vineyard behind without any supervision. He must place his trust solely in G-d, and in His promise to us: "*No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem your G-d*" (*Shemot 34:24*).

Can there be any greater faith than this? For a person to abandon everything that he has worked on for the past year, to leave everything behind and to travel to Jerusalem with joy and enthusiasm, bringing with him all kinds of offerings to the Temple?

All throughout the year, man fights his evil inclination as it seeks to prevent him from serving G-d, and especially from placing his faith in Him. The evil inclination entices him with its ruses, availing itself of every possible trick, be it through desire (*"eat and drink, for life is short"*), or through waves of denial that weaken his faith in G-d. Each day, the evil inclination adopts new arguments and pretexts in this fight, primarily attacking a person's faith, the pillar of all mitzvot, as we read: "*It is Habakkuk who came and based all of them [the 613 mitzvot] on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the righteous shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]*" (*Makkot 24a*).

Hence during the three pilgrimage festivals, every Jew had to intensify his faith in G-d by traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem. There he would see the kohanim, G-d's servants, performing their functions and the Levites singing, which prompted a spiritual awakening in him.

The Gemara recounts that when the festival pilgrims arrived at the Temple, they were shown the Showbread: "*They used to lift it [the Shulchan] and show the festival pilgrims the Showbread…and they would say to them: 'Behold the love in which you are held by the Omnipresent, it [the Showbread] being taken away as [fresh as] when it was set down.' As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, 'A great miracle was performed in regards to the Showbread: Just as it was set down [fresh], so was it taken away'*" (*Chagigah 26b*). Indeed, they were truly loved. In fact this miracle – the Showbread being taken away as hot and fresh as on the day it was placed on the Shulchan – was not necessary for the fulfillment of the mitzvah, only for its beautification. Hence this miracle revealed G-d's special love for them.

When the festival pilgrims realized just how much G-d loved His children, they were immediately infused with more faith and an extraordinary level of confidence in the fact that G-d does not let forsake His people or abandon His heritage.

It is also explained in our holy books that the miracle of the Showbread alludes to the sustenance of the Jewish people. That is, just as G-d ensured that the Showbread remained hot, growing neither old nor moldy, likewise He does not forget to generously provide everyone with all that they need. The more confidence that we have in Him, the greater our reward.

These were not the only inspirational signs lavished upon the festival pilgrims, for they were also shown the jar containing the manna, which had been preserved and remained in perfect condition as a perpetual reminder. Its goal was to teach people that just as Hashem fed the Children of Israel in the desert for 40 years, likewise He feeds all of us each day.

All of these signs, which infused faith into the hearts of the Children of Israel, had to take place during Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. These are times whose very essence strengthens our faith in G-d.

Pesach is when G-d demonstrated that He had accepted a nation and a people, "*for the Children of Israel are My servants*" (*Vayikra 25:55*), a time when we received the commandment: "*I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*" Sukkot is when G-d protected us with the Cloud of Glory, so that nothing could harm us. Then there is Shavuot, the time when we received the holy Torah, which has ensured our existence and that of the universe to this very day, as it is written: "*If not for My covenant [the Torah], I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth*" (*Jeremiah 33:25*). In fact it is well-known that at each of these times, the same supernal influence affects us, just as it did at those particular times: On Pesach, as it did during the exodus from Egypt; on Sukkot, as it did during the journeys of the Children of Israel in the desert "*with a perfect faith*"; and on Shavuot, as it did when they received the Torah on Mount Sinai. When G-d's majesty was revealed on the mountain and He made them hear His holy words amid the flames, the heights and the depths crumbled, and all the people could perceive the oneness of G-d, as it is written: "*You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is G-d! There is none beside Him!*" (*Devarim 4:35*).

This is why the Torah declares that precisely for these three festivals, "*all your males shall appear before Hashem your G-d.*" Thus everyone will attain faith on Passover, called the festival of faith. Everyone will attain joy and the Divine spirit on Sukkot, when water would be drawn, which is why the festival that took place at the Temple during this time was called the Simchat Beit HaShoeva. Finally, everyone will attain the Torah on Shavuot. Nevertheless, in order to be influenced by all these things, a person must take the first step, meaning that he must travel to Jerusalem. In fact it is only when he creates the proper vessel for receiving this abundance – when he establishes the pillars of faith that allow him to abandon all his possessions and travel

to Jerusalem – that he will be able to receive everything lavished on him from above. As the Sages say in the Midrash, "*Present to Me an opening of teshuvah no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages may pass*" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 5:3*). This not only pertains to teshuvah per se, but includes everything that deals with spirituality and the strengthening of one's faith.

Thus whoever undertook this pilgrimage opened this door and merited great abundance in the spiritual and material realms. In spirituality, as we have said, and also in materiality he lacked nothing, as the verse promises: "*No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem your G-d.*" In fact the Sages recount extraordinary stories in Yerushalmi Peah 3:7 and in the Midrash to this effect: "*A man once forgot to lock his house when he went up to celebrate the festival, and when he returned he found a serpent entwined in the rings of his door. On another occasion, a man forgot to bring his chickens into the house when he went up to celebrate the festival, and when he returned he found some cats torn to pieces before them. On another occasion a man forgot to bring a stack of wheat into the house when he went up to the festival, and upon his return he found it guarded by lions*" (*Shir HaShirim Rabba 7:3*).

The Midrash also relates the story of two brothers living near some wicked, non-Jewish neighbors who sought to harm them. When these brothers went to celebrate the festival, G-d sent angels in their likeness, dissuading their neighbors from stealing from them, for they thought that the brothers had remained home (*Shir HaShirim Rabba ibid.*). These are just some of the miracles that our Sages attest to.

We therefore see that the objective behind the mitzvah of the pilgrimage festival is to strengthen our faith and confidence in G-d. May we strengthen our loyalty to the Creator, and may He send us Mashiach, for then we will travel to the pilgrimage festivals and eat the peace-offerings and Passover-offerings.

Resembling Angels, Not Animals

It is written, "*You are children to Hashem your G-d – you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people from among all the peoples on the face of the earth. You shall not eat any abomination*" (*Devarim 14:1-3*).

The chain of prohibitions cited in these verses implies a causal relationship. In other words, if the Children of Israel had not been the children of Hashem, they would not have been prohibited from cutting themselves. How can we explain this relationship? Furthermore, why does the Torah juxtapose the prohibition against eating something abominable with the prohibition against shaving and cutting oneself for the dead?

In the Mishnah the Sages teach, "*Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]…as it is said: 'For in the image of G-d, He made man.' Beloved are Israel, for they are called the children of G-d…as it is said: 'You are children to Hashem your G-d'*" (*Pirkei Avoth 3:14*).

The author of this Mishnah chose these two points that argue in man's favor because they are related. In fact a person who scorns the image of the king scorns the king himself, for if he had no intention of scorning the king, he would not have scorned his image. Likewise, a person who scorns and irritates the king's son brings suffering upon the king himself. We can now affirm that because the Jewish people were created in the image of Hashem, they are forbidden from harming their bodies, for they are scorning the image of the King by shaving and cutting themselves. This is why the text attests that we are the children of Hashem before discussing shaving and cutting, for we must respect these prohibitions regarding Hashem, Who is our Father, our King, and our G-d. Furthermore, He commands His children to not sully themselves with non-kosher food, just as a father distances his child from anything that can harm his body or soul, since everything prohibited by the Torah can harm the physical and spiritual welfare of man. Hence Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that the sole purpose of the distinction made by the Torah between permitted and prohibited foods is to develop man's intellect, for the mitzvot constitute the foundation of physical and spiritual life (*Kad HaKemach Pesach 1*). As King Solomon said, "*For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh*" (*Mishlei 4:22*). The term "*life*" refers to the soul and physical health. Non-kosher food, which is prohibited by the Torah, harms the body and instills a negative and cruel disposition in man, for it is crude. Doctors are well-aware of this, and it is incumbent upon those who want to receive the Torah to purify their minds with clean food and distance themselves from cruelty. This is the meaning of the Sages' teaching: "*What does the Holy One, blessed be He, care whether a man kills an animal by the neck or the nape? Hence its purpose is to refine man*" (*Bereshith Rabba 44:1*). The mitzvot were only given in order to create harmony among men.

Likewise, our Sages have said: "*[It is written] 'Only be strong not to eat the blood' [Devarim 12:23]. Now if in the case of blood – for which man's soul has a loathing – anyone who refrains from it is rewarded, then how much more in regards to robbery and adultery – which man's soul craves and longs for – shall one who refrains acquire merit for himself and for the generations to come, to the end of all the generations! Rabbi Hanania ben Akashia says, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to make Israel meritorious, therefore He gave them the Torah and many mitzvot, for it is written: "Hashem desire, for the sake of his righteousness, that the Torah be made great and glorious*" [Isaiah 42:1]' " (*Makkot 23b*). The Rivan (*Rabbi Yehudah ben Nassan*) gave the following explanation: "*The goal of multiplying mitzvot and fences is to bestow merit upon a person who abstains from sinning – committing, for example, many sins by the eating of insects, which are repugnant to all men – the sole objective being to reward those who respect these laws*."

The Sages are Angels

Our Sages say in the Aggadah, "*You want to know the difference between the conduct of our G-d and the conduct of the nations? If a king imposes evil and unbearable decrees, then even if a person succeeds in respecting them, he will not be greatly*

rewarded. Yet those who transgress them will be put to death. On the other hand, Hashem prescribes laws in the interest of Israel, and He rewards those who put them into practice, as it is written: 'You shall not make a cut in your flesh for the dead' [Vayikra 19:28]. The nations cut their bodies and suffer, as the verse states: 'They cut themselves with swords and spears, according to their custom' [I Kings 18:28]. What does Hashem say? "I am Hashem" – I commit Myself to giving you a reward. In other words, do not bring suffering upon yourselves, and I will reward you" (*Ma'alot HaMiddot*).

Furthermore, because He distanced the Children of Israel from forbidden foods and sanctified them with permitted foods – as we are taught: "*Sanctify yourself by that which is permitted to you*" (*Yevamot 20a*) – Hashem wanted them not to resemble animals. In fact our Sages have taught: "*In three ways are men like the ministering angels: They possess understanding like the ministering angels, they walk erect like the ministering angels, and they can speak in the holy tongue like the ministering angels. And in three ways are they like animals: They eat and drink like animals, they procreate like animals, and they relieve themselves like animals*" (*Chagigah 16a*).

There are situations in which a person can, despite appearances, resemble angels. It is when he distances himself from forbidden foods, sanctifies himself by what is permitted, and does not eat like an animal, which swallows everything in front of it and pays no attention to the harmful effects of its food. From this we may deduce that man possesses four points in common with angels, and two in common with animals, meaning that he more closely resembles angels than animals. Our Sages affirm (*Tanchuma, Emor 9*) that we may explain the verse, "*You save both man and animal, O Hashem*" (*Tehillim 36:7*) by the Midrash which states that man is saved by Hashem through the merit of animals. How is this possible? Man is superior to animals! In fact when a person behaves improperly, he degrades himself and becomes inferior to an animal, and therefore he requires its merit. Animals cannot, in fact, degrade themselves, just as it is impossible for them to elevate themselves. Yet man, through the Torah, can elevate himself to a great level and resemble angels, as it is said: "*Who are the ministering angels? The Sages*" (*Nedarim 20b*). However if a person is not meritorious, he degrades himself and resembles an animal. He will then depend on its merit, for it – contrary to man – cannot digress.

Channeling our Desires

It is written, "*You shall spend the money for whatever your heart desires – for cattle, for flocks, for wine, or for strong drink, or anything that your soul wishes*" (*Devarim 14:26*).

Once we have made an effort in our fields, and we have worked with our hands and can finally see the fruit of our labors, the Torah enjoins us: "*You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year*" (*v.22*). We must take the second tithe of our produce and bring it to Jerusalem, where we are to eat it in holiness

and purity. If transporting the second tithe is too difficult, we can exchange it for money and spend that money in Jerusalem. The Torah even details how we are to use it: "*You shall spend the money for whatever your heart desires – for cattle, for flocks, for wine, or for strong drink, or anything that your soul wishes.*" This means that we can consume the value of the second tithe with joy and derive tremendous benefit from it, as the verse tells us: "*anything that your soul wishes*." This is surprising, for it does not follow the normal pattern of the Torah. In general, the Torah asks us to refrain from the desires of this world and distance ourselves from them, lest we become enthralled by these desires and begin to pursue them. It is also said, "*Before praying for words of Torah to enter our innards, better to pray for excessive food and drink not to enter them.*" Furthermore we read, "*You shall be holy*" (*Vayikra 19:2*), which our Sages have explained as meaning: "*You shall be separate.*" In other words, we must turn away from the pleasures of this world, diminish our desires, be satisfied with little, and not allow ourselves to be tempted by an abundance of food. Let us cite the words of the Mesilat Yesharim: "*There are no pleasures on earth that do not lead to transgression*" (*chapter 13*). For example, food and drink are allowed once we have fulfilled all the laws of kashrut. Nevertheless, a satiated person is tempted to cast off the yoke of Heaven. Drinking wine steers him toward debauchery and all other kinds of bad behavior. How much more, if someone is used to eating and drinking in excess, will he turn away from serving G-d, observing Torah, and prayer. This is the path that has been adopted by all the righteous throughout the generations. I remember that my father and teacher, Rabbeinu Moshe Aharon Pinto, was always content with little and stayed far from all desires. He made sure not to eat meals that overly pleasing to the pallet, and was content with bread and water in small measure. Sometimes he would just eat the leftovers remaining on the table. This is the path that allows a person to grow in Torah and the fear of G-d. Despite all these things, in the verse found in this week's parsha, the Torah seems to be freeing us from this duty to restrain ourselves, allowing us to eat and drink in abundance by asking us to consume the value of the second tithe to our satisfaction. Why? In general, is it not better to be satisfied with little?

The explanation is the following: Someone who has abundant harvests, and whom G-d has blessed the work of his hands, will have a sizeable amount once he redeems his second tithe for money. Of course he will have to use it entirely in Jerusalem to eat, rejoice, and benefit as he desires, and then he will share the rest with the poor of Jerusalem. However the flip side is that doing so constitutes a real danger to his spiritual life. In fact when faced with the tremendous wealth that G-d has given him, such a person is liable to grow proud and say, "*My strength and the might of my hand have made me all this wealth*" (*Devarim 8:17*), and he will forget G-d. Hence the Torah specifies, "*You shall eat it there before Hashem your G-d, and you shall rejoice*" (*Devarim 14:26*). The joy that surrounds the eating of the second tithe is specifically meant to increase G-d's glory, not our own glory or social status. All while eating, we must keep in mind the importance of the Shechinah, according to the verse: "*I have set Hashem before me always*" (*Tehillim 16:8*). This is the meaning of the phrase, "*You shall*

eat it there before Hashem your G-d," namely that our meal takes place before Hashem and should be for His glory. We must always keep in mind that "*it was [Hashem] Who gave you strength to make wealth*" (*Devarim 8:18*), that this entire blessing comes from the open and generous hand of G-d, and that we have no reason to grow proud.

That being the case, an individual who has the merit of eating the second tithe in holiness and purity by keeping the Shechinah in mind – a person who savors his food with the proper and correct intentions, seeking only the glory of Hashem, not his own joy – not only will such a person's spiritual level not diminish, but his meal will become holy and be considered an offering. Such a meal will even allow him to grow in holiness and refine the purity of his soul. The more he eats, the more he will grow in the spiritual realm.

It is for this reason that we can rejoice and benefit during Shabbat and the holidays by allowing ourselves to eat in abundance. Such eating is holy, similar to that of the offerings, and the more we eat the greater the mitzvah. Nevertheless, it must be done for the sake of Heaven and the glory of G-d. This clearly teaches us that during such sacred meals, we must be very careful not to succumb to frivolity or superficiality. If we let ourselves go by acting with self-importance, or after a good meal we go to sleep instead of reciting Birkat Hamazon, such a meal obviously loses the status of a mitzvah. In fact, how can such a meal be a pleasing odor to Hashem if it has not been properly completed with a blessing?

Shoftim

The Importance of Loving Your Fellow

It is written, "*When you go out to the battle against your enemy and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not fear them, for the L-RD your G-d is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ... The Kohen…shall say to them: 'Shema Israel…'* " (*Deuteronomy 20:1*). We may say that this week's parsha alludes to loving one's fellow Jew and exhibiting good middot with others. We will begin with a question: Why must everyone love their fellow, as it is written: "*You shall love your fellow as yourself*" (*Leviticus 19:18*)? We shall attempt to explain. When the Holy One, blessed be He, created man, He created him alone. He then created the woman, Eve, from the man himself – not as a separate creation. As such they are really one body, and even when separated they remain connected through the soul. It was the will of Hashem, Whose every action is perfect, that everyone should be connected to one another and united, for this is what gives Him satisfaction. It is not without reason that Rabbi Akiva said, " *'You shall love your fellow as yourself' is a great principle of the Torah*" (*Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:3*), for unity is of paramount importance.

Similarly, we see an allusion to the unity of the Children of Israel in the making of the Menorah, every part of which – knobs, flowers, and cups – had to be fashioned starting from a single block of gold. Despite the fact that people differ from one another in terms of their nature, habits, physical attributes – some being poor and others rich, some being large and others small – and despite the fact that tremendous differences exist among us, none of this should impede our unity. We must form a single entity and a single body.

Since we have reached this point, we can see how all this is alluded to in this week's parsha. Thus we have: "*When you go out to the battle against your enemy*" – the battle against the evil inclination; "*and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you*" – when you see that your fellow is wealthier than you, or has a more successful job or a better family, the evil inclination will fill you with feelings of jealousy in an attempt to make you hate him.

Sometimes a person does not even know the reason for his anger, which began with feelings of jealousy stirring inside, and he will attribute it to another reason. The truth is that if he looks deeply into his heart, he will see that his hatred began with his jealousy of his fellow, and little by little it grew until finally it controlled him to such an extent that he cannot stand to look at him. Here the holy Torah tells us how to escape such wicked thoughts: "*You shall not fear them, for the L-RD your G-d is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*" In other words, we are not to fear the enticements of the evil inclination, for Hashem is with us and everything is in His hands, as it is written: "*Nobody can touch what has been prepared for his fellow*" (*Yoma*

38b). This is what constitutes, "*For the L-RD your G-d is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*" We were slaves in Egypt, and the Holy One, blessed be He, delivered us from there and gave us wealth and honor. He alone knows what a person should be given and what he should not be given.

Hence this is man's goal in this world: To improve his middot and to work on himself. He must defeat the evil inclination that burns in his heart and tries to remove him from this world through jealously, hatred, and strife. We must exhibit the opposite traits in order for all mankind to be a single body – as it was when the world was created – living in perfect harmony. May this always be the case, for even when people are divided by the body, they must be united by the soul.

If we are right in this regard, we may explain another issue, namely why a person recites Shema Israel when taking the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven upon himself. It is because he must be united with the Jewish people and love all of them in order to undertake this responsibility. He can thereby reach a level of devotion that is comparable to having given his life for Hashem. In fact by saying, "*You shall love the L-RD your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might*" – even if He takes your soul (*Berachot 54a*) – a person is regarded as having actually given his life. Thus when he studies Torah, in which it is stated, "*You shall teach them to your children and speak of them*" (*Deuteronomy 6:7*), three things will be fulfilled in him, for the Torah, Hashem, and Israel are one. There is something else that is important about loving one's fellow Jew. If Heaven issues a decree against a Jew, the Holy One, blessed be He, takes that Jew's punishment and divides it into smaller parts to be distributed among the Jewish people. In this way the intensity of his punishment is automatically diminished. For example, if Heaven decrees that someone is to be burned, the Holy One, blessed be He, administers very small and easily-tolerated burns to several people, instead of burning that one person to death. As such, Heaven's decree is considered to have been carried out. This is only possible through unity. Similarly, when a person does something good, it is regarded as a merit for others as well, even if they did not participate in his good deed because they were somehow prevented, for everyone is considered as a single body.

This is why the tzaddikim perform an important mitzvah even when they do not sin, due to the responsibly that all Jews have for one another. Otherwise it would be considered a sin for them as well, since it is written: "*There is no man on earth so perfectly righteous that he [always] does good and never sins*" (*Ecclesiastes 7:20*). When the tzaddikim repent, their repentance also helps people who have truly sinned, due to the power of the Jewish people's unity. The concept of the participation of others in the punishment of the individual is, to a small degree, useful for everyone. Today it is the other who sins, and tomorrow it is the person himself who sins, for no tzaddik is immune to sin. Therefore tomorrow a person will need the help of others to lighten his punishment, which is why unity is so important. Since we have reached this point, we realize that we must be forgiven by others. When we wrong another person, we must

seek his forgiveness, for repenting just before G-d is not enough to preserve unity, and we cannot say that another person should receive Heaven's punishment for a sin that he brought upon himself. It is not our job to distribute punishment to another person by thinking that since he is the cause of his punishment, it should be administered to him alone. We must put an effort into seeking only good for others, and to live in peace and harmony with them.

Begin with Yourself

It is written, "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates…and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment*" (*Deuteronomy 16:18*). A judge and an officer have different roles to play. An officer ensures that law and order is maintained, and if he sees a person breaking the law, he brings him before a judge, who decides what should be done with him. From the above verse, however, we see that an officer also acts as a judge, for the verse states that "*they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.*" This means that both judge and officer must judge righteously. How does an officer judge? He must not use different standards with people, meaning that he must not bring one person before the judge while closing his eyes to another. He must learn from the judge to be impartial towards everyone, not favoring one person over another.

The Torah begins with the plural (*"judges and officers"*), proceeds to the singular (*"shall you appoint"*), and then returns to the plural (*"they shall judge the people"*). This is because it is speaking to both the judge and the officer, who must realize that they also have a judge and an officer, namely Hashem, as it is written: "*G-d is a righteous judge*" (*Psalms 7:12*). This means that it is not enough for a city to have numerous judges and officers to ensure law and order, given that they themselves do not act properly and fail to remember that there is a judgment in Heaven. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Celestial Court sit in judgment over everyone, including the judge and officer themselves, for it is written: "*Know what is above you: An eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:1*). There are judges and officers above who look upon you so that you do not distort justice. Therefore if a judge does not conduct himself properly, he will be severely punished. This is the reason for the plural expression: Even above, there are judges to judge everyone, and if both judge and officer place judges and officers over themselves – not seeking special permissions, dispensations, or leniencies for themselves – they can then judge the people with righteousness.

This teaches us that even a tzaddik and a great Torah figure can err by not doing what is right, just as a judge who must ensure that officers are not afraid of criticizing him or showing him his error. As a result, a judge must act as an officer over himself, judging himself at the same time as he judges others. In this way he will be following the dictates of justice and not distorting it.

We find support for this idea among the Sages in the story of Rabbi Yanai, whose tree was overhanging public property. Another person, whose tree was also overhanging public property, was approached by people who asked him to cut his tree, for it was blocking their way. He brought his case before Rabbi Yanai, who said to him: "*Leave and return tomorrow.*" During the night, Rabbi Yanai sent someone to cut his own tree. The next day the man returned and Rabbi Yanai said to him, "*Go and cut your tree.*" The man replied, "*But your tree is also overhanging public property!*" Rabbi Yanai replied, "*Go and look. If my tree has been cut, cut yours as well!*" This is precisely what happened (*see Bava Batra 60ab*).

This is quite surprising! Did Rabbi Yanai not realize that his own tree was overhanging public property and preventing people from passing? Did he only realize that he should cut his own tree when this man came to see him? The answer is, as we mentioned earlier, that even a great man is liable to forget, and even a tzaddik may think that the branches of his own tree are helping people who use public property, insofar as providing them with shade. He will only cut it down when he realizes that nobody has brought up the subject with him because they are too embarrassed to do so. In fact he fulfills in himself the dictum, "*Adorn yourself first, and then adorn others.*" Even if people are content on having the branches of the tzaddik provide them with shade, and even if they consider it to be a blessing, nevertheless it is not right and it goes against Halachah. Even a tzaddik can err, and people may be afraid to point this out to him. Hence a judge must also act as an officer over himself, so that everyone learns to judge properly from his example. He must especially watch over himself, since everyone learns from his way of life. Officers also learn from him to judge righteously and not to use different standards when dealing with people. The officer must watch over himself in order not to harm others by his judgment. It is therefore written, "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates,*" meaning that in all your actions, you must place judges and officers over yourself, for you wield the power of the law. Nobody can help you in this, for you must monitor yourself, even if you think that people benefit from your actions, as in the story of Rabbi Yanai. Even then you must realize that it is forbidden to act in this way with the public, for they learn how to conduct themselves from you. Everything must therefore be done in justice and righteousness.

Later in the parsha, the passage on the mitzvah of the king appears: "*It shall be that when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah*" (*Deuteronomy 17:18*). The king must have two Torah scrolls, as the Sages have said: One that is placed in his treasury, and the other that accompanies him outside. Great Torah figures have raised an objection here, for why does the king need two Torah scrolls? It is clear that he should always have one with him, and when he returns to his palace he can place it in his treasury!

It seems that an explanation can be found in the verse itself: "*Vehaya [It shall be] that when he sits on the throne of his kingdom.*" As we know, the Sages have said

that the term vehaya denotes joy, and it is formed by the same letters as Hashem's Name. This means that as the king sits upon his throne, he must rejoice in the fact that everyone obeys him and does his will. Yet at the heart of this joy, the king must know Hashem and keep Him in mind, meaning that Hashem is seated even higher on His Celestial Throne, judging him and examining how he judges his people.

This is why the king needs two Torah scrolls, one that accompanies him outside, since he is a king who goes out to his people, and another to remind him that he is the son of Hashem, Who watches him. This scroll is placed in the king's treasury in order to remind him that Hashem sees everything, even what is done within his treasury. The king needs it in order to sense that Hashem expects him to dispense justice in righteousness, just like a judge, as well as to wipe out the descendants of Amalek, build the Temple (as the Sages have said), and deliver the oppressed from their oppressors. The second Torah scroll, found in the king's treasury, alludes to self-annulment before Hashem. It alludes to the fact that the Torah is found within him, as King David said: "*Your Torah is in my innards*" (*Psalms 40:9*). This is meant to prevent him from thinking that, since he is the king, he is exempt from learning Torah. These Torah scrolls are alluded to several times in the verse, for the term *mishneh* (two) is used, as the Sages have pointed out. The verse also states "*hazot [this] Torah,*" and the Torah is called zot, as it is written: "*Vezot haTorah [And this is the Torah] that Moses placed before the Children of Israel*" (*Deuteronomy 4:44*). This constitutes a lesson for the king himself, teaching him the proper way to act.

It also constitutes a life lesson and teaching for all Jews. Each person is a king in his own right, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has made him a king over creation. The Sages have said, "*All the Children of Israel are sons of the King.*" Each person must therefore put an effort into learning Torah until it becomes part of his innards, to which the treasury alludes. When a person goes out to attend to his business and returns, or when he goes out to perform a mitzvah and returns, he must also study Torah. This is vehaya, an expression of joy, for it is a great joy before Hashem and for the person seated on the throne of his kingdom to conquer his desires and constantly place Hashem before him.

We Are All the Disciples of Abraham

It is written, "*You shall not plant for yourselves an Ashera of any tree near the altar of Hashem your G-d, which you shall make. Neither shall you erect for yourselves a pillar, which Hashem your G-d hates. You shall not sacrifice to Hashem your G-d an ox or a sheep with a blemish, anything evil, for that is an abomination to Hashem your G-d*" (*Devarim 16:21-17:1*). There are a host of things that are difficult to understand in this week's parsha, which begins with the appointment of judges and officers to judge the people in accordance with the principles of Torah and justice.

First of all, what is the expression, "*You shall not plant for yourselves an Ashera*" doing after, "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates*" (*Devarim 16:18*)?

Furthermore, how could anyone think that a Jew would want to plant an Ashera next to the altar? This is impossible, for anyone who wants to plant one does so only for idolatrous purposes, meaning that he does not believe in the altar. Such a person will therefore plant his Ashera elsewhere, not near the altar. We also need to explain what the expression, "*You shall not sacrifice to Hashem your G-d an ox or a sheep with a blemish*" is doing next to the mitzvah to appoint judges and officers.

Israel Bends Like the Reed

We may explain this entire passage according to the teachings of Mussar. The above passage pertains only to a person who grows proud, for the Sages have said: "*Better is the curse that Ahijah the Shilonite pronounced on Israel than the blessings with which the wicked Bilam blessed them. Ahijah the Shilonite cursed them by comparing them with the reed. He said to Israel, 'For Hashem will smite Israel as a reed is shaken in water' [1 Kings 14:15]. The reed grows by the water, its stock grows new shoots, its roots are many, and although all the winds in the world come and blow against it, they cannot move it from its place because it sways with the winds, and the reed resumes its upright position as soon as they have stopped. However the wicked Bilam blessed them by comparing them with the cedar, as it is said: 'Like cedars by the water' [Bamidbar 24:6]. The cedar does not grow by the water, its stock does not grow new shoots, its roots are not many, and although all the winds in the world blow against it, they cannot move it from its place. Yet if the south wind blows at it, it uproots and overturns it*" (*Taanith 20a*).

Why did Bilam bless them by comparing them to a cedar, while Ahijah the Shilonite compared them to a reed?

Both men spoke in keeping with their own nature. Our Sages have said, "*Whoever possesses the following characteristics is among the disciples of Abraham our father, and [whoever possesses] the three opposite characteristics is among the disciples of the wicked Bilam. The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul. The disciples of the wicked Bilam possess an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul*" (*Pirkei Avoth 5:19*).

Ahijah the Shilonite spoke in keeping with his nature – a humble spirit and a meek soul like the reed – while the wicked Bilam spoke in keeping with his nature – an arrogant spirit and a greedy soul, a soul as insatiable as a cedar. Yet the pronouncement of the former was fulfilled, while that of the latter was not. It is in the nature of Jews to bend like a reed and not to grow proud.

Hence it is written, "*You shall not plant for yourselves an Ashera of any tree.*" This seems like a redundant expression, for the term Ashera implies a tree. Therefore why use the term "*tree*" and "*Ashera*" together?

This teaches us that whoever grows proud and becomes as hard as a tree, Scripture considers him to have planted an Ashera near the altar in order to reject G-d. As our Sages have said, "*Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'*" (*Sotah 5a*). It is also taught, "*If one*

walks with a stiff bearing even for four cubits, it is as if he pushed against the heels of the Shechinah" (*Berachot 43b*). The Sages add: "*Everyone who is proud of heart is an abomination to Hashem…. It is as though he had erected an idolatrous altar*" (*Sotah 4b*).

Pride Points to a Blemish

The verse uses the expression "*near the altar of Hashem your G-d,*" which indicates that even if a person studies a great deal of Torah and practices mitzvot, Hashem will want nothing to do with him if he grows proud. Hence we read, "*You shall not sacrifice to Hashem your G-d an ox or a sheep with a blemish, anything evil, for that is an abomination to Hashem your G-d.*" Although a person may make himself into an ox with regards to carrying the yoke of the Torah – as the Sages have said: "*What is the meaning of the verse, '…sending the ox and the donkey to roam freely' [Isaiah 32:20]? … In order to study words of Torah, one must cultivate in oneself the [habit of] the ox for bearing a yoke and of the donkey for carrying burdens*" (*Avodah Zarah 5b*) – if he grows proud, he will still be an abomination to Hashem. The verse explicitly says "*an abomination to Hashem*" (*Devarim 17:1*), and we also read, "*Every haughty heart is an abomination to Hashem*" (*Mishlei 16:5*). In both cases the issue is pride, for Hashem abhors all who grow proud.

How do we know that the passage is speaking of the proud? The verse says, "*with a blemish,*" and the Sages state: "*What is the meaning of the verse, 'Why do you prance [teratzdun], O you mountains of majestic peaks' [Tehillim 68:17]? A Celestial voice went forth and said to them: 'Why do you want litigation [tirtzu din] with Sinai? You are all full of blemishes in comparison to Sinai.' Here it is written, 'gavnunim [of majestic peaks]' and elsewhere it is written, 'or gibein [a hunchback] or a dwarf' [Vayikra 21:20]. Rabbi Ashi observed, 'From here you learn that if a man is proud, it constitutes a blemish in him'*" (*Megillah 29a*).

Complete Control of the Gates

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read: "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates*" (*Devarim 16:18*), and we know what is written in our holy books, namely that the gates mentioned here are those of the body: The eyes, mouth, and ears. A person must always protect them from sin and control them with his good inclination.

Just as a person can sin with his eyes, mouth, and ears, he must use them to fulfill mitzvot. The Midrash tells us, "*King David said, 'Sovereign of the universe, every day I used to plan and decide that I would go to a particular place or to a particular dwelling, but my feet always brought me to synagogues and houses of study.' Hence it is written, 'I returned my feet to Your commandments' [Tehillim 119:59]*" (*Vayikra Rabba 35:1*).

This is why a hunchback is mentioned in regards to the prohibition against "*erect[ing] for yourselves a pillar, which Hashem your G-d hates.*" This teaches us that just as a pillar does not bend before the wind, a proud person does not yield before anyone, and since he is proud, he is abhorrent to Hashem.

Elul – Preparing for the Days of Judgment

The verse states, "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates*" (*Devarim 16:18*). From here we see just how the deeply the holy Torah sees into man's behavior, and just how powerful the evil inclination is. Although the Torah is actually an antidote to the evil inclination, it is still difficult to conquer it with the Torah alone. We must also appoint judges and officers who will oversee our deeds so that we do not come to sin.

It is odd that the Torah mentions judges before officers, since the role of an officer comes before that of a judge, given that it is an officer who brings people before a judge! Furthermore, an officer protects a judge so that nobody attacks him. Officers should therefore be mentioned first in the verse. To explain this, we may say that these parshiot are read before the month of Elul, and the Sages have said that the initials of the expression *Ani ledodi vedodi li* (*"I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine" – Shir HaShirim 6:3*) form the word Elul. The very same idea is expressed in regards to the verse, "*A lion has roared; who will not fear?*" (*Amos 3:8*), where the term *ari* ("lion") is formed by the initials of Elul, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur – which are soon approaching – for who will not fear at that time? The greatest tzaddikim tremble before the day of judgment, and everyone prepares themselves by shuddering on Rosh Hashanah, for we are judged at that time: Who will be raised, and who will be lowered; who will die, and who will live; who will grow poorer, and who will grow richer. Although the tzaddikim have not sinned, they tremble for their flock, which has sinned, and they fear being caught in the sins of the generation. We must all learn from this, namely to fervently prepare ourselves for the day of judgment, and plan on bringing good defenders before Hashem. These consist of the Torah and mitzvot, and the more we prepare, the better things will be.

The Torah tells us to appoint "*judges*" and "*officers*" in all our gates in order to prepare ourselves for the day of judgment. In fact Hashem judges the whole world and places us on the scales. A person must therefore prepare himself correctly to prevent accusers from getting in his way. Hashem will then judge us favorably, and officers will accompany the innocent back with great honor. If the judgment is against us, however, these officers will also fulfill their mission, but this time it will consist of placing the guilty person "*in prison.*" We can now understand why Hashem first judges and decrees, and then an officer comes and carries out the sentence issued by the Judge, the Holy One, blessed be He. If a person returns to Hashem through love, the power of his repentance is so great that his accusers are transformed into angels of mercy, and his intentional sins are transformed into merits (*Yoma 86b*). This only happens, however, when a person repents of his sins with a broken and contrite heart. These are the angels who accompany a person at the end of Yom Kippur, as the Sages have said: "*On the night after Yom Kippur, a Celestial voice proclaims: 'Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already approved your deeds' [Kohelet 9:7].*"

At that incredible moment, the Holy One, blessed be He, comes closer to us, "*my Beloved is mine.*" He is prepared to help anyone who asks Him as the Judge of the entire world, so that no one falls into the hands of accusers and is found guilty on Rosh Hashanah. We therefore have the sacred duty of using this proximity to Hashem, which does not exist during the rest of the year, for we can thereby successfully emerge from the days of judgment. We will merit a new year of life, a year that we will use to serve Hashem, a year filled with Torah and mitzvot, one rich in good deeds. Amen!

The Story of Agrippa

It is written, "*You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem your G-d shall choose. From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself; you shall not place over yourself a foreigner, who is not your brother*" (*Devarim 17:15*).

The Mishnah in Sotah 41a recounts what happened to Agrippa, a king of Israel who descended from Herod, a slave from the house of the Hasmoneans. Agrippa was called to the Torah and read a passage from this week's parsha. He received it and read it while standing, for which the Sages praised him. When he reached the words, "*You shall not place over yourself a foreigner,*" tears ran from his eyes, but they said to him: "*Do not fear, Agrippa. You are our brother, you are our brother!*"

As he was reading from the Torah, Agrippa wept upon reaching the expression, "*you shall not place over yourself a foreigner,*" for he knew that he descended from Herod. The Sages then told him that he was their brother. The Gemara explains: "*At that moment, the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for Israel] made themselves liable to destruction, for they flattered Agrippa*" (*Sotah 41b*).

Rashi comments: "*Tears ran from his eyes – for the verse rendered him unfit as king. You are our brother – for his mother was Jewish.*" Commenting on Sotah 41b, Rashi says: "*They flattered Agrippa – for although his mother was Jewish, he was not fitting to be king because he was a slave, and it was shameful.*"

Let's think about this: What is the first concept taught by the verse in question, and what is the final concept that it teaches? When King Agrippa wept, it was because he understood that the expression, "*From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself,*" was referring to a Jewish king of Jewish descent. Now, "*From among your brothers*" is not the same as a king who is Jewish only on his mother's side. In that case, why did the Sages tell him: "*You are our brother*"? Did they not know that only his mother was Jewish? Furthermore, we need to understand why their flattery made them liable to destruction. What wrong was there in wanting to console him?

We need to explain why Agrippa wept only when he reached the second part of the verse (*"you shall not place over yourself a foreigner"*). He should have burst into tears as soon as he reached the first part: "*From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself.*" The Sages interpret this expression to mean "*the best of your brothers,*" and yet Agrippa descended from a slave, meaning that he was not among the best of his brothers.

It seems that Agrippa initially thought that "*from among your brothers*" excluded a foreigner. Yet when he reached the end of the verse – which explicitly mentions the foreigner – he realized that the beginning of the verse was excluding him.

If we are correct about this, then our initial question is now even more pertinent: What purpose did the Sages' response serve? Agrippa's ancestors were not among the best of their brothers, meaning that he was not fit to be king. Therefore what were the Sages telling him?

It seems that by saying, "*You are our brother,*" the Sages meant to tell him that because the end of the verse says "*who is not your brother,*" it was not referring to him, since "*you are our brother.*" The fact that the verse says, "*from among your brothers*" teaches something else. That is why they twice said, "*You are our brother,*" for the term "*brother*" is mentioned twice in the same verse.

As a result, when the Sages told Agrippa: "*You are our brother,*" they annulled the mitzvah of "*from among your brothers*" and twisted an entire verse from the Torah. They did all this so they could flatter Agrippa, which is why they were held to account.

To modify a verse – to give explanations on the Torah that are contrary to the Halachah – renders a person liable to destruction.

We should also point out how the accusation made against the Sages was different, for the Gemara teaches that only individuals from among the tribe of Judah could reign as king. As we know, the Hasmoneans were accused of this, as the Ramban says in commenting on Sefer Bereshith. On the verse, "*The scepter shall not depart from Judah*" (*Bereshith 49:10*), the Ramban writes: "[T]he scepter shall not depart from Judah to any of his brothers because the king of Israel, who will rule over them, must be from the tribe of Judah, and none of his brothers will rule over him. …[E]very lawgiver in Israel who carries the king's signet must be from Judah. It is he who will rule and command in all Israel, and he will have the seal of royalty until the coming of his son….

"In my opinion, the kings from other tribes, who ruled over Israel after David, went against the wish of their father Jacob by diverting the inheritance of Judah to another tribe. Now they relied on the word of Achiya the Shilonite, the prophet who anointed Jeroboam, who said: 'For this I will afflict the seed of David, but not forever' [I Kings 11:39]. Yet when [the northern kingdom of] Israel continued to crown kings one after another from the rest of the tribes, and they did not revert to the kingdom of Judah, they transgressed the testament of their ancestor, and they were accordingly punished….

"*This is also the reason for the punishment of the Hasmoneans, who reigned during the Second Temple. They were saints of the Most High, without whom the learning of Torah and the observance of mitzvot would have been forgotten in Israel. Nevertheless, they suffered great punishment: The four sons of the old Hasmonean Matityahu, saintly men who ruled one after another, fell by the sword of their enemies despite all their prowess and success. The punishment ultimately reached the point at which our Sages*

of blessed memory said: 'He who says, "I come from the house of the Hasmoneans," is a slave' [Bava Batra 3b], and they were all destroyed on account of this sin."

Hence this may be why the Sages of the generation were admonished: They should have reprimanded Agrippa directly for having dared to reign as king, since he was not from the tribe of Judah. Despite the fact that on any other day, the Sages would not have been obligated to reprimand Agrippa due to the fear of authority, once he read what was written in the Torah and tears began running from his eyes – since he realized that he was not worthy to reign as king – they should have taken advantage of this opportunity and reprimanded him. Instead, not only did they not reprimand him in any way, they went so far as to flatter him, allowing this opportunity to pass! Hence they made themselves liable to destruction, for a person who has an opportunity to spiritually progress and strengthen himself, yet fails to use it, has much to be admonished for. The Sages, who could have returned the kingship of Israel to the tribe of Judah, yet failed to use this marvelous opportunity which presented itself to them, were held liable and deserving of destruction.

The Kingdom of Judah and David's Dynasty

It is written, "*You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem your G-d shall choose. From among your brothers shall you set a king over yourself; you cannot place over yourself a foreign man, who is not your brother*" (*Devarim 17:15*).

When we analyze the order given to the Jewish people to appoint a king, we must understand why exactly it was Judah who was chosen from among the tribes to carry this title. Although he was never actually a king, his brothers nevertheless considered him as one. The proof is that when Joseph dreamed that he would rule over the tribes, his brothers inflicted on him the punishment reserved for those who rebel against the king, personified in their eyes by Judah. This explains why they decided to kill him, as well as why they ended up casting him into a pit. That being the case, we need to understand why it was precisely Judah who was designated as the head of David's dynasty.

When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she named him Judah, declaring: "*This time let me gratefully praise Hashem*" (*Bereshith 30:35*). We may ask why she felt a need to thank G-d only upon the birth of her fourth son, not the previous ones. The answer is that she knew, through prophesy, that Judah would complete the Divine chariot with four sacred wheels: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. She understood that he would also participate in the construction of this chariot, for David never would have seen the light of day without Judah. She therefore named him Judah to express her gratitude to G-d for having given her a son who would be David's forefather (*the name Judah [Yehudah] comes from hoda'a – gratitude*).

Even though Judah himself never wore the crown, he embodied royalty because he was the ancestor of David's dynasty, being the first link in this illustrious chain.

Hence the verse clearly indicates this to us: "*He [Jacob] sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen*" (*Bereshith 46:28*). This shows us that Jacob also considered his fourth son as the holder of royal power.

Furthermore, the letters of the Tetragrammaton are contained in Judah's name. Since G-d is the King of kings, it was decided in Heaven that Judah, who carried the Divine Name within his own, would also be king among men.

Most blessings begin with the words, "*Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe.*" We can explain this formulation in the following way: If a person fully realizes, at the start of a blessing, that Hashem is his G-d, then he will become completely infused with the concept that G-d is the King of the universe, and that He reigns over him just as much as He reigns over others.

Clearing the Way for Truth

The name Judah can be understood in yet another way. Indeed, it also denotes confession, the ability to recognize the truth. Therein lay the essence of Judah, who bears the seal of truth. We see proof of this in the incident involving his daughter-in-law Tamar, when Judah confessed without hesitation to his involvement in the matter, which is also why he became worthy for all Jews (*Yehudim*) to carry his name. Judah therefore cleared the way for us: A Jew is a person who can recognize the truth, even if it requires him to confess his wrongdoings and mistakes. The seal of truth sometimes requires him to know his place and his abilities, and to act accordingly. The Ramban explained the hardships that the Greeks inflicted on the Hasmoneans in the following way: Seeking the privileges of the tribe of Judah, though being Levites themselves, they somehow rejected the only responsibilities that their status conferred upon them. This family was entirely scattered for having usurped the crown of the tribe of Judah. The same applies to King Uzziah, who sought to burn incense in the Temple despite not being a kohen himself. Because he desired things that were beyond him – things that did not correspond to his position – he was punished with leprosy. This forced him into isolation, having to live outside the camp of Israel.

King Solomon

The Gemara tells us that because of King Solomon's sins, the Sages thought of including him among those who have no place in the World to Come, despite the fact that he repented and was forgiven. We have to ask ourselves why the Sages were so strict, such that they counted him among the evildoers who perpetrated the greatest wrongs upon the Jewish people.

King Solomon's sins centered precisely around his royal duties, such that after him the kingdom of Israel was divided and Jeroboam reigned over most of the tribes of Israel. Now Jeroboam was an ungodly man, encouraging the people to sin and commit idolatry, which led to a spiritual catastrophe. The Sages therefore believed that King Solomon was partly responsible for this decline, since had he not sinned, Jeroboam would not have ascended to the throne and the Jewish people would never have fallen

into idolatry. Yet the Sages' decision was not accepted in Heaven, for David, Solomon's father, defended him by arguing that he married many women, acquired many horses, and amassed large amounts of gold only so as to defeat the forces of impurity that dwelled within these very three things.

As a result, because this impurity was held in check by holiness, Solomon could have become Mashiach and delivered the Jewish people, as the Ben Ish Hai teaches. The commentators explain that Solomon only married the daughters of kings in the hope that, through these marriages, he could conquer the impurity found among the nations of those kings. Along the same lines, Solomon only acquired many horses because those animals came from Egypt, and therefore he wanted to conquer the specific impurity of that nation. Likewise, gold contained impurities due to the sin of the golden calf, and Solomon sought to amass great amounts of gold in order to defeat its impurity. Nevertheless, and despite his noble intentions, Solomon was unable to overcome the calls of his evil inclination. Thus he succumbed to sins associated with being a Jewish king, for whom it is forbidden to have many wives, acquire numerous horses, and amass a large quantity of gold. Still, Heaven had compassion on him, and he was not counted among those who have no place in the World to Come, since his intentions were completely pure.

Judges for Middot and Officers for Thoughts

It is written, "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities*" (*Devarim 16:18*).

We need to understand what the Torah is teaching us here that is new. It is clear and obvious that in order to function properly, every country needs judges and officers to inforce the law, and that all its inhabitants must comply with the rules and regulations of the land. Thus logic necessarily requires the institution of judges and officers. Yet in that case, why must the Torah command us to do so?

To me it seems that the Torah is warning us here against the evil inclination. It is asking us to appoint judges and officers for ourselves in order to avoid the advice of our evil inclination. In fact if we fail to place judges over our desires, and if we do not restrain our passions, we are liable to be swept away by the current of our desires and fall into the abyss.

The evil inclination tricks us into following the wrong path, making us feel that there is nothing to fear or worry about. Using sweet words, it subtly leads us toward our downfall. And if we awaken from our stupor and want to repent, it may already be too late: We are already so immersed in the material world, overcome by our desires, that it becomes very difficult to extricate ourselves from it. Hence the Torah demands: "*Judges and officers shall you appoint*" – they will watch over us and help us remain rational so we do not fall into the traps of the evil inclination and its ticks.

We can now explain the verse, "*You shall surely set over yourself a king*" (*Devarim 17:15*). The holy Torah is called a "*king;*" it is the crown of Creation. Hashem demands

that the Torah enlighten our steps. It must guide us in all our ways and be our king and leader. For this to happen, we must appoint judges and officers over ourselves, and we must not let the evil inclination come near. Rabbi Chaim Vital interpreted the verse, "*Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities*" (*Devarim 16:18*) in the following way: "*We have several gates that open onto the world: That of sight, which corresponds to the eyes; that of odor, which corresponds to the nose; that of hearing, which corresponds to the ears; and that of speech, which corresponds to the mouth. We must lock these gates by placing 'judges and officers' there. We must establish barriers at each of our gates, so that our eyes do not look upon forbidden sights, so that our ears do not listen to gossip or slander, so that our nose does not smell the perfumes of depravity, and so that our mouth does not utter forbidden or frivolous words. Finally, we must watch over all our deeds and not go to any place that leads to sin. Whoever acts in this way and appoints judges and officers over himself to protect all his bodily members from sin is mentioned by the verse: 'Open the gates so that the righteous nation, keeper of the faith, may enter' [Isaiah 26:2]. G-d will act measure for measure with such a person, for just as he establishes officers for himself to control his gates, likewise Hashem will open the gates of Heaven for him, the 310 worlds.*"

We must also appoint officers to act against our bad middot in order to prevent us from growing proud or feeling superior to others, for G-d despises pride. Furthermore, whoever acts with self-importance is not accepted by others, and even his closest relatives do not appreciate him. This is a great principle in regard to peace in the home: If a man feels proud and better than his wife, if he feels superior and believes that everyone must listen to him, he ruins the peace in his home and destroys himself. However if he has the wisdom to act with humility toward his wife, and he asks for forgiveness when he hurts her feelings, he thereby establishes his home and builds it in peace. In the latter case, G-d is also pleased and resides among them, as it is written: "*If husband [ish] and wife [ishah] merit it, the Shechinah rests upon them*" (*Sotah 17a*). In regard to this subject, at the wedding of my dear son Rabbi Moshe Aharon, I found an answer to a question that I had been asking myself: When we recite the blessing "*in Whose abode there is joy,*" why is there rejoicing in Heaven when people get married? For what reason does joy reside in G-d's abode? I believe that the answer is because there is good reason to rejoice. In fact human nature inclines a person to want to rule over and dominate others, and during the wedding ceremony, when a man declares to his wife: "*By this ring you are consecrated to me,*" she immediately comes under his dominion, entering under his protection and belonging to him. At that very moment, she becomes forbidden to every man except her husband. There is no greater act of submission and self-sacrifice than this. In fact she is annulling herself and submitting to her husband. Likewise, when the groom breaks the glass and says: "*If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill*" (*Tehillim 137:5*), he recalls the destruction of the Temple, which was caused by baseless hatred, and he realizes that if he wants to preserve the integrity of his home and prevent it from being destroyed, he must demonstrate humility and modesty before his wife, distancing himself from pride and

hatred. Even if she hurts him, he must make an effort to remain humble, to yield, and to forgive. He must go beyond himself and keep no grudge, harbor no hatred. When Heaven sees that one yields to the other, that both make concessions and agree to live in love, friendship, peace, and harmony, great joy is born in Heaven and extends to all the supernal worlds, for peace is essential to G-d. Hence at a wedding, we recite the blessing "*in Whose abode there is joy.*"

Ki Teitzei

The Duty to Establish Fences for Ourselves

It is written, "*If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof so that you will not place blood in your house ki yipol hanofel [when the fallen falls]*" (*Deuteronomy 22:8*). The commentators (*see Rabbeinu Bechaye*) have questioned why Scripture employs the redundant expression *ki yipol hanofel*, rather than simply stating *pen yipol* (*"lest one falls"*). We also need to understand what lesson we are to learn from this verse, since it is clear that anyone building a home should put a guardrail on his roof. Therefore what is the Torah telling us here that is new? We may say that the Torah is teaching that a person must establish fences for himself that resemble "*guardrails,*" this being in order to distance himself from the material realm. In fact if a person does not limit himself in terms of materiality, but instead continues to allow himself unnecessary things, he will stumble in the service of Hashem. If he continues to do so, without changing, he is liable to completely fall and be unable to recover, in which case he will be regarded as being spiritually dead.

We sometimes see someone who takes a spiritual fall, and who thinks that it resulted from a sin he committed. Actually, we need to realize that a person does not necessarily stumble spiritually on account of sin, for it may have occurred because he was drawn to unnecessary desires. If he failed to repent, and instead continued in his path, he will constantly fall until he eventually dies spiritually.

We may base this concept on a statement of our Sages concerning the verse, "*Upon the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the dead die*" (*Deuteronomy 17:6*). The Sages questioned the expression "*shall the dead die,*" which is a contradiction in terms. He is either dead – in which case he cannot be put to death – or he is alive – in which case he cannot be described as dead. The text should have stated "*shall the living die.*" The Gemara explains the expression to mean that he is already regarded as being dead (*Berachot 18b*), and the Ba'al HaTurim wrote that even while alive, the wicked are called dead.

This means that when a person sins, he is immediately regarded as dead, especially when he harms the root of his soul, doing it such harm that it leaves him. He then becomes a person without a soul, comparable to an animal that also has no soul, as it is written: "*Man has no preeminence over animal, for all is futile*" (*Ecclesiastes 3:19*). When he is killed, his body is the only thing affected, for his soul is already dead.

This is what the expression ki yipol hanofel means: At first he sinned and harmed his soul, which caused it to flee (this is the first fall), and the second time his body died,

which constitutes the second fall. Therefore to avoid such an unenviable fate, a person must establish fences for himself in order not to fall the first time, as it is written: "*You shall safeguard My charge*" (*Leviticus 18:30*). Here our Sages have said, "*Make a keeping to My keeping*" (*Yebamot 21a*), and the Mishnah states, "*Make a fence around the Torah*" (*Perkei Avoth 1:1*). The Rambam explained that we must enact decrees that distance people from sin, which is why we have the duty to surround ourselves with Torah and mitzvot, lest we fall twice. Actually, a person who is no longer spiritually growing, but gets used to staying where he is, will conduct himself without any sense of spiritual yearning or desire. The result is that he will be fed up with everything. There is more. The Children of Israel must pay particular attention to easy mitzvot, for they are the children of the Holy One, blessed be He (*Deuteronomy 14:1*), as the verse states: "*You alone did I know from among all the families of the earth. Therefore I will hold you to account for all your iniquities*" (*Amos 3:2*). This means that since we are close to Hashem and stand before Him, He will demand an accounting from us for our sins, which are ours alone. As for the other peoples of the world, such transgressions are not accounted as a sin; only for us are they a sin.

In fact a person who is close to royalty must be absolutely pure, which is why we do not resemble the other peoples, for whom Hashem only demands an accounting of grave sins. Yet from us, He demands an accounting even for the lightest of sins, for transgressing mitzvot that a person tends to trample on, as King David said: "*The iniquity of my heels surrounds me.*" (*Psalms 49:6*). Even those at his feet were considered by him as sin.

This is what the Torah is telling us by allusion with the words, "*If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail.*" It means that a person who wants to spiritually build himself up must be extremely pure, as white as snow, without any stain or sin. He must always establish fences for himself that act as guardrails, and he must always strengthen these barriers.

For example, one who builds a beautiful home, yet neglects to put up a protective barrier, creates a danger for anyone who approaches the site, for he might be injured there. The same applies to man himself: If he is content on performing mitzvot only as the Torah commands him to, without establishing fences for them, he will not be prevented from falling, for he is considered as someone who has already fallen. Thus his second fall will result from his first, from the fact that he performed the mitzvah without protection. Since we have reached this point, let us add that even among the rest of the mitzvot, we must constantly be adding, adding in terms of fences and in terms of helping others, lest we reach the point at which we will fall. Take for example the mitzvah of tzeddakah. We must not remain static in this mitzvah. Instead we should always be adding to it, constantly being in tune with the needs of others and proceeding accordingly. If a person acts as such, he will not sin in this area. Instead he will strengthen this trait and grow by adding to his good middot.

The War Against the Evil Inclination

It is written, "*When you go out to war against your enemies…and you take captives of him*" (*Deuteronomy 21:10*). We must ask why the verse states, "*captives of him*" rather than "*captives of them.*" The answer is that, as we know, it is speaking about the war against the evil inclination, which is man's greatest enemy. Hence we learn a very important lesson from this verse, namely that when a person wholeheartedly studies Torah, he will conquer the evil inclination and capture it. In fact not only will a person control what the evil inclination wanted to take from him, he will also take captives from it, a reference to the captives that the evil inclination imprisoned and took from others. This means that such a person will merit, and enable others to merit as well, being saved from the evil inclination and given the ability to conquer it. This is alluded to in the expression "*captives of him.*" As we know, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that he himself could free the world from judgment, and people said that he was able to grant merit to a large number of people. This is the meaning of the term shivyo (*"captives of him"*), which is formed by the initials of Shimon bar Yochai. It means that by the power of his Torah, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was able to overcome his own evil inclination and also capture all the sins of the entire world from it, just as a person owns everything that is acquired by his slave. This was because the evil inclination became Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's slave, for he had taken the evil inclination as his captive. Therefore everything belonging to the evil inclination henceforth belonged to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the result being that he was able to bestow merit upon all the Children of Israel at the same time as himself.

Every Jew has additional strength because of this, for if he elevates himself in Torah and mitzvot, he can take from the evil inclination all the strength and everything that it took from others. Every Jew can earn merit for himself and grant merit to others so that they can also grow spiritually, conquer the evil inclination, and draw closer to Hashem. We still need to understand, however, how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai could grant merit to all Jews, since the Sages have said: "*If a man says that the Holy One, blessed be He, is lax in the execution of justice, his life will be forfeited*" (*Bava Kama 50a*). Therefore how can the Holy One, blessed be He, be so lenient and not ask for an accounting of Israel's sins because of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai? The explanation is the following: The main thing that prevents a person from repenting is the evil inclination, as the Sages have said: "*Sovereign of the universe, it is known before You that our will is to do Your will. Yet what prevents us? It is the leaven in the dough*" (*Berachot 17a*). As Rashi states, "*The evil inclination in our heart causes it to rise.*" It follows that when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai placed the evil inclination under his control, it could no longer make anyone sin, and the Children of Israel could solely perform mitzvot and repent of all their prior sins. In that case the deliberate sins they had committed would become merits. Above all, if they observed Shabbat and the covenant of circumcision, they would be delivered. That is the main thing.

We find this alluded to in the expression "*veshavita [and you take captives] of him,*" the term *shavita* being formed by the same letters as *shabbat vai*. Now the letters forming the term *vai* are the initials of the expression *chayil bala vayekiyenu* (*"he swallowed wealth, but will disgorge it" [Job 20:15]*), a sanctified term for circumcision. In other words, by these two things the Children of Israel would be delivered and conquer the evil inclination, all by the merit of the man who loves Israel, and who bestows merit upon the entire Jewish people by the power of his Torah study. Yet before anything else, a person must know how to conquer the evil inclination, which is not an easy thing to do. Let us therefore look at what we need to learn for this.

While I was in Jerusalem with my teacher, the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal, he told me that before sitting down to study, the author of Ketzot HaChoshen would repent to such a degree that he would cry. He would say to himself, "*Perhaps the verse, 'G-d says to the wicked: What right do you have to declare My statutes?' [Psalms 50:16] is about me?*" We learn something amazing from this, which is that this great tzaddik prepared for learning Torah by completely annulling himself. Unfortunately, today we see people who prepare themselves for studying Torah in a completely different way: They smoke a few cigarettes, drink a cup of coffee, chat a bit with their friends, and only then do they "*accept*" to sit down and study. We must realize that this is not the way to prepare ourselves for learning Torah. Instead we must learn from the way of the Ketzot HaChoshen. This kind of preparation is essential for being successful in learning Torah, for it is only through the right kind of preparation that we can conquer the evil inclination when studying, thereby avoiding pride, a love for honor, and jealously. If we want to merit the light of the Torah, we must conduct ourselves with humility. As we know, the evil inclination often enters the Beit Midrash with a person as his good friend, sitting next to him and wanting to study with him. Yet when it comes time to study, it infuses him with foreign thoughts and tries to make him sin.

As a result, before studying Torah, a person must shed tears and say to the evil inclination: "*Evildoer! What right do you have to recite Hashem's statutes? Why have you followed me here to study Torah, for the Beit Midrash, the yeshiva, isn't your place! Why are you sitting here and bothering me?*"

When a person acts in this way, exerting all his strength to prepare himself for learning Torah without any foreign thoughts, he will succeed, as the Sages state: "*If he says, 'I have labored and found,' you may believe him*" (*Megillah 6b*). It is in this way that we can conquer the evil inclination, as King David said: "*One thing have I asked of the L-RD, that I will seek after: That I might dwell in the house of the L-RD…to behold the beauty of the L-RD and to contemplate in His Temple*" (*Psalms 27:4*).

We know the classic question: Why did David first have a single and unique request, but then asked for several things? He asked to dwell, to behold, and to contemplate! We may explain this by saying that King David asked for a single thing: For the evil inclination not to disturb him as he studied Torah and performed mitzvot. In that case

he could automatically obtain all the things he desired. However if the evil inclination were to disturb him, he would achieve nothing, since it would enter the Beit Midrash with him. This was King David's method for preparing to study Torah: He asked Hashem for the evil inclination not to disturb him. Every person must learn from King David and ask Hashem for the same thing. He will then be able to enslave the evil inclination and succeed in his Torah study, which will earn merit both for himself and the entire Jewish people.

The Torah Takes the Evil Inclination Into Account

It is written, "*When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand and you take captives, and you see among the captives a woman who is beautiful of form and you desire her, you may take her as a wife*" (*Devarim 21:10-11*).

As soon as this passage states, "*Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand,*" we know that it is speaking of captives, for there are captives whenever a victory takes place. Therefore why does the passage go on to say, "*and you take captives*"? Something else is even more astounding: How could anyone possibly think that those going out to war will look at women, since it is said: "*The officers shall continue speaking to the people and say, 'Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house'*" (*Devarim 20:8*)? The Sages have explained in the name of Rabbi Yossi the Galilean: "*Fainthearted – he who is afraid because of the transgressions he committed*" (*Sotah 44a*), which is why the Torah gave him these pretexts in order to return home.

Now since the Sages mentioned this in regards to a minor sin – such as speaking between the placing of the tefillin of the arm and the tefillin of the head – a sin for which they return home from the front, then for the far graver sin of immorality, how much more should they return home from the front!

With the Intention of Yielding to G-d

The Sages state that the verse, "*Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him*" (*Malachi 3:18*) seems to indicate that the righteous is one who serves G-d, while the wicked is one who does not serve Him (*Chagigah 9b*). Such is not the case, however, for in reality one who serves Him and one who does not serve Him are both perfectly righteous. It is simply that one who studies a passage 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times.

In other words, there is a righteous person who serves G-d, and there is a righteous person who does not. How is this possible? One who studies a passage more often than is strictly necessary so as not to forget what he has learned – completely devoting himself to the study of Torah not only to remember it, but also because his Creator has commanded him to study it – such a person is said to serve G-d (*El-kim*), not Hashem.

Now everywhere we find the term El-kim, the reference is to the G-d of Israel, meaning that there are people who study a great deal of Torah, but do not serve G-d because they have no intention of crowning Him as King over themselves. Yet those who study with this intention, reviewing their studies even after they have learned it beyond the point of forgetting, are said to serve G-d.

In Chovot HaLevavot we read: You must realize that your greatest enemy in the world is your evil inclination. If you watch out for it, and you use your wisdom to fight it and rid yourself of its arrows, you will be saved and escape it with Hashem's help. However if you cast your desires towards the evil inclination and allow yourself to be drawn to what it wants, it will never leave you alone until you have lost both worlds, until it has torn you away from both of your abodes, as it is written: "*For she has felled many victims; many are the number slain by her*" (*Mishlei 7:26*). The story is told of a chassid who met some people returning from war with their spoils. He said to them, "*You have returned from a minor war, and now prepare yourself for a major war.*" They replied, "*What is this major war?*" He said, "*The war against the evil inclination and its soldiers.*" In fact when you defeat any enemy once or twice, it will leave you alone and not even think of fighting you again, for it has lost hope of ever defeating and controlling you. Yet defeating the evil inclination even 100 times is not enough, for if it defeats you just once, it will kill you. Yet if you defeat it once, it will lay all kinds of traps over the course of your lifetime in order to defeat you. Thus as the Sages say, "*Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:4*).

How Can We Defeat the Evil Inclination?

No one hates man more than the evil inclination. Man's war against it is a continuous battle, as the Sages have said: "*A man should always incite the good inclination to fight against the evil inclination*" (*Berachot 5a*). Rashi explains that a person must wage war against it. This war never ends, it is difficult, and if the Holy One, blessed be He, were not to help a person, he could never defeat it.

Thus in this week's parsha, the Torah is speaking about the evil inclination and how a person can defeat it. What can he do to ensure that the Holy One, blessed be He, will help him win? The passage states, "*Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand,*" meaning that you must crown Hashem as King over yourself and He must be your G-d, at which point you will defeat the evil inclination. How can a person crown Hashem as King over himself? If he wants to defeat the evil inclination, he must turn his heart towards Heaven and wage a perpetual war against it. A person is not called a servant of G-d – even if he is called righteous – unless he defeats the evil inclination time and time again, for he has crowned Hashem as King over himself.

So the Tzaddikim May See

The Torah states, "*and you see among the captives a woman who is beautiful of form.*" This is written solely for the righteous who are not servants of G-d, and the Torah is only speaking of the evil inclination. Although these righteous men are not among those who return home from the front, since they have not sinned, yet because

they had no intention of being judged by their good inclination in battle, they did not devote themselves entirely to the battle, nor did they act over and above what was needed to defeat the evil inclination. Hence when they went out to war – when they were in battle, a time when the evil inclination was in control – it tried to make them stumble by means of the woman of beautiful form. This verse therefore appears in the Torah so that the righteous who serve G-d may see what happens to the righteous who do not serve G-d. Since they did not chase the evil inclination from their hearts, it made them stumble in regards to the woman of beautiful form.

With our own eyes, we see many people who get up in the morning and go to study in the Beit HaMidrash. Yet instead of conquering the evil inclination during prayer as well, as they do by learning Torah in the morning, some fall asleep in the middle of prayer, while others waste time in foolish pursuits before prayer. Such people have lost as much as they have gained, for if their intention was to defeat the evil inclination and to chase it from their hearts, they should have fought against it all day long and throughout their lives. They should not be content simply with the few hours that they study Torah in the morning. The fact that they are not waging a constant battle shows that they have not crowned Hashem as King over themselves, despite defeating their evil inclination from time to time.

Placing a Fence on Your Roof: Making a Fence Around the Torah

In this week's parsha we find a special mitzvah that applies to anyone building a home. It is the mitzvah to make a *ma'akeh* (fence), as it is written: "*When you build a new house, you shall make a fence for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house ki yipol hanofel [if the fallen falls] from it*" (*Devarim 22:8*).

The commentators have thoroughly questioned why the verse uses the double expression *ki yipol hanofel* (literally *"if the fallen falls"*), rather than "*if one falls*." Here Rashi says, "*This one deserves to fall. Nevertheless, you should not be the one to bring about his death, for meritorious things are executed through meritorious people, while things of ill-fortune are executed through guilty people*." In other words, although the person who has fallen from this place deserved to fall – for man does not move a finger below unless it has been decreed above – even in that case, we are commanded to place a fence around our roofs so as not to be the ones through whom this decree is executed.

Rabbeinu Bechaye cites the Midrash in commenting at length on this subject. He says the following: " *'You shall make a fence for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house if the fallen falls from it' – from the six days of Creation, it was foreseen that he would fall from it, but you should not be the one through whom his fall takes place.*" This Midrash is telling us that all created beings were made according to their desire and their will. From the beginning of Creation, the Holy One, blessed be He, declared everything that would happen to everyone, and all the events that would

occur to them. He also announced how many days they would live and how they would die, as well as the ease or difficulty of their livelihood, and whether they would obtain it through their own means or through the intermediary of others. The Sages have said that all things have been created in function to their own will and characteristics, as it is written: "*and all their hosts*" (*Bereshith 2:1*) – all living beings agreed and accepted. In this context, it is said that from the six days of Creation it was foreseen that this individual would fall, and yet the one through whom it occurs deserves a grave punishment. Hence "*you shall make a fence for your roof.*"

Although a decree already existed in regards to this person, each individual must be careful not to be the one through whom such a decree takes place.

In reflecting upon this, we see that a great lesson is concealed in this verse. We note the importance that the Torah places on caring for each individual – to the point of issuing a special mitzvah to make a fence on our roofs – all so as not to cause an accident for someone to whom it was nevertheless decreed. In addition, the Torah describes a failure to do so as placing "*blood in your house,*" as if the homeowner had committed murder.

Thus when someone deliberately, not accidentally, harms another person by vexing him, wronging him, or shaming him in public, how much more is he called a murderer!

As a result, we must be exceedingly careful to demonstrate respect for others.

Furthermore, since the holy Torah warns us even for such unlikely scenarios – simply in order for the person in question not to be the one through whom an evil decree occurs – how much more should we pay attention to more likely scenarios, ones in which an evil decree occurs through us! In such situations, we ourselves will be guilty! In fact the Sages have said, "*Evil comes about through sinful men, and good through worthy men*" (*Sanhedrin 8a*). This is not just a simple phrase or a nice saying – it is the truth: If a person merits it, good things will happen through him. Conversely, evil will occur through him.

As a result, if we want evil not to occur through us, it is not enough to place a fence on our roofs. We are also obligated to better ourselves. Then and only then, because we merit it, nothing evil will occur through us.

Upon further reflection, it may be that this concept is alluded to in the verse: "*You shall make a ma'akeh [fence] for your roof.*" Nowhere else in the Torah do we find the term *ma'akeh*, a fact which the commentators have noted. The Rashbam says that the term *ma'akeh* has no equivalent in the Torah, coming from the same root as the term *akat* ("oppression") in the expression *akat rasha* (*"the oppression of the wicked" [Tehillim 55:4]*). Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezer also cites this viewpoint, adding: "*It is not by coincidence that the only root corresponding to the term ma'akeh is akat, telling us that putting up this fence is not only a physical endeavor, but a spiritual one as well. It does not consist of protecting one standing there from falling, but preventing one from becoming wicked and committing sins by rectifying what is not right and preserving what is.*"

It may be that "*if the fallen falls*" is written as a warning to a person destined to fall – and one who has already started to fall – so he can repent and change his ways. In other words, it is written so he can put up a fence, search his soul, and repent. Thus we read, "*Repent, O wayward sons, and I will heal your waywardness*" (*Jeremiah 3:22*), which is the call hidden in the construction of such a fence. In other words: Repent, O wayward sons, and correct your ways! Construct fences that will prevent you from returning to your old sins.

Thus the verse states, "*if the fallen falls*" – meaning that one who has already fallen will continue to fall. Do not say that since he has already fallen, he can no longer fall, for in the Gemara we find that whoever commits a sin and repeats it, to him it seems permitted (*Yoma 86b*). In other words, one who has fallen once is not like one who has fallen numerous times. He will have regrets upon falling the first time, but little by little, upon falling more, he will get used to having committed evil, and eventually he will see nothing wrong in it. This is what constitutes, "*if the fallen falls.*" We have a special mitzvah to prevent the fallen from falling once again and continuing to fall, for even children who have sinned on numerous occasions, to the point of being called "*wayward sons,*" have the ability to repent, such that G-d Himself will heal them of their waywardness.

It may be that this is one of the three things which the Men of the Great Assembly mentioned at the beginning of Pirkei Avoth: "*Make a fence around the Torah*" (*1:1*). In fact a person has an obligation to sanctify himself in what is permitted, to set limits and make vows, and to build a fence for himself in order to progress in the service of Hashem.

I have found something similar to this in the book Peh Eliyahu, which states that a person is obligated to constantly add to and improve everything he does, as the Sages have said: "*Regarding old Torah scholars…the older they grow, the clearer their minds become*" (*Kinim 3:6*). This is due to the fact that they are constantly working to strengthen their good middot. As for the ignorant, as they grow older they tend to lose their clarity of mind, for they have distanced themselves from good middot. The result is that their minds become clouded.

Hence a person is obligated to protect himself through Torah and mitzvot so as not to fall. Even if a person has fallen often – even if he is in the same state as "*the fallen who falls*" – he can still strengthen himself and completely repent. However if he remains obstinate and acts in the opposite way, the verse explicitly tells us "*not [to] place blood in your house*" – meaning that he will be spilling blood, his very own.

When You Go Out to War – Man and the Fight Against the Evil Inclination

It is written, "*When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand and you take captives…*" (*Devarim 21:10*).

The commentators, such as the Alsheich Zatzal in his book Torat Moshe, have already explained this passage as referring to a Jew's war against his constant and

eternal enemy, the evil inclination. In this week's parsha, we are given a great deal of advice on how to fight and defeat it, a subject that I will explain by following the order of the verses.

The words, "*Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand*" relate to what the Sages have said: "*Man's evil inclination gathers strength against him each day and seeks to kill him…and were the Holy One, blessed be He, not to help him, he would be unable to prevail against it*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). This means that with his own minor strength, man cannot defeat the evil inclination. On the other hand, he has the duty to start fighting it, in which case the Holy One, blessed be He, will help him to defeat it, as the Sages have said: "*If one comes to purify himself, he is helped*" (*Yoma 38b*). At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, will certainly deliver it into his hand.

In general, we know that whoever goes to war will try to uncover the details and secrets of his enemy's forces, doing so in order to determine how he can defeat his enemy, such as by using a sophisticated weapon for example. The same applies to man's fight against the evil inclination, which possesses considerable strength and employs all the tricks of warfare. He must therefore attack it using the most sophisticated weapon possible, namely the Torah, as the Sages have said: "*I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). It is the Torah which can defeat the evil inclination and make it fall.

This idea is alluded to in the expression, "*When you go out to war,*" for the term *milchama* ("war") can be divided into *lechem ma*. This designates the Torah, which is called *lechem* ("*bread*" – *Yalkut Shimoni*), as it is written: "*Come, eat of my bread*" (*Mishlei 9:5*). As for the term *ma*, it has the same numerical value as *adam* ("man"). As we have said, this means that when a person decides to fight his evil inclination, he will only be able to defeat it through Torah. In such a case, it will dissolve if made of stone, and it will shatter if made of iron (*Kiddushin 30b*).

In this regard, we must add that there exists another way to defeat the evil inclination, a segula to conquer and prevent it from bringing man down to the abyss. This consists of guarding the sanctity of the milah. Sanctity must be absolute in this area, in which case we will be able to conquer the evil inclination. This is also alluded to in the expression ki tetzei la'milchama, which is formed by the letters of lechem milah, meaning that when a man guards his milah as he should, and he strengthens himself in lechem (*i.e., Torah*), he will defeat the evil inclination.

In that case, he will fulfill the next part of the verse: "*and you take captives.*" This means that all the drops of semen which he emitted in vain, and which were held captive by the forces of impurity, will also be saved and purified. This occurs when a person controls his evil inclination, as it is written: "*He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it*" (*Job 20:15*), and they will return to their source.

As we know, "*He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it*" represents the initials of one of Hashem's sacred Names. This is the Name that we focus on when immersing ourselves in a mikveh, doing so in order to retrieve the sparks of holiness that we have

damaged, and to no longer lose them. This is the meaning of "*and you take prisoners.*" By dividing the term *shivyo* ("prisoners"), we get *shav* and the letters *yud vav*. These letters are part of the sacred Name in question, one by which a person retrieves all that was taken from him by the evil inclination, all the sparks of holiness that were lost.

The passage continues: "*And you see among the captives a woman of beautiful appearance*" (*Devarim 21:11*). In other words, once you defeat the evil inclination, you will perceive the sweetness of the Torah, which enabled you to fight the evil inclination. How so? By the brilliance of its glory and by its secrets. It will be beautiful to you, making you desire it even more, as it is written: "*Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its pathways are peace*" (*Mishlei 3:17*). This is also alluded to in the term *to'ar* ("appearance"), the numerical value of which (when adding its four letters to the total) is equal to that of Torah.

At that point, "*you will have a desire for her*" (*Devarim 21:11*), meaning that your desire for Torah will make you cleave to it, and you will truly acquire it in your soul as if it were your wife. As the Sages have said on the verse, "*Moshe commanded us a Torah, a heritage [morasha] of the congregation of Jacob*" (*Devarim 33:4*): "*Do not read morasha [heritage], but me'orasa [betrothed]*" (*Sifre ad loc.*). They also compare a good wife to the Torah (*see Yebamot 63b*). This is "*you will take her to yourself for a wife*" (*Devarim 21:11*).

We then come to the following idea: "*You shall bring her into the midst of your house*" (*v.12*), meaning that the Torah must truly be within you, as it is written: "*Your Torah is in my innards*" (*Tehillim 40:9*). In that case, you will have completely acquired and internalized it, and it will never leave you.

You will then fulfill: "*She shall shave her head*" (*Devarim 21:12*) – the shaving of the head being an allusion to the fact that everything which hinders and prevents you from learning Torah will be "*shaved*" and removed. You will be able to study Torah with even greater strength, all evil will disappear, and only good fruit will remain.

The verse continues: "*and [she shall] make her nails*" (*ibid.*), which means that she will let them grow. The Holy One, blessed be He, "*made for Adam and his wife garments of skin [ohr: ayin-vav-resh]*" (*Bereshith 3:21*). This signifies the exclusive development of good things for man, especially since the Sages tell us that in the Torah of Rabbi Meir it is written: "*garments of light [ohr: aleph-vav-resh]*" (*Bereshith Rabba 20:12*). This is the light of the Torah, as the Sages have said: "*Light means the Torah, as it says. 'For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light' [Mishlei 6:23]*" (*Megillah 16b*). It is to man's greatness to "*let his nails grow,*" for the nail is smooth and shiny, an allusion to the light of Torah.

This fully corresponds to what we have said. It consists of growing and donning them [i.e., words of Torah] like a garment, for the Torah itself wears garments of glory and honor. The honor of the Torah will also grow in our eyes, for this is what the Torah "*makes.*" All this happens the more that we put an effort into learning. In that case, the reward comes next:

"*She shall remove the garment of her captivity*" (*Devarim 21:13*) – the Holy One, blessed be He, will remove all the kelipot of the Satan, which surrounds us and lies in wait, as it is written: "*My heart is wounded within me*" (*Tehillim 109:22*). As the Sages have said (*Yerushalmi, Berachot 9:5*), this teaches that David killed the evil inclination in such a way that it could no longer tempt or wrong him. As a result, we attain a true connection to G-d by our study of Torah, without any self-interest coming into play. We will be purified by one cleansing after another, and its sanctity will make us so holy that we will never again become prisoners of the evil inclination. Instead, we will remain the "*prisoners*" of the Torah.

In fact we will reach a point at which we "*shall go to her and be her husband*" (*Devarim 21:13*). We will be completely connected to Torah, and we will find new explanations in it, as the Sages have said: "*Happy is he who comes here in full possession of his learning*" (*Bava Batra 10b*). This refers to new Torah explanations, and it represents fertility in Torah. It signifies that we feel like a part of the Torah itself, truly as if it was our wife – that it is part of us – part of our very essence.

It is not by chance that Parsha Ki-Teitzei is read every year precisely during the month of Elul, the parsha which conceals the best instructions for the days of judgment. These instructions remain concealed, awaiting anyone who reflects upon the best way to fight the extremely difficult battle against the evil inclination and its legions. It is a battle for life, for the mission that we must fulfill on earth, and for our existence in this world and the World to Come.

The Spiritual Guardrail in the Building of Man

It is written, "*If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof so that you will not place blood in your house ki yipol hanofel [when the fallen falls]*" (*Devarim 22:8*).

The commentators, among them Rabbeinu Bechaye, have asked why the verse employs the redundant expression *ki yipol hanofel*, rather than simply stating *pen yipol* (*"lest one falls"*). We need to understand what lesson we must learn from this verse, since it is clear that anyone building a home is obligated to put a guardrail on his roof for safety reasons. Therefore what is the Torah teaching us here?

In reality, a person must establish fences – guardrails – for himself in order to keep his distance from materiality. In fact if he does not safeguard himself against the calls of the material realm, and instead gives in to sensory desires, even permitted ones, he will inevitably end up with spiritual ruins.

We sometimes see people who take a spiritual stumble, and often we're convinced that it's because they sinned. In reality, a person does not necessarily experience a spiritual decline after a sin; it may occur because his heart allowed itself to be drawn to the dictates of his desires. Now if he does not pull himself together, but continues on this downward trend, he will end up falling and endure a spiritual death!

The proof comes from a teaching of our Sages on the verse, "*Upon the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the dead die*" (*Devarim 17:6*). The Sages questioned the expression "*shall the dead die,*" which is a contradiction in terms. He is either dead – in which case he cannot be put to death – or he is alive – in which case he cannot be called dead. The text should have written "*shall the living die.*" The Gemara replies that he is already regarded as dead (*Berachot 18b*), and the Ba'al HaTurim explains that even while alive, the wicked are called dead.

In reality, a person who sins is immediately regarded as dead, especially when he harms the root of his soul, which leaves him after being defiled. Thus deprived of a soul, he finds himself at the level of an animal, a living being without a soul, as it is written: "*Man has no pre-eminence over an animal, for all is futile*" (*Kohelet 3:19*). Killing him means taking the life of a body without a soul.

This is the meaning of the redundancy cited earlier, for ki yipol hanofel means: At first he sinned and blemished his soul, causing it to flee. This is the first fall. Then came the second fall, when the body in turn died. A person who does not want to reach that point must surround himself with guardrails, thereby preventing a first fall, as it is written: "*You shall safeguard My charge*" (*Vayikra 18:30*). Here our Sages explain: "*Make a keeping to My keeping*" (*Moed Katan 5a; Yebamot 21a*), and the Mishnah states: "*Make a fence around the Torah*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:1*). The Rambam explains this as referring to the laws instituted by the Sages to distance man from sin.

Writing along the same lines, the author of Pe Eliyahu states that we must never stop improving our character traits, as our Sages teach: "*Regarding aged scholars…the older they get, the more composed their minds become*" (*Kinim 3:6*). By knowing how to preserve their fine character traits, Torah scholars maintain all their wits despite their advanced age. As the uneducated age, however, their minds grow dull because their character flaws become more pronounced, the result being that their thoughts become increasingly muddled.

Hence we must always strive to consolidate our gains in Torah study and mitzvot observance, lest we fall twice, G-d forbid. In fact a person who fails to make an effort to spiritually elevate himself, preferring instead to maintain his current status, will lack ambition and drive in serving Hashem. He will practice Judaism without desire or pleasure, such that he will end up vehemently rejecting it. This is the meaning of the verse, "*Vehaya [And it will be], because you will hearken [eikev; literally 'heel']*" (*Devarim 7:12*), which Rashi explains in citing the Sages: "*If you heed the minor commandments, which one tramples b'akevav [with his heels].*" An individual who respects the mitzvot that people have a tendency to neglect safeguards himself from the routine practice of Judaism and the habitual faults that eventually drive people to reject it. We should therefore be careful to practice mitzvot with joy, for in Scripture the term vehaya always signifies joy. Cheerfulness and self-sacrifice create this fence, this guardrail that surrounds the practice of mitzvot, allowing us to constantly elevate ourselves in serving Hashem.

Their Closeness to Hashem

Because of their closeness to Hashem, Jews also need to remain vigilant with respect to simple mitzvot and minor details. In fact a person's conduct must be irreproachable in all respects if he is close to the king. Furthermore, we are not like the other nations of the world, among whom G-d examines only the gravest of sins. For Jews, even the most insignificant sins are counted, meaning sins that a person tends to trample upon, as King David said: "*Why should I be fearful in the days of evil, when the injunctions that I trampled upon will surround me*" (*Tehillim 49:6*). That is, even the mistakes that only resulted from a person's heels will be considered as outright sins.

The Torah alludes to this as well by stating: "*If you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof*" (*Devarim 22:8*). This means that a person who wants to spiritually elevate himself must ensure that his body is always pure, like new, and without any trace of sin. He must establish fences and safeguards for himself, barriers that he must constantly strengthen and reinforce. For example, if a person builds a house, no matter how beautiful, and yet forgets to build a fence around the construction site, he is responsible for anyone who ventures too close to it and gets injured. The same applies to a person himself: If he simply observes mitzvot without adding fences and safeguards, his behavior is liable to lead to an irreversible loss, for a spiritual fall is inevitable without fences. Indeed, it is as if he has already fallen. Now the second fall is but the consequence of the first, for a person who observes mitzvot without attempting to strengthen them with an ironclad barrier has already fallen.

The Sacred War of the Eyes

Parsha Ki-Teitzei is always read during the month of Elul, the month of mercy and selichot. It is the most fitting time for us to draw closer to Hashem, conquer our bad habits, and sanctify and purify our thoughts in order to arrive at the day of judgement before the King of the universe and be inscribed for a life of goodness and peace. During these days, we sound the shofar to stir the strings of the soul and awaken the heart, so that a person seeks to return to the Creator and improve his conduct and behavior. The commentators have said that the term shofar has the same root as *shipur* ("improvement"), for the entire goal of sounding the shofar is to awaken a desire to improve our deeds and rectify our way of life.

I would like to add that the shofar is also called a trumpet, for it is written: "*You shall sound [utekatem] the trumpets*" (*Bamidbar 10:10*). Trumpets (*chatzotzrot*) allude to the courtyards (*chatzerot*) of Hashem. The Torah asks a person to plant (*itka*) his tent stake with all his might in the courtyards of Hashem, meaning that he should dwell in the Beit HaMidrash to study Torah, just as King David asked "*to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life*" (*Tehillim 27:4*). In fact if a person is wise enough to pitch his tent within the walls of the Beit HaMidrash, within the courtyards of Hashem, he is guaranteed protection from all harm, both spiritual and material. The evil inclination

will not be able to defeat him, as the Sages have said: "*If that wretch meets you, drag it to the Beit HaMidrash. If it is made of stone, it will dissolve; if iron, it will shatter*" (*Kiddushin 30b*). This is the allusion we find in the term shofar, for whoever seeks to sanctify and purify his soul must diligently study Torah in the courtyards of Hashem, where he will be protected and guarded from all harm, so much so that Amalek will be unable to defeat him.

This week's parsha begins with, "*When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver them into your hand*" (*Devarim 21:10*). If a person goes out to war against his evil inclination, he is promised that Hashem will safeguard him and that the evil inclination will be captured and trodden upon without any possibility of arising. However the Torah continues by stating, "*and you see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you desire her*" (*v.11*) – meaning that although the evil inclination is already imprisoned and under control, unable to tempt a person into doing evil – all this applies to other desires. Insofar as being drawn to a woman or looking at something forbidden, a person is still not victorious. He is not immune to it, and despite the victory that he experienced in his battle against the evil inclination, it still has the ability to surprise him and set a trap that he may fall into. Thus suddenly, without wanting to, he will be faced with something that is forbidden to look at, as the verse states: "*and you see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you desire her.*" A casual glance is liable to blind him and make him fall into the trap of desire, all because when it comes to being attracted to women, it requires a much greater effort to control than other desires that dwell in the human heart. I'm surprised by people who attend celebrations, look at women face to face, and chat with them about meaningless things, all without worrying in the least about this serious and terrible sin. The Torah warns us: "*You will bring her into your house*" (*Devarim 21:12*), meaning that we shouldn't believe that looking at a woman and thinking of her, whoever she may be, is insignificant because it doesn't involve an actual sin. In fact we are warned that looking at her is liable to lead to, "*You will bring her into your house.*"

This means that she has the power to infiltrate the depths of a person's soul and access the recesses of his mind. Even if a forbidden thought is asleep within him, it still has the ability to awaken one day and under any circumstance, even while he is praying or learning Torah.

Just as a camera captures an image, what the eyes capture is engraved upon the brain. It is possible that when a person is standing in prayer before Hashem, a strange thought will suddenly arise and blind his reasoning. In that case, his entire prayer will have been channeled to the forces of impurity. As for a person who has experienced this without being careful to guard his eyes and purify his thoughts, he should realize with certainty that the root of Amalek is within him, and that doubts as to faith and how G-d guides the world will arise in him and multiply without stop. Even if he puts an effort into learning Torah and meticulously observing mitzvot, a certain coldness [in his service of Hashem] will develop despite his best intentions, all because he is far

from holiness and purity. That is why we must put as much of an effort as possible into guarding the sanctity of our eyes and purifying them. This is the proper way to discard the "*Amalek*" that is found within the heart, for doubts vanish on account of holiness, and instead of coldness in the service of Hashem, the heart will actually be driven by a sacred fire for Torah and mitzvot.

We can now understand that when a person subdues his evil inclination and conquers it, he should be careful not to boast and think that he has completely defeated it. On the contrary, he should continue to pay careful attention to not looking at women, lest he think that nothing vile can affect him if he looks at them because he has been careful not to do anything with them.

Simply looking at a woman is enough to "*bring her into your house,*" which is the body. This can result in tremendous harm, to the point of fathering a rebellious son who does not listen to his parents. This is the

"*Amalek*" that hides in the heart of man and arouses doubts in terms of faith and the way to serve Hashem – all without the person himself realizing that this occurred because he looked at women. He thinks that looking at them has no spiritual consequences. On the contrary, the fact that he looked at them prevents him from fearing G-d, and spiritually speaking he will go from bad to worse, until he arrives at thoughts that will truly put him in danger.

May it be G-d's will to allow us to erase the memory of Amalek from our hearts, and may our hearts be completely devoted to serving Him. Amen and Amen.

Ki Tavo

An All Out War Against Pride

It is written, "*It will be when you enter the land that the L-RD your G-d gives you… you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground…and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the L-RD your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there. You shall come to the priest who will be in those days…and the priest shall take the basket from your hand*" (*Deuteronomy 26:1-4*).

We know just how powerful the evil inclination is, for it can infuse a person's heart with pride in order to chase him from this world. As the Sages have said, "*Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world*" (*Perkei Avoth 4:21*). As such, not only will a person lose this world, but the World to Come as well.

In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, detests the proud, as it is written: "*Every haughty person is an abomination to the L-RD*" (*Proverbs 16:5*).

Although he was a great hero, King David's heart did not wax proud. Instead he regarded himself as nothing, as he said: "*I am a worm and not a man, the scorn of humanity, despised of people*" (*Psalms 22:7*). He also said, "*My heart was not proud, and my eyes were not haughty*" (*ibid. 131:1*). He fully realized that all he possessed originated from Hashem, which is why he fought against the evil inclination as it tried to convince him to take advantage of the honor bestowed upon him by the Holy One, blessed be He. In fact King David chose to devote all his abilities and strength to increasing the glory of Hashem.

When the Children of Israel were about to enter the land of Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey (*Exodus 3:8*) – "*a land where you will eat bread without poverty; you will lack nothing there*" (*Deuteronomy 8:9*) – the Holy One, blessed be He, was concerned that wealth would lead the people to become proud and forget their Creator. As we read, "*Yeshurun became fat and kicked – you became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent – and it deserted G-d its Maker*" (*ibid. 32:15*).

Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, reminded them not to forget that they had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. The land of Israel had not been given to them on account of their own merit, but because of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had wholeheartedly served Hashem by completely yielding to Him. Thus they had no reason to grow proud, especially since the gift of the land was based on the condition that Jews study Torah and observe mitzvot. Otherwise the Holy One, blessed be He, would take it from them and send them into exile.

This idea is alluded to in the expression ki tavo (*"when you enter" [Deuteronomy 26:1]*), the word tavo having a numerical value of 403. Of this amount, 400 corresponds to the years of oppression they endured, as it is written: "*Your offspring shall be aliens*

in a land not their own…and they will oppress them 400 years" (*Genesis 15:13*), while 3 corresponds to the three Patriarchs, to whom Hashem promised the land after the exile in Egypt.

This is why Hashem commanded that the first fruits be brought to the Temple and that people declare, "*My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt…. The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and they placed hard work upon us*" (*Deuteronomy 26:5-6*). As such they would never forget their past, when they were slaves in Egypt, nor the fact that they inherited the land due to the merit of the holy Patriarchs, though only on condition that they study Torah and perform mitzvot. Therefore everything the Children of Israel had was given to them entirely as a gift, which would obviously lead them to humility, the opposite of pride, which destroys all that is good within people. This is why they went to the Temple with their baskets in hand to thank Hashem for having led them to the land of their forefathers, as it is written: "*He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the ground that You have given me, O L-RD*" (*vv.9-10*). By thanking Hashem for all the good that He did for them, they never entertained forbidden thoughts such as, "*My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.*"

This is some of the advice that the Torah gives a person in order to prevent pride from making its way into him and causing him to lose the world. In general, when a person becomes wealthy and his thoughts focus on his business, he begins to study less Torah. In fact the wealthier he becomes, the further he strays from the words of Torah. Pride certainly comes to occupy the space created by the diminishment of his study, in which case he is liable to entertain wicked thoughts.

Because of our many sins, today the Temple no longer stands. Therefore the place where a tzaddik lives is like the Temple, and the tzaddik is like the High Priest who officiates there. When a person learns how to serve Hashem from the tzaddik, it is as if he had brought an offering to the Temple.

Furthermore, when we bring a gift to the tzaddik and see how he serves Hashem in a completely unselfish way, our hearts will begin to melt. We will then repent and become completely different people. In that case it is like bringing the first fruits to the Temple, as the Sages have said: "*One who brings a gift to a scholar, it is as if he had offered first fruits*" (*Ketubot 105b*). This is the meaning of the verse, "*When you enter the land that the L-RD your G-d gives you*" – remember that it is only your land when you follow the path of the Patriarchs, and remember that you were a stranger for 400 years. The land does not belong to you – for "*the land is Mine*" (*Leviticus 25:23*), and I gave it to your fathers "*and their descendants after them*" (*Deuteronomy 1:8*) – but only on condition that they do not grow proud on account of their wealth. Let them not think that the power of their own hand has brought them this.

Above all, from here a person must learn that if he was poor and has become rich, he must remember his poverty. He must remember that it was only because of Hashem's

compassion and the merit of the holy Patriarchs that he was given this gift. Hence he has no reason to grow proud, for just as Hashem made him wealthy, so too can He reclaim this wealth if he fails to follow the right path.

The Role of the Soul: Serving Hashem in this World

It is written, "*It shall be, when you enter the land that the L-RD your G-d gives you as an inheritance and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that the L-RD your G-d gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the L-RD your G-d will choose to make His Name dwell there*" (*Deuteronomy 26:1-2*). We shall explain these verses from the viewpoint of Mussar. In our time, when the Temple no longer stands and we no longer bring firstfruits, it is a mitzvah for us to understand how we can fulfill these verses, since the entire Torah was given to each generation.

The Sages have taught, "*Against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give an accounting before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:22*). When Hashem brings down a soul into this world, it says: "*Master of the universe, it is impossible to emerge from beneath the Throne of Glory, from a world that is entirely good, and descend into a world that is completely dominated by the evil inclination. Who knows if I will be able to resist? Better that You leave me here, where I am close to You!*" At that point Hashem tells the soul, "*You will descend into the material world against your will, for I created you to resist the evil inclination. As long as you remain hidden beneath the Throne of Glory and nourish yourself from the splendor of the Shechinah – as long as you do not descend into the material world, study Torah, and perform mitzvot – all the nourishment that I give you is only through My favor. That is why I have decreed that you must descend into the material world to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. If you do well, you will receive a reward. Whatever happens, you will not descend alone. I will personally descend with you and help you to confront the evil inclination.*"

The soul of man is actually a Divine spark, for when the soul is above, an angel teaches it the entire Torah, as Hashem did for Moses in Heaven. The soul has no greater enjoyment than this, and when the time comes for it to descend into the world, it does not want to go. Instead it wants to remain learning Torah with an angel, not to venture into a world of the evil inclination and hardships. It says, "*Master of the universe, why have You decreed that I must descend into the world?*" Hashem answers the soul in the same way that He answered Moses when he was in Heaven: "*Go, descend*" (*Exodus 32:7*) – for your own benefit and your own good, because as long as you are in Heaven, as long as an angel teaches you Torah and you do not need to put an effort into it, you will receive no reward whatsoever. Therefore descend into the world, fulfill mitzvot, and I will give you a reward. Do not be afraid of the evil inclination, for I am descending with you into the world. Hence it is written *lech reid* (*"go, descend"*), which has the same

numerical value as the term *nered* ("let us descend"). This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, also descends with the soul into the world, which is why it is written: "*Vehaya [It shall be] when you enter the land,*" for the term *vehaya* is formed by the same letters as the Tetragrammaton. This teaches us that when the time comes for the soul to descend into this world, which is completely material, it does not want to go. Yet at the same time, the Holy One, blessed be He, descends with it, and it is happy to be able to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. Hence it is written vehaya, which is an expression of joy.

Once the soul has descended into the world and experienced it, it no longer wants to leave this world and its vanities. At the same time, the Holy One, blessed be He, tells man: "*Against your will you die, taking no money with you from this world. All your money, all the effort that you put into acquiring it, will be left to others.*" The Holy One, blessed be He, asks man to fix times for learning Torah and performing mitzvot, and he replies: "*I didn't have time to study Torah and perform mitzvot, for I had too many possessions that took up my time. Therefore why did You bring me down into this world against my will? Why did You give me all this money, since it made me stumble?*" At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, says to him: "*When you descended into this world, I descended along with you. And where were you? You were busy with your money and did not know that I dwelled in you and helped you to overcome the evil inclination. If you ask why I did not awaken you, the answer is that I did not say anything because I saw that you were occupied with material concerns.*" The soul is like a deposit placed in man's hands, and he must protect it from the evil inclination so as not to tarnish it with his sins.

On the verse, "*Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out*" (*Deuteronomy 28:6*), the Gemara states: "*That your going from the world should be like your coming – just as you came into it without sin, so should you go out from it without [sin]*" (*Bava Metzia 107a*). The soul will eventually be reclaimed, though a person does not know when the owner of the deposit will come to reclaim it. Hence he must be careful that his soul is worthy of being returned at all times. In this way he will not shame the owner of the deposit when he returns for it, so that he does not find it tarnished.

This is why the verse states, "*That the L-RD your G-d gives you as an inheritance.*" Just as Eretz Israel is a conditional heritage and deposit in the hands of the Children of Israel – as our Sages have said: "*If you do G-d's will, the land of Canaan is yours. Otherwise you will be exiled*" and, "*So that the land does not vomit you out when you defile it*" (*Leviticus 18:28*) – likewise the soul is a deposit that is placed in man's hands, and he must protect it from all harm.

How can a person safeguard this deposit so that the evil inclination does not ruin it? It is through much Torah study, which is why the Torah has given man some useful advice that will enable him to render his soul to his Creator and bring Him satisfaction when his time comes to leave this world: He must go to the yeshiva and study Torah.

A person should not say, "*If that's the case, then I'll stay in yeshiva for my entire life to study Torah, and I won't practice mitzvot, which are too difficult for me,*" for the goal of learning Torah is to bring man to the performance of mitzvot.

This is why the Torah states, "*You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that the L-RD your G-d gives you.*" The firstfruits (*reshith*) are none other than the Torah, which teaches us that a person must study Torah and fulfill mitzvot in order for Hashem to give him a reward in the World to Come. The firstfruits represent this reward. In fact the soul cannot study Torah and fulfill mitzvot without a physical body, and the fulfillment of mitzvot can only occur in this world, not in the World to Come. Not only that, but the majority of mitzvot deal with material things, such as the Shmita year, the Jubilee, and circumcision, while few of them deal with spiritual things such as prayer. When a person dies, he is exempt from mitzvot, which is why the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards the soul for the body that practiced mitzvot in this world. The Torah therefore states, "*You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land,*" for this Torah and its fruits come only from the land, from this material world. When a person dies, he takes nothing with him, not silver or gold, but only the Torah and mitzvot that he acquired in life. These are the firstfruits of man, the first of his fruits, and there are no firstfruits but the Torah. By doing this, a person will merit to sense the reality of Hashem within him.

Eretz Israel was Given to us Conditionally

It is written, "*You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there*" (*Devarim 26:2*).

In our time, when the Temple no longer stands and we no longer bring *bikkurim* (firstfruit), we need to understand these verses in order to observe and fulfill them, for the entire Torah was given to every generation. As the Zohar states, the entire Torah is filled with good counsel for man (*Zohar III:202a*).

Our Sages have taught, "*Against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give an accounting before the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:22*). This teaches us that when Hashem brings a soul down into this world, it says: "*Sovereign of the universe, it is impossible to emerge from beneath the Throne of Glory, in a world that is entirely good, and descend into a world that is entirely bad. Who knows if I will be able to resist the evil inclination? Better that You should leave me here.*"

At that point He responds, "*You are descending into a material world against your will, since it is for this reason that I created you – so you may resist the evil inclination. As long as you remain hidden beneath the Throne of Glory, you will nourish yourself*

from the radiance of the Shechinah. You have not yet descended into the world of action, nor have you studied Torah or fulfilled mitzvot. You do not possess the merit to obtain a reward, for you have not yet done anything. As long as I continue to nourish you, I am only providing you with 'bread of shame' through My generosity."

This is why Hashem says to the soul, "*I order you to descend into the world of action, to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. If you do well, you will receive a reward. You will not descend alone, however, for I Myself will descend into the world with you, and I will help you overcome the evil inclination.*" Thus the Gemara states, "*The evil inclination of man grows in strength from day to day and seeks to kill him…. Were it not for the Holy One, blessed be He, to help him, he would not be able to withstand it*" (*Sukkah 52b*).

Entrusted to Man

The soul is a deposit entrusted to man. In general, when someone goes overseas and entrusts his plants to his friend, if his friend is honest, he will protect them from the sun, from the cold, and from mice. Thus when the owner returns and asks for his plants back, he will be able to return them as they were entrusted to him. However if he is not honest, he will not protect them. Instead he will think, "*The owner is not going to return soon, for he's gone for a while!*" Now if the owner encounters a favorable wind and returns earlier than expected, he will return to find that mice have eaten his plants, or that they have been damaged by the sun and cold, and he will immediately become angry.

The same applies to the soul: A person must protect it from the evil inclination so it does not get soiled by sin, as the Sages have said: " *'Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out' [Devarim 28:6]. Your departure from the world should be as your entry into it: Just as you entered it without sin, so may you leave it without sin*" (*Bava Metzia 107a*). We will eventually be asked to return the soul, but nobody knows when the owner will return for it. We must therefore always be careful to ensure that it can be returned at any time, in order not to upset the owner if he finds it tarnished when he comes to retrieve it.

Hence the verse states, "*When you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance*" (*Devarim 26:1*), meaning that just as Eretz Israel is an inheritance that has been entrusted to Israel conditionally – as our Sages have said, "*If you perform G-d's will, the land of Canaan is yours; otherwise you will be exiled from it*" (*Sifri, Devarim 38*), and "*Let the land not vomit you out for having defiled it*" (*Vayikra 18:28*) – likewise the soul has been entrusted to man, and he must watch over it so it does not get damaged.

How can we safeguard this deposit to prevent the evil inclination from damaging it? It is by committing ourselves to intensive study, for we can only learn Torah by devoting ourselves to it. As the Sages have said, "*Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva…. In the wilderness they had a yeshiva…. Our father Abraham was an elder and a member of the yeshiva…. Our father Isaac was an elder and a member of the yeshiva…. Our father Jacob was an elder and a member of*

the yeshiva" (*Yoma 28b*). Commenting on the verse, "*He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen*" (*Bereshith 46:28*), the Sages explain: "*To prepare a yeshiva for him there, where he would teach Torah and where the tribal fathers would study Torah*" (*Bereshith Rabba 95:3*).

Devotion to Torah

The Torah states, "*You shall take of the first [reshith] of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you*" (*Devarim 26:2*). Now the word reshith always designates Torah (*Bereshith Rabba 1:1*), teaching us that a person must study Torah and fulfill mitzvot in order for Hashem to give him a reward in the World to Come. The fruits represent this reward, as it follows from the Mishnah: "*These are the things for which a man enjoys the fruits in this world*" (*Pe'ah 1:1*). From the fact that a person fulfills the Torah, he merits a reward.

Since the soul cannot study Torah and fulfill mitzvot without a material and earthly body – something that cannot occur in the World to Come, but only in this world – and since most of the mitzvot pertain to material and earthly matters (such as the Shmita year, the Jubilee, conception, circumcision), and since only a few pertain to spiritual matters such as prayer, and man is exempt from mitzvot once he dies (*Shabbat 151b*), the Holy One, blessed be He, grants a reward to the soul that has fulfilled mitzvot in this world. Hence the Torah states, "*You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land,*" for Torah and fruit come only from the earth, from this earthly world. When a person leaves this world, he takes nothing with him, neither silver nor gold, but only the Torah that he studied and the mitzvot that he fulfilled in life.

The Meaning of the Mitzvah of Bikkurim

It is written, "*It will be, when you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance…that you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground…. You shall come to the kohen who will be in those days…. The kohen shall take the basket from your hand*" (*Devarim 26:1-4*).

These verses describe the mitzvah of bikkurim (*first fruits*). According to this mitzvah, after the land has been conquered and distributed among the Children of Israel, every year we must bring the seven types of fruit that are the glory of Eretz Israel. And not just any fruits, but the first fruits – the ones that appear first on a tree.

Sefer HaChinuch discusses the reasons for this mitzvah: "*The profound significance of the mitzvah lies in placing Hashem's word at the top of our joy. We must remember and know that every blessing in the world comes from Him. We have received the commandment to bring to those who serve in His House the fruits that have ripened first on His trees. We do this in recalling and accepting the yoke of His kingdom, and by thanking Him for these fruits and for all the other good things we receive from Him. We will then be worthy of a blessing, and there will be a blessing on our fruits*" (*Sefer HaChinuch 91*).

This seems to contain something that requires additional thought. Pride is among the worst sins, and it can make a person lose his share in this world and the World to Come. Our Sages warn us about this in the Mishnah, stating that "*Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world*" (*Pirkei Avoth 4:21*). In the Gemara they go into greater detail: "*Rabbi Elazar said, 'Every man in whom there is pride deserves to be cut down like an Asherah [object of idolatrous worship]. ... Every man in whom pride dwells, his ashes will not arise [in the resurrection]'*" (*Sotah 5a*). This means that the proud deserve death in this world and are not worthy of being resurrected in the future. The Sages add, "*Rabbi Chisda – according to another version it was Mar Ukba – said: Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'*" (*Sotah 5a*). G-d cannot, so to speak, dwell in the same world as him, the reason being that He detests every heart that is filled with pride, as it is written: "*Every haughty heart is an abomination to Hashem*" (*Mishlei 16:5*). Mussar books such as Sha'arei Teshuvah by Rabbeinu Yona and Messilat Yesharim by the Ramchal go into great detail on this subject.

Although the sin of pride is unfortunately widespread, being found among many people, the prevalence of pride is even greater among those who sow and harvest their fields. This can almost be expected, given that these people go to the trouble of working the earth all year round by watering and tilling it, along with all the difficulties that this entails. Hence it is natural that after so much effort, when such a person finally sees the result of his work, he will likely attribute it to his own efforts. He will consider it a personal achievement, a private success, and he will be inclined to think that "*I put in the effort. I did all the work.*"

It is therefore possible that the goal of the bikkurim is to teach us that we must eradicate such thoughts from our heart. Hence as soon as it is possible – as soon as the first fruits begin to grow and emerge on a tree – we are obligated to mark them off with some reed rope, as mentioned in the Mishnah, and say: "*Let these be bikkurim*" (*Bikkurim 3:1*).

That is why this order was given precisely at the time of the Children of Israel's arrival in Eretz Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey, and described as "*a land where you will eat bread without poverty; you will lack nothing there*" (*Devarim 8:9*). It is precisely at such a moment, when a person is sitting beneath his vine and fig tree, that such abundance may lead him to pride, as the verse states: "*Yeshurun grew fat and kicked*" (*ibid. 32:15*).

Thus when a person would present his bikkurim, he would utter a *vidui* (confession) by recalling all the kindnesses of the Creator: "*My father was a wandering Aramean*" (*Devarim 26:5*). This teaches us that everything we have received, the land and its magnificent fruits, only comes by the merit of our holy Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They served Hashem with devotion by humbling and annulling themselves, and it was by their merit that we were able to escape from Egypt, from the house of slavery, and enter Eretz Israel. Nevertheless, everything was on condition that we study Torah

and observe mitzvot, otherwise the Holy One, blessed be He, would exile us from our land, as it is written: "*Let the land not vomit you out*" (*Vayikra 18:28*). (*Note: This may be the meaning of the expression ki tavo ["when you enter"], which has a numerical value of 403. It corresponds to the 400 years of exile and the three patriarchs, for it was by means of these two things – the Patriarchs and the hardships of exile – that the Children of Israel received the land.*)

Reflecting further, I found other things that may also be explained in this way. Thus the Ohr HaChaim pondered the meaning of the phrase, "*and you shall speak*" (*Devarim 26:5*) and commented: "*It may be that the term ve'anita ['and you shall speak'] actually comes from the root oni ['poverty']. It is like a crude man for whom the king has done a great favor, and who comes before him like a beggar, pleading with a broken heart. Likewise it is fitting to humble oneself before Hashem.*" Now this is clearly what it means, for the mitzvah of the first fruits consists of the fact that a person recognizes the greatness of the Creator and feels insignificant for having received such great kindness, like a poor man standing at the door. At that point, no pride is liable to enter his heart.

There is something else here, which Sforno notes in examining the words "*the kohen who will be in those days.*" It means, "*Even if he is not great in wisdom, it does not prevent you from addressing him with respect.*" In other words, even if you know that you are greater than the kohen, you must still humble yourself before him and bring him the bikkurim. That is what Sforno states.

Yet because of our many sins, we have been exiled from our country and find ourselves far from our land, no longer being able to bring bikkurim to Jerusalem and the Temple. Yet we learn something amazing in this week's parsha, something that can help anyone who wants to avoid being infused with pride, given that it can make a person lose his portion in the world: It consists of reflecting upon the kindnesses of the Creator and His generosity towards him. When a person perceives the greatness of G-d, coupled with his own insignificance, a spirit of humility will infuse the deepest parts of his being.

What follows is an excerpt from the Ramban's famous letter to his son: "*And now, my son, understand and observe that whoever feels that he is greater than others is rebelling against the kingdom of Hashem, for he is adorning himself with His garments, as it is written: 'Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur' [Tehillim 93:1]. Why should one feel proud? Is it because of wealth? 'Hashem impoverishes and makes rich' [I Samuel 2:7]. Is it because of honor? This belongs to Hashem, as we read: 'Wealth and honor come from You' [I Chronicles 29:12]. Therefore how can a person adorn himself with Hashem's honor? One who is proud of his wisdom surely knows that Hashem 'removes the speech of assured men and reasoning from the elders' [Job 12:20]! We therefore see that everyone is the same before Hashem, since He lowers the proud in His anger, and when He wishes He raises the low. Therefore lower yourself, and Hashem will lift you up!*"

The Greatness of Constant Joy

It is written, "*Vehaya [And it will be], when you enter the land*" (*Devarim 26:1*).

We are familiar with what our Sages have taught, namely that the term vehaya always denotes joy (*Bereshith Rabba 42:3*). That said, we need to understand exactly what joy this verse is referring to. In fact the parents of those who entered Eretz Israel had died in the desert, for they had been the generation which left Egypt. None of them remained, and they did not even deserve to enter the land. So what exactly is joy doing in this verse?

If we think that this joy refers to bringing the firstfruit, then why does the Torah not state: "*Once you are in the land, you shall immediately bring the fruit of the earth*"? Why does it say, "*When you enter the land,*" which seems to imply that this joy is directly related to entering Eretz Israel?

We shall attempt to explain. Here the Torah is teaching us two principles that a person focus on in order not to stumble. It will also teach him why, when he enters the land, he should be joyful. This approach will enable us to explain everything.

1. A person is obligated to accept everything with love, as the Sages have said: "*It is incumbent on man to bless [G-d] for evil in the same way as for good*" (*Berachot 54a; Zohar II:174a*). He must realize that everything comes from Hashem, Who is the Judge of truth, and that he has no reason to protest against how He deals with us. If Hashem has caused someone pain, he must search his soul and ask himself why it happened to him, for evil cannot come from the Most High (*Eicha 3:38*). We may therefore say that everything is for the good; all that the Merciful One does is for the good (*Berachot 60b*). It is man's fault that misfortunes come upon him, and "*Hashem admonishes the one He loves*" (*Mishlei 3:12*).

We see this when the Children of Israel entered Eretz Israel. Although they were suffering because their fathers had died, and also because their fathers were not found worthy of entering the land, they had to realize that everything was their fault because they had spoken ill of the Holy Land. That is why the children had to enter the land with joy, as well as to bring the firstfruit to the Temple with joy.

It was only through joy that they could acquire the land, for it is through joy that we can serve Hashem. When this happens, the Holy One, blessed be He, sends an abundance of sustenance and sanctity upon the Jewish people. However if we do not act with joy, then admonishment comes, as it is written: "*Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy*" (*Devarim 28:47*).

As a result, when the Children of Israel were about to enter Eretz Israel with joy, despite fearing the battles that awaited them, they could be certain that Hashem would fight for them. Herein lies the connection between this week's parsha and last week's parsha, Ki Teitzei. They were forbidden to succumb to sadness and pain because their fathers had not been able to enter Eretz Israel. Otherwise, they would not have an abundance of fruit to bring as firstfruit.

This is why they had to rectify the sin of their fathers, who had spoken ill of the land (*Bamidbar 13:32*), and for whom the land had not yielded its fruits. It is also why they had to enter the land with joy, which primarily concerned their entry into Eretz Israel. They would thus rectify, with even greater power, the mitzvot that depend upon Eretz Israel, and they would have fruit and firstfruit to bring to the Temple.

2. We may add that the expression vehaya ki tavo teaches us that we must enter the Holy Land with joy. Even the poor, those who had almost nothing to bring as firstfruit – and who were ashamed of the small baskets which they used to bring their firstfruit, given that the rich brought theirs in golden baskets (*Bikkurim 3:8*) – had to be joyful and not protest, for hidden things belong to Hashem our G-d (*Devarim 29:28*), Who alone knows the reasons for what He does.

Furthermore, someone who was rich and accustomed to bringing his firstfruit in a golden basket – but then lost his wealth and had very little left, thus becoming worried about what people would say about him and how the kohanim would treat him, without as much respect as before – was liable to lose hope and become depressed in serving Hashem. Nevertheless, the Torah tells us vehaya, which denotes joy. In other words, whatever your situation is, bring your firstfruit to the Temple with joy. In any case, we must be joyful to be able to live in the Holy Land, which represents the firstfruit of the entire world for Hashem, the land in which the Shechinah dwells in every generation. Of the Holy Land it is written: "*The eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end*" (*Devarim 11:12*). There can be no greater joy than this! In fact due to the Shechinah and the sanctity of the land, a person can grow spiritually and his heart can become elevated in the ways of Hashem and His mitzvot (*II Chronicles 17:6*).

We may also explain this week's parsha according to a statement of the Sages: "*One who brings a gift to a talmid chacham is as if he had offered firstfruit*" (*Ketubot 105b*). In fact the generation of the desert spoke ill of the land, which alludes to the tzaddik, for as we know Eretz Israel is the holiest of all lands. Instead of bringing a gift to the tzaddik, we observe the mitzvot that depend upon the land, like someone who cleaves to the truth. The land was disparaged – people did not want to seize the opportunity and bring a gift – which is why Hashem punished that generation measure for measure by forbidding them from entering the land. On the other hand, the children of that generation were seized by a great joy for Eretz Israel, which is like the tzaddik, and they held firm in every trial. Hence it was as if they offered firstfruit, since they elevated themselves upon entering the land, they were influenced by the holiness of the Temple, and they adhered to a good and upright way of life.

We learn a great principle from this: A person can continuously learn without ever doing work in the field, but in that case he will be unable to bring firstfruit, for he will have grown no fruits. Nevertheless, the Torah commands us to put an effort into it, to work the earth and bring firstfruit to the Temple. Even if someone is wealthy and has people working for him, he must still put an effort into bringing these fruit himself, to demonstrate his love for the land and the mitzvot.

In fact today, even if someone studies Torah himself, it does not prevent him from going to see the tzaddikim of the generation and not to worry about the difficulties and hardships involved. This is because he will always have something to learn from the tzaddik, and he will go to see him with joy, as people did in the era of the Temple.

Hence this is the meaning of vehaya, an expression denoting joy, for regardless of the situation that a person finds himself in, he must enter Eretz Israel with joy, not with despair or sadness, knowing that no evil comes from Hashem. He will then bring a gift with joy and be able to overcome all obstacles and difficulties because of this joy.

The Basket of First Fruits Reminds us of Hashem's Goodness

It is written, "*And it will be, when you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem your G-d gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there*" (*Devarim 26:1-2*).

We are fully aware of just how powerful the evil inclination is, to the point that it tries to infuse pride in the heart of man in order to drive him from this world. In fact the Sages have taught that jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honors drive a man from this world (*Pirkei Avoth 4:21*). As such, not only will he be driven from this world, he will also lose his place in the World to Come, for the Holy One, blessed be He, despises all the proud of heart, as it is written: "*Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem*" (*Mishlei 16:5*).

When the Children of Israel were about to enter Eretz Israel, the land of milk and honey, it is written: "*You will eat bread without poverty – you will lack nothing there*" (*Devarim 8:9*). The Holy One, blessed be He, was concerned that wealth would result in pride, and that the people would forget their Creator, as it is written: "*Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent – and he deserted G-d his Maker*" (*Devarim 32:15*).

Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, reminded them that they had been enslaved and exiled for 400 years, as well as the fact that the land of Israel was given to them not by their own merit, but by the merit of the holy Patriarchs – Abraham Isaac, and Jacob – men who faithfully served Hashem with devotion by annulling themselves. Consequently, the Children of Israel had no reason to be proud, especially since the land was given to them as a gift on condition that they study Torah and observe mitzvot. Otherwise, the Holy One, blessed be He, would take it back and exile them from their land.

He Remembers the Patriarchs

This is alluded to in the verse, "*And it will be, when you enter the land…*" (*Devarim 26:1*). The words *ki tavo* ("when you enter") have a numerical value of 403. The number 400 represents years of slavery and exile, as it is written: "*Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own – and they will serve them, and they will*

oppress them – 400 years" (*Bereshith 15:13*), and the number three represents the Patriarchs, to whom the Holy One, blessed be He, promised the land after the exile in Egypt.

That is why Hashem ordered them to bring *bikkurim* (first fruits) to the Temple and to recite the passage: "*An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt.... The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and placed hard work upon us*" (*Devarim 26:5-6*). In this way, they would never forget their past, when they were enslaved in Egypt, nor would they forget that they inherited the land not only by the merit of the holy Patriarchs, but also on condition that they study Torah and observe mitzvot. That being the case, everything they possessed up to that point was entirely a gift.

This is why they came to the Temple with a basket in hand, to thank Hashem for all the good that He had done for them. He had let them enter the land of their forefathers, as it is written: "*Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand.... He brought us to this place and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold – I have brought the first fruits of the ground that You have given me, O Hashem!*" (*Devarim 26:8-10*). As a result of thanking G-d for all the good that He had done for them, they never had prideful thoughts, nor did they fool themselves into thinking that their success was their own doing.

This is one of the ways in which the Torah protects a person from being infused with pride, which causes him to lose his place in this world. In general, when a person because wealthy and his mind is preoccupied with business, he begins to study Torah less and less. The wealthier he becomes, the less he studies. When he distances himself from words of Torah, pride will certainly fill the void created by his diminished Torah study. He is therefore liable of having wicked thoughts.

Because of our many sins, today we no longer have the Temple. However the abode of the tzaddik serves as a substitute to a small degree. The tzaddik is like the Kohen Gadol, who used to officiate in the Temple. When a person learns the path to follow in serving Hashem from the tzaddik, it is as if he has brought an offering to the Temple.

Furthermore, when a person brings a gift to the tzaddik and sees his conduct – which is completely devoid of self-interest – he will feel his heart melt and become another person as he completely repents. It is therefore as if he has brought first fruits to the Temple, as our Sages say: "*One who brings a gift to a Torah scholar, it is as if he had offered first fruits*" (*Ketubot 105b*).

Cleaving to the Tzaddik

The verse states, "*And it will be, when you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you*" (*Devarim 26:1*), meaning you will remember that the land is yours only on condition that you follow the ways of the Patriarchs and do not forget that you were in exile for 400 years. In fact the land is not yours, for the entire earth is Mine. I gave it to your forefathers and their descendants on condition that you do not succumb to pride on account of the wealth that the land brings you, nor feel that you are the masters of your own success.

Above all, we learn from this passage that if a poor person has become wealthy, he must remember that such a gift is only due to G-d's compassion and the merit of the Patriarchs. Hence we have no reason to become filled with pride and vanity. In fact just as Hashem can bring wealth, He can also take it away when a person does not act correctly. Due to the abundance that G-d gives to man, the evil inclination tries to delude his heart into thinking that his wealth is on account of his own intelligence, or that his current state is due to the fact that he has "*succeeded*." Yet when a person is constantly going to see the tzaddik in order to be guided along the right path, he will avoid becoming filled with pride, and will always remain humble before Hashem.

Hashem Seeks Only Sincerity

It is written, "*And you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground*" (*Devarim 26:2*).

There was great joy when the first fruit were brought to Jerusalem. The Mishnah provides us with the following description of this event: "*How were the first fruit brought [to Jerusalem]? All [the inhabitants of] the cities that constituted the ma'amad assembled in the city of the ma'amad and spent the night in the open place thereof without entering any of the houses. Early in the morning the officer said, 'Arise, let us ascend to Zion, to Hashem our G-d' [Jeremiah 31:5]. … An ox with horns bedecked with gold and with an olive crown on its head led the way. The flute was played before them until they were close to Jerusalem*" (*Bikkurim 3:2-3*). Then all the inhabitants of Jerusalem would welcome them and inquire about their welfare. Thus they ascended to the Temple mount with joy and cheer. The wealthy would bring their first fruit on platers of silver and gold, while the poor would bring them in wicker baskets. As each person offered his first fruit, he would read the section of the Torah corresponding to this subject: "*An Aramean tried to destroy my father…*" (*Devarim 26:5*), concluding with the blessing: "*Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Israel*" (*v.15*).

I wonder why the Torah commanded us to surround the mitzvah of the first fruit with such honor. What was the goal of all these preparations for this mitzvah? Why did each person not simply bring his first fruit to the kohen? Why was this mitzvah embellished and arrayed with all kinds of beautiful ornaments, such that the first fruit were brought with such glory and splendor? Furthermore, why did the owner of the first fruit have to read the section, "*An Aramean tried to destroy my father*"? This is how I interpret it: Clearly, a person's service of Hashem must come from the depths of the heart. Superficiality does not suffice. We sometimes fulfill G-d's mitzvot and even study Torah, but our actions are external, superficial – devoid of all feeling and enthusiasm. There seems to be, at least on the outside, an impetus to serve Hashem. However the main thing is missing, namely the heart. Yet we must serve G-d from the depths of our heart, with true feeling! We must experience a desire and yearning to draw closer to our Creator and fulfill mitzvot for G-d with true love and sincerity. But without an internal awakening to move us, all our actions will be mechanical,

as mentioned in the verse: "*With its mouth and with its lips it has honored Me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me*" (*Isaiah 29:13*). It goes without saying that mitzvot performed in this way, as well as Torah studied in this frame of mind, will have no positive effect. Our Sages have also said, "*The Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart, as it is written: 'But Hashem sees into the heart' [I Samuel 16:7]*" (*Sanhedrin 106b*), and as it is written: "*The intention of man is what matters to Hashem.*" Hence when we are serving G-d, we must not be satisfied with simply carrying out a mitzvah, for we should add intention and sincerity to it. We will then sense a fire for the mitzvah igniting within us, and we will draw closer to Hashem.

This is the idea contained in the mitzvah of the first fruit: Its goal is to help us realize that Hashem is the One Who gives us the strength to succeed. It must distance us from the thought that "*my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth*" (*Devarim 8:17*). Because of this mitzvah, we will praise and thank G-d for the beautiful land that He has given us, for all the good that He bestows upon us, and for enabling us to harvest the produce of our fields. Of course, gratitude that is simply superficial or artificial is not enough. We must fully realize the immense good that Hashem has done for us by giving us life, and by providing us with a heritage in the land that assurers our sustenance and blessing. This is why the Torah orders us to honor and magnify the offering of the first fruit. In fact upon seeing all the beauty and glory surrounding this mitzvah, the owner of the first fruit will rejoice and be carried away by a love for G-d, and he will praise, glorify and thank Him. This won't be a simple thank you; it will be a true expression of gratitude stemming from the depths of his heart for the portion of land that G-d has given him, and for all the magnificent fruit that he has obtained from it. As a result, he will fully understand that it is G-d Who directs the world, Who provides him with everything, and Whose open and generous hand is the only source of blessing for his land. Such deep and sincere gratitude will strengthen the owner's faith in G-d and draw him even closer to Him.

At that point he will say, "*An Aramean tried to destroy my father*" – the term *Arami* ("An Aramean") refers to the evil inclination, which is *ramai* ("crafty"), according to the explanation of the Ohr HaChaim. The expression *oved avi* ("destroy my father") means that "*it was the evil inclination that pushed me to oved [destroy] the spiritual connection that I had with my holy ancestors, but now I want to draw closer to Hashem and fulfill His will with all my heart. Therefore please, Sovereign of the universe, 'Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Israel' [Devarim 26:15].*" In other words: "*Sovereign of the universe, we love You, we seek Your presence, and we want to take shelter in Your presence.*" We fully realize that without G-d's help, we would be unable to confront the evil inclination, which is why we pray: "*Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Israel.*" How can we attain such a degree of love for G-d? By serving Him with deep sincerity and by offering the first fruit with joy and song. This idea also applies to Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness. In fact the gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Lewinstein said, "*It is true*

that during Elul, we are all motivated by an awakening that is greater than during the rest of the year. However we must be extremely careful to avoid a simple awakening that is external and superficial. We must create an internal impetus stemming from the depths of the heart. This constitutes true service, which is called complete teshuvah. If we act in this way, we will sense the gravity of the day of judgment, and we will be filled with the fear of G-d."

Nitzavim

The Attribute of Truth

It is written, "*You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d: The heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel; your small children, your women, and your proselyte who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water*" (*Deuteronomy 29:9-10*).

King David wrote, "*Who shall ascend the mountain of the L-RD, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully*" (*Psalms 24:3-4*). He also wrote, "*Who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor casts disgrace upon his close one*" (*ibid. 15:1-3*). From here we learn that a person cannot stand before Hashem and reside in His holy place unless he possesses the attribute of truth and distances himself from lies and falsehood. Our Sages have said, "*The seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth*" (*Shabbat 55a*). It is also written, "*One who practices deceit shall not dwell in My house. One who tells lies shall not stand before My eyes*" (*Psalms 101:7*). This teaches us that we can only stand before Hashem if we hold truth in hand. It is also written, "*The L-RD hates these six, and the seventh is the abomination of His soul: Haughty eyes, a false tongue…*" (*Proverbs 6:16-17*).

Hence Moses told the Children of Israel, "*You are standing today*" – the word *atem* ("you") being formed by the same letters as the word *emet* ("truth"), for here Moses was giving them the Torah for the third time. As the Midrash tells us, the Torah was given in three places (on Mount Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, and in the plains of Moab), and in each case we find the term *yetzivah* (to stand firm): On Mount Sinai, as it is written: "*Vayityatzvu [And they stood] at the base of the mountain*" (*Exodus 19:17*); in the Tent of Meeting, as it is written: "*Venitzvu [And they would stand] each by the door of his tent*" (*Exodus 33:8*); and in the plains of Moab, as it is written: "*You nitzavim [are standing] today, all of you, before the L-RD.*"

Since they had accepted the yoke of the Torah, they took upon themselves the attribute of truth, for the Torah is called "*truth,*" as it is written: "*Buy the truth and sell it not*" (*Proverbs 23:23*), which the Sages say refers to the Torah. Moses told the Children of Israel, "*Since you have taken upon yourselves the Torah and the truth, you can stand before Hashem.*" The Sages have said, "*Truth can stand, falsehood cannot stand*" (*Shabbat 104a*), and it is written: "*True speech is established forever*" (*Proverbs 12:19*). We find in the Aggadah that when the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to create the world, all the letters immediately descended and stood before Him. One letter said, "*Create the world beginning with me,*" while another said, "*Create it beginning with*

me!" The tav was the first letter to present itself before Hashem, followed by the shin, which said to Him: "*Master of the universe, may it please You to create the world with me, for Your Name begins with me, as it is written: 'This is Shemi [My Name] forever' [Exodus 3:15], and I am also the first letter in the Name Sh-ddai.*" When Hashem said no, the shin asked why, to which Hashem replied: "*Because both shav [lie] and sheker [falsehood] begin with you, and sheker has no legs, nor do you. How can I create the world by a letter without legs?*" Dejected, the shin immediately departed.

Why did Moses tell the Children of Israel, "*The heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel; your small children, your women, and your proselyte who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water*"? It was because they believed that they did not have to learn Torah with those who were interior to them in wisdom. Moses explicitly mentioned "*your small children, your women, and your proselyte,*" meaning that everyone has the duty to learn Torah with those of lesser stature, for the Torah was not only given to the wise, but also to commoners and the feeble-minded. The duty of the wise is to study with those lacking wisdom, so that the Torah may be familiar to everyone. We learn this from Hashem's attributes, for His seal is truth, and one of His attributes is to do good to the wicked and the good. Furthermore, each day He feeds the entire world, from the horns of the reimim to the eggs of lice.

Just as Hashem does good to both small and great, whoever possesses the attribute of truth must do good to all kinds of people. The Sages have said in the Aggadah: "*The heads of your tribes*" – although I counted your leaders, your elders, and your officials, you are all equal before Me, as it is written – "*all the men of Israel.*" Hence we learn that all Jews are equal before G-d.

Of Rabbi Chiya the Sages have said, "*How great are the deeds of Chiya!*" In fact Rabbi Chiya said of himself: "*I ensure that the Torah will never be forgotten in Israel. For I take flax seed, plant it, and weave nets. [With these] I hunt deer, with whose flesh I feed orphans and from whose skins I prepare scrolls. I then proceed to a town where there are no teachers of young children, and I write out the five books of the Chumash for five children, and I teach another six children the six orders of the Mishnah*" (*Ketubot 103b*). This exemplifies the principle, "*Whoever possesses the attribute of truth, it is a sign that he possesses the attribute of humility,*" for he is not afraid to teach the truth and recognize sin. When a person is infused with humility, he learns with everyone and does not say, "*How can I study with so-and-so? He hasn't learned Chumash or Mishnah, and he never frequents Torah scholars!*" Actually, the Torah is only acquired through humility. Why are the words of Torah compared to water, as it is written: "*Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water*" (*Isaiah 55:1*)? It is in order to tell us that just as water travels from higher to lower ground, words of Torah only endure with someone who is humble. Hence King David said, "*Who shall ascend the mountain of the L-RD, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully.*" He also stated, "*Who may*

abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor casts disgrace upon his close one." Hashem placed the attribute of truth next to the attribute of humility, thereby teaching us that it is impossible to find one without the other. In other words, a person who possesses one also possesses the other, and likewise a person who lacks one will necessarily lack the other, meaning that he will be unable to stand before Hashem.

"Choose Life" – Preparing for the Day of Judgment

It is written, "*I call heaven and 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 may live, you and your offspring*" (*Deuteronomy 30:19*). Rashi explains, "*Heaven and earth exist forever, and when evil befalls you, they will be witnesses that I warned you regarding all this.*"

Rashi also states, "*Another explanation is that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of Israel: 'Look at the heavens that I created to serve you. Have they ever changed their ways? Has the sun ever failed to rise from the east and illuminate the entire world, as it is stated, "The sun rises and the sun sets*" [Ecclesiastes 1:5]? Look at the earth that I created to serve you. Has it ever changed its ways? … They were created with neither reward nor loss in mind – for if they are meritorious, they still do not receive reward, and if they sin, they are not punished – and yet they have never changed their ways! So you, who will be rewarded if you are meritorious and punished if you sin, how much more should you do so!' " In fact Hashem fixed the paths of all the stars in order to do His will.

Likewise on earth we never see a person planting a tree in one place, only to discover it growing elsewhere. Only the moon has no fixed position in the sky, for its path is constantly changing because "*the strength of His deeds He declared to His people*" (*Psalms 111:6*). Moses adds, "*You shall choose life so that you may live, you and your offspring.*" Here Rashi explains: "*I instruct you to choose the portion of life. It is like a man who says to his son, 'Choose for yourself a fine portion of my estate,' and then directs him to the best portion, saying to him, 'This is what you should choose for yourself!'*" It seems that we need to understand the meaning of, "*You shall choose life.*" After all, which fool would not choose life if given the choice between life and death?

To explain this, we must say that when a person becomes accustomed to the vanities of the world and this fleeting life, materiality then seems to constitute true life, and conversely spirituality appears as nothing in his eyes. In fact to him, the "*lazy and foolish*" who spend their time studying Torah in the Beit Midrash seem to be "*dead.*" When a person is immersed in the vanities of this world, he cannot tolerate being reprimanded or hearing words of Mussar. They seem like a heavy burden to him, something completely foreign in his eyes.

Thus Moses warned the Children of Israel: "*Choose life.*" In other words, choose true life – a life of Torah and moral values – and carefully consider what your responsibility is in this world in order not to be drawn to meaningless pursuits, to the point that such pursuits seem like true life to you. In fact if you follow these vanities, they will lead you to spiritual death. When you eventually leave this world, you will not be able to take anything with you.

The Sages have said, "*Provide yourself with a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:6*), and in his wisdom King Solomon said: "*Rejoice, young man, in your youth*" (*Ecclesiastes 11:9*). This means that a person will be happy if he chooses, while still young, Hashem's path in the holy Torah and makes it a personal acquisition. He will be happy if he cleaves to it like an inseparable friend, be it for a single instant, as King David said: "*I am a friend to all who fear You*" (*Psalms 119:63*).

A person's primary service of Hashem begins in his youth. The reason is that a youngster can fight the evil inclination with tremendous vigor. Happy is the person who will not be ashamed of his youth when he reaches old age, for his youth was not lost pursuing the vanities of this world.

Instead he will have served Hashem in his youth and filled his days with studying Torah, fulfilling mitzvot, and doing good deeds. He knew how to distinguish between the eternal life that is within us – the holy Torah that Hashem implanted in man's body – and the life of this world. The latter only appears to be a good life that is filled with pleasure, but in reality leads to nothing other than death, chasing a person from both this world and the World to Come. In the word *u'vacharta* ("and you shall choose"), we find the letters of the word *bachur* ("young man") and *chaver* ("friend"). This means that when a person cleaves to the Torah in his youth, choosing it exclusively and acquiring it as his own possession, he will never leave it. Instead he will keep it for his entire life, and the Torah will never depart from him either. In this way he will acquire for himself the World to Come, which is life and length of days, and he will study Torah day and night. Hence this is the advice of the Torah: It is only when a person is young that he can cleave to the Torah and make it his true friend, in which case he will never leave it.

Likewise King David said, "*Taste and see that the L-RD is good*" (*Psalms 34:9*). How can one "*taste*" Hashem? If a person fulfills the Creator's mitzvot in the proper way, he will merit tasting the delights of Hashem. In fact there is no taste, pleasure, or desire in this world that is more pleasant, delicious, and exquisite than the taste and delight of His light, which reveals itself to those who seek it. When a person tastes the flavor of the Torah and Mussar, he will immediately notice that the material life he has lived up to now has no taste, being completely filled with vanity.

This has special significance to the last week of the year, in the month of Elul, as a preparation for Rosh Hashanah and the day of judgment. How greatly should everyone fulfill mitzvot and taste the pleasantness of Hashem! If he does this, he will come to the day of judgment in a state of spiritual purity, and both he and the entire Jewish people will have a good year. Amen, may it be so.

Doing Good to All Men, Small and Great Alike

It is written, "*You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d: The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water*" (*Devarim 29:9-10*).

King David said, "*Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and a pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully*" (*Tehillim 24:3-4*). He also said, "*Hashem, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart*" (*ibid. 15:1-2*). Here we learn that a person cannot stand before Hashem and reside in His holy place unless he possesses the attribute of truth and distances himself from lies and falsehood.

We see proof of this in what the Sages have said: "*The seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth*" (*Shabbat 55a*). We also read, "*One who practices deceit shall not dwell in My house. One who tells lies shall not stand before My eyes*" (*Tehillim 101:7*). Therefore only those who live by the truth may stand before G-d.

This is why Moshe told the Children of Israel, "*You are standing today*" – the word atem (*"you"*) being formed by the same letters as the word emet (*"truth"*). Here Moshe is giving them the Torah for the third time, as the Midrash states: "*The Torah was given in three places, and in each case the root yatziv is used: On Mount Sinai, as it is written: 'Vayityatzvu [And they stood] at the base of the mountain' (Shemot 19:17); in the Tent of Meeting, as it is written: 'Venitzvu [And they would stand] each by the door of his tent' (Shemot 33:8); and in the plains of Moab, as it is written: 'You nitzavim [are standing] today, all of you, before Hashem.'*"

They received the truth because they had accepted the yoke of the Torah, for the Torah is called "*truth,*" as the Sages explain: "*Truth is Torah, for it is said, 'Buy the truth and sell it not' [Mishlei 23:23]*" (*Berachot 5b*). Moshe told the Children of Israel, "*Since you have taken the Torah and truth upon yourselves, you may stand before Hashem.*"

Studying with the Simple

Why did Moshe tell them, "*The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water*"? It was in order to prevent Jews from thinking that they did not need to study Torah with those who are less intelligent than themselves. Hence Moshe specifically mentions "*your little ones, your wives, and your stranger,*" to teach us that every person must learn Torah with someone less intelligent than himself. In fact on the contrary, it is the duty of Torah scholars to study with those who are not very intelligent, in order for the Torah to be studied by all.

In principle, whoever possesses the attribute of truth, it is a sign that he possesses humility, for he is not afraid to teach the truth and recognize error. This is because when a person is infused with humility, he learns with everyone and does not say, "*How can I study with so-and-so? He hasn't learned Scripture or Mishnah, and he never visits Torah scholars!*" The Torah is only acquired through humility, as we read: "*Why are the words of Torah compared to water, as it is written: 'Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water' [Isaiah 55:1]? This is to teach you that just as water flows from a higher level to a lower one, likewise words of Torah only endure with someone who is humble*" (*Taanith 7a*).

It is for this reason that King David said, "*Who may ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and a pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully.*" He also said, "*Hashem, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor casts disgrace upon his close one*" (*Tehillim 15:1-3*). Truth is juxtaposed to humility in order to teach us that one is impossible without the other. Whoever possesses one also possesses the other, and whoever lacks one will necessarily lack the other, meaning that he will be unable to stand before Hashem.

He Bestows Good on the Wicked and the Good

The Aggadah also states that when the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to create the world, all 22 letters that comprise the Torah immediately descended and stood before Him, each letter saying: "*Create the world starting with me.*"

The first letter to present itself was the tav. It was followed by the shin, which stood before Hashem and said: "*Master of the universe, may it be Your will to create the world through me, for Your Name begins with me, as it is written: 'This is Shemi [My Name] forever' [Shemot 3:15], and I am also the first letter in the Name Sh-ddai.*" When Hashem said no, the shin asked why, and Hashem replied: "*Because both shav [lie] and sheker [falsehood] begin with you, and sheker has no legs, nor do you. How can I create the world starting with a letter that has no legs?*" The shin immediately left covered in shame (*see Midrash Otiyot D'Rabbi Akiva*).

How can we say that anyone who possesses truth also possesses humility? We learn this from the attributes of Hashem, for Hashem's seal is truth, and one of Hashem's attributes is to bestow good on both the wicked and the good. He also sustains the entire world every day, from the horns of the reimim to the eggs of lice (*Avodah Zarah 3b*). Just as Hashem does good to small and great alike, whoever possesses the attribute of truth must also do good to both small and great. In the Aggadah we read, "*Although I appointed leaders, elders, and officers for you, you are all equal before Me, as it is written: 'all the men of Israel'*" (*Tanchuma, Nitzavim 2*). From here we learn that everyone is equal before G-d.

Good Advice for Being Judged Favorably: "The Joy of Hashem is Your Strength"

We find something extraordinary concerning Rosh Hashanah: It is the day of a great and awe-inspiring judgment, a day when the Creator decides the fate of all the world's inhabitants, in general and specifically, to punish or acquit. As we say in the poem U'Netaneh Tokef, composed by Rabbi Amnon of Mayence: "*Let us proclaim the mighty holiness of this day, for it is awe-inspiring and fearsome. Thereon Your Kingship is exalted. ... You open the Book of Remembrance and it reads itself; every man's signature is in it. ... As a shepherd examines his flock, making his sheep pass under his staff, likewise You make every living soul pass before You, and You count, reckon, and are mindful of them. You grant the fixed portion for the needs of all Your creatures, and inscribe the verdict of their judgment.*" On this day, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits upon His royal throne, the Throne of Justice, judging all the world's inhabitants. He decides the length of their lives and what will happen in the coming year – "*who will live and who will die, who will live out his allotted time and who will depart before his time, who [will perish] by water and who by fire, who by the sword and who by wild beast, who by hunger and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by pestilence….*"

In other words, everything that happens to a person during the months of the year is decreed on this day of judgment, on Rosh Hashanah, for better or for worse.

Despite all this, we have been commanded to rejoice on this day. Indeed, the verse calls it "*a day of your gladness*" (*Bamidbar 10:10*). We also find an explicit account of what Ezra and Nehemiah told the Children of Israel on Rosh Hashanah: "*Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today is sacred to our L-rd. Do not be sad, for the joy of Hashem is your strength*" (*Nehemiah 8:10*).

This truly requires an explanation. How can G-d command us to rejoice on this day? Is rejoicing not diametrically opposed to the spirit of the day? How can we go about and "*eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages,*" deriving pleasure from eating and drinking as if we were not being judged on this day and did not need to tremble out of fear?

Has anyone ever seen a person whose fate depends on a forthcoming verdict, and yet instead of weeping and pleading for mercy, he sits down to a royal meal of meat and wine, a festive meal? How could that be possible?

To understand this, we must first examine the basis of Judaism, which consists of faith and trust in Hashem. The Rishonim (men such as Rabbi Saadia Gaon, the Rambam, the Ramban, the Kuzari, Chovot HaLevavot, etc.) have spoken at great length on this subject. It is not without reason that the Chazon Ish entitled his Mussar book Emunah U'Bitachon ("Faith and Trust"), for these are the foundations of Judaism.

These principles are so fundamental that a Jew who does not believe that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, and who does not trust in G-d, is simply lacking something at his very core, for these principles comprise the complete man. One who lives without faith in Hashem and who fails to trust in the Creator of the world, such a person's mitzvot and Torah learning are worthless. This is because these principles are the foundation of every Jew. This means that there is none but Him, that He is the Master of all, and that He was, He is, and He will always be.

Since faith and trust are so fundamental and deeply engrained in us throughout the year, how much more so at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, to which the Sages have applied the verse: "*Call upon Him while He is near*" (*Isaiah 55:6*). In fact a person can choose to ignore, as it were, the Creator's providence throughout the year, for he may get bogged down and drown in his daily routine without worrying about reversing direction. However during the days of Tishri, which are among the kindnesses that the Holy One, blessed be He, has bestowed upon His creations – days which by their essence lead to "*faith and trust*" – Hashem draws closer to us. Indeed, "*the king is in the field,*" as our holy books explain. In such a case, how much more are we obligated to increase our faith and trust in Hashem!

These days constitute a true lifeline. If we grab hold of them with all our might, they can save us from a harsh judgment. However if we fail to grab hold of this lifeline of faith and trust, when will we do so? And if not now, when?

This is especially true given that we have already received the promise that "*one who places his trust in Hashem will be surrounded by chesed.*" In other words, even if someone does not merit chesed by the strict measure of justice, if he trusts in Hashem, then Hashem will treat him with mercy, going beyond the bounds of strict justice by giving as He has promised. That being the case, a good way of escaping the judgment would be to trust in the Holy One, blessed be He!

We can now begin to understand the mitzvah to rejoice on this day. It consists of demonstrating our certainty that, because of the Creator's compassion, we will be found innocent on the day of judgment, for just as a father has compassion on his children, we are certain that the Creator will have compassion on us. As a result, the situation is similar to that of a person who must be judged in court, though he knows that he will be declared innocent. He will therefore not be afraid of the verdict or tremble out of fear. Instead, he will eat with joy, for the verdict will only serve to declare his innocence to the entire world.

However if he experiences the slightest degree of fear, it means that he is not certain of the verdict. Thus not only must we rejoice – "*Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today is sacred to our L-rd*" – we have also been commanded: "*Do not be sad, for the joy of Hashem is your strength.*" Joy is the power through which we will be declared innocent. It is joy that demonstrates our complete trust in the Creator of the world, and it is through faith that we are "*surrounded by chesed.*" However if we become

sad instead of trusting in Hashem, this is a mistake, for it demonstrates that we lack the incredible virtue of trust.

We may therefore say that if we tremble and fear for our lives on that day, not only will we be lacking joy, we will also be lacking trust. This will show everyone that we do not trust in the compassion of the Creator.

Naturally, we must underline the fact that the judgment is incisive and frightening. Nobody can consider themselves innocent, for who could make such a claim before the King of kings? As King David said: "*Do not enter into strict judgment with Your servant, for no living being can be vindicated before You*" (*Tehillim 143:2*) and "*My flesh trembles from dread of You, and I fear Your judgments*" (*ibid. 119:120*). Now if King David – G-d's anointed one, the beloved singer of Israel, who said of himself, "*My heart shudders within me*" (*Tehillim 55:5*) – so feared the judgment, then what can we say, we who are so insignificant? If fire has descended upon the cedars, what can the weeds do? It is clear that there is reason for fear! Before the terrifying day arrives, the great men of Israel weep day and night during the month of Elul as they repent of their deeds. All this is among a person's duties before Rosh Hashanah, to do complete teshuvah, to improve his conduct by worrying and regretting his misdeeds, and to confess them and commit himself to future improvements, as Rabbeinu Yona explains at length in his book Sha'arei Teshuvah. However on Rosh Hashanah, when the time for judgment has arrived, we can do nothing more because we have already done all that we could through repentance and improving our deeds. At that point we must trust in Hashem, and because of this trust we will rejoice in being declared innocent, "*for the joy of Hashem is your strength.*"

Preparing for the Day of Judgment in Thought and Deed

It is written, "*You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d: The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers*" (*Devarim 29:9*).

This verse, which is generally read on the last Shabbat of the year, just before Rosh Hashanah, seems to be alluding to the day of judgment on Rosh Hashanah. When the day of judgment comes, a person wakes up and multiplies his prayers to the Creator, asking to be forgiven for all the sins that he committed throughout the year. This is because he feels that he cannot present himself in judgment while stained with sins, some more serious and others less, and he wants to merit a good year.

Yet how can a person think that Hashem has accepted his prayers and forgiven all his sins if he never repented? How can he possibly imagine that he will merit a good year if he has not yet decided to never return to his sins?

Bringing About a Real Change

This is why a person must sincerely repent of all the sins that he committed, meaning that he must fully regret them and take it upon himself to never commit them again. This resolution must be so firm that G-d, Who knows all that is hidden, can affirm that

he will never return to his sins, as our teacher the Rambam states in Hilchot Teshuvah 2:2. It is only when these conditions are met that Hashem will hear his prayers and forgive him. When this person presents himself on the day of judgment, Hashem will see the change that has taken place in him and will declare him innocent. He will then merit a good year that is filled with blessings.

This idea is alluded to in the verse, "*You are standing today.*" Now the term *atem* ("you") is composed of the same letters as *emet* ("truth"), and the Sages say that the term *hayom* ("today" – literally "the day") refers to the day of judgment, Rosh Hashanah (*see Zohar III:231a*). This means that as we are standing before Hashem to be judged for all our actions on Rosh Hashanah, which is the day of judgment, we must cleave to the truth. In fact there is no falsehood before Hashem, nor are there bribes. The tzaddik pays in proportion to his righteousness, and the rasha in proportion to his wickedness, each according to his deeds.

If a person is infused with lies and falsehood, then how can he dare stand in judgment before Hashem and ask for forgiveness, since he has not yet truly repented? How can he not be completely ashamed to open his mouth, since he has not yet sincerely decided to stop sinning? He stands there as a liar and utters falsehood, so can he expect the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is truth, to forgive his sins and declare him innocent? Hence the verse warns us, "*You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d.*" On the day of judgment, when you stand in judgment before Hashem, you must grab hold of *atem* – *emet* (truth) – and be like the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers. In fact the leaders of the tribes of Israel are the tzaddikim of the generation, men who do teshuvah that is truly perfect. Every Jew must learn from the example of the leaders of the Jewish people, presenting themselves in judgment with truth in their hearts. By doing so, we will certainly be judged innocent, like the leaders of the Children of Israel, who are the tzaddikim of the generation.

Ensuring Stability

According to this explanation, we can understand the juxtaposition of Parsha Nitzavim to Parsha Vayeilech, and why they are sometimes read together. This seems contradictory, for if we are standing (*nitzavim*), there can be no walking (*vayeilech*). Likewise if we are walking, then *vayeilech* is no longer *nitzavim*. What we need to understand is that real stability lies solely in the fact that a person is *yatziv* ("stable") and honest with himself, meaning when he does not deceive himself. This only happens when he walks in the way of the truth, which is the Torah, the way of Hashem, as it is written: "*If you walk in My statutes*" (*Vayikra 26:3*) and "*I will walk in broad pathways*" (*Tehillim 119:45*).

Walking in the way of truth – the way of Torah, the way of Hashem – represents the greatest stability that can exist in a person's life. It is also the connection between Parsha Nitzavim and Parsha Vayeilech. In other words, today you can only stand stable and sincere with yourselves if you walk in the way of truth, the way of Torah, the way of Hashem.

If we correct in this regard, we can also understand the verse: "*The matter is very close to you – in your mouth and your heart – to perform it*" (*Devarim 30:14*). The commentators ask the following question: Since the Sages have said, "*Not study, but action is the main thing*" (*Pirkei Avoth 1:17*), then why is it important for the matter to be close to you, "*in your mouth and your heart*"? All that is needed is that it should be close enough for you to do it, since action is the main thing!

The answer is that when a person studies Torah in order to fulfill it, the Holy One, blessed be He, connects intention to action (*Kiddushin 40a*), and such a person is considered to have fulfilled it despite the fact that he only studied it. This only applies, however, when the goal of study is action, when "*in your mouth and your heart*" exists only for the sake of taking proper action. In other words, "*in your mouth and your heart*" refers to the perfect execution of a mitzvah, which is not the case without prior preparation. In that case, the deed is not in keeping with the mouth and the heart, but resembles a body without a soul, for thought is not connected to deed.

According to what we have said, this is completely understandable. Preparing to take action can only occur when a person maintains his stability, follows the way of truth and the way of Torah – the way of Hashem. It can only occur when he cleaves to the truth, does not delude himself, or come before Hashem asking for forgiveness despite the fact that there has been absolutely no change in his heart. In that case, preparing for the day of judgment takes place with action, the mouth and the heart, in order to ask for forgiveness from the Creator of the world. Hashem will then forgive, for it is written: "*Hashem is close to the brokenhearted, and He saves those with a crushed spirit*" (*Tehillim 34:19*).

Seize the Moment

It is written, "*You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d: The leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers*" (*Devarim 29:9*).

According to the holy Zohar, the expression, "*You are standing today*" refers to Rosh Hashanah. On this day, everyone stands before the Creator to be judged. The Mishnah states, "*On Rosh Hashanah all creatures pass before Him like children of Maron, as it says, 'He Who fashions their hearts together, Who comprehends all their deeds' [Tehillim 33:15]*" (*Rosh Hashanah 16a*). The Gemara asks, "*What is the meaning of the expression like children of Maron?*" It responds: "*Like a flock of sheep*" (*ibid. 18a*). Here Rashi explains: "*Like sheep that are counted in order to give a tithe, and they go one after the other through a narrow opening by which only one can pass.*" Rabbi bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "*They are all viewed with a simple glance*" (*Rosh Hashanah 18a*).

I have the impression that "*with a simple glance*" can be compared to going through a body scanner. G-d examines each of us on the day of judgment: He probes our innards and scrutinizes our hearts to verify that we have truly repented and agree to

return to Him from now on, to adhere to His holy Torah and fulfill His commandments – or if we are still infused with our abominations and no positive change has taken place within us. In fact it is essential for teshuvah to stem from the depths of the heart, for us to experience true regret for our past misdeeds and a commitment to no longer being so irresponsible in the future. However it is not enough to simply say, "*I've erred, I'm guilty, I've sinned,*" without it coming from our heart. Thus the Rambam writes, "*What constitutes teshuvah? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart to never commit them again, as it states: 'Let the wicked one forsake his way' [Isaiah 55:7]. Similarly, he must regret the past, as it states: 'After I returned, I regretted' [Jeremiah 31:18]. [He must reach the level at which] He Who knows what is hidden will testify that he will never return to this sin again*" (*Hilchot Teshuvah 2:2*). The Rambam continues: "*Anyone who verbalizes his confession without resolving in his heart to abandon [sin] can be compared to [a person] who immerses himself [in a mikveh] with a lizard in his hand. This principle is implied by the statement, 'He who confesses and forsakes [his sins] will be granted mercy' [Mishlei 28:13]*" (*Hilchot Teshuvah 2:3*).

I've found a beautiful allusion to the Rambam's words in the verses, "*You will return ad [unto] Hashem your G-d and hearken to His voice*" (*Devarim 4:30*) and, "*Return, Israel, ad [unto] Hashem your G-d*" (*Hosea 14:2*) – the term *ad* ("unto") being composed of the same letters as the term *da* ("know") and *ed* ("witness"). Thus we must repent until G-d witnesses our complete return unto Him from the wrong path, and our clear knowledge (*yedia*) of His greatness.

We should realize that it is neither evident nor right for G-d to readily accept and forgive the sins of those who return to Him. This is actually a gift from Heaven that comes from the goodness of Hashem, Who in His great compassion is ready to erase our sins, forgive us, and accept everyone who repents – but only if they have sincerely regretted their misdeeds and are committed to no longer taking the wrong path. Our Sages have said, "*Rabbi Pinchas examined the verse, 'Good and upright is Hashem, therefore He guides sinners on the way' [Tehillim 25:8]: If He is good, it is because He is upright. And if He is upright, it is because He is good! 'Therefore He guides sinners along the way' – He shows them the path of repentance, for He acts with goodness and mercy, over and above the strict measure of the law. They asked wisdom, 'What is the punishment of the sinner?' Wisdom replied, 'Evil pursues sinners' [Mishlei 13:21]. They asked prophecy, 'What is the punishment of the sinner?' Prophecy replied, 'The soul that sins, it shall die' [Ezekiel 18:4]. Then they asked the Holy One, blessed be He, 'What is the punishment of the sinner?' He replied, 'Let him repent and he will find atonement'*" (*Yerushalmi, Makkot 2:6*). Thus from the perspective of wisdom and prophesy, the sinner has no way of rectifying his misdeeds. However Hashem acts over and above the strict measure of the law and accepts his repentance. Not only that, but He shows everyone the path to follow in order to achieve complete teshuvah, as it is written: "*Therefore He guides sinners on the way.*"

The same applies to all areas of teshuvah: The fact that we regret our sins allows them to be erased, to disappear, and to be completely annulled. This comes from the goodness of Hashem, Who forgives us and gladly accepts those who sincerely return to Him, especially during this most fitting time, days of mercy and supplication when G-d's hand is ready to welcome those who repent. We are obligated to take advantage of this precious occasion and draw closer to Him by doing teshuvah and increasing our good deeds. As such, we will merit standing before Him on the day of judgement and to be inscribed for a good life and peace.

The disciples of the Baal Shem Tov said that on Rosh Hashanah, each of us receives a great light in our soul, with numerous sparks of holiness awakening within us. For it was on this day that the first man was created, and G-d breathed into him a pure soul with great and powerful lights. These very same lights awaken each year, and we also merit their illumination in our souls.

I would add that G-d certainly demonstrates tremendous goodness by allowing us to benefit from the great light originating from the first man. Yet in order for this light and its sparks of holiness to remain in us throughout the year, we must prepare our hearts and purify ourselves so as to make our body fitting to receive this light. For that to happen, we must do sincere teshuvah, rectify our deeds, and be committed to distancing ourselves from evil and drawing close to good, which is the holy Torah.

Vayeilech

Good Intentions at the Start of the New Year

This week's parsha describes Moses' parting words before his death. He went to every Jew and said, "*I am 120 years old today. I can no longer go out and come in*" (*Deuteronomy 31:2*). In other words: I can no longer teach you laws and decrees, for the Sages say, "*One masters nothing on the day of his death.*" The Sages have also said that the gates of wisdom were closed to Moses on that day, and he could no longer teach the Children of Israel (*Sotah 13b*).

Two things seem quite surprising, however, when we read these verses. First of all, in the preceding parsha it is written: "*You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d*" (*Deuteronomy 29:9*), and Rashi cites the Sages as saying that this teaches us that Moses assembled everyone for the covenant and declared everything to them. That being the case, every Jew was standing before Moses when he spoke to them. Therefore why does the parsha state that "*Moses went and spoke*" (*Deuteronomy 31:1*)? Where did Moses have to go, since everyone was standing before him?

Next, why did Moses modify the Torah's words by saying, "*I can no longer go out and come in,*" since the Torah states: "*Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out*" (*ibid. 28:6*) – "*come in*" first and "*go out*" second? Moses should have said, "*I can no longer come in and go out.*"

At that point Moses had just a few more days to live, a few more days before leaving this world. He said to the Children of Israel: I am going to the world that is entirely good. I am going to study in the Heavenly yeshiva, for here the gates of wisdom are closed to me. I will no longer be able go out from there, from the Heavenly yeshiva, to come and teach you. Yet even so, there is a way. True, I am leaving you, but the Sages have said: "*Before the sun of one tzaddik sets, the sun of another tzaddik rises.*" This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not take a tzaddik from this world before having prepared another tzaddik to take his place. Therefore Joshua bin Nun, my distinguished disciple, will take my place after I die. He will continue to teach you laws and decrees, and you must obey him.

Such is the power of the tzaddik. He leaves this world, but he immediately has a replacement, a person to take his place, for the new tzaddik receives the power of the previous one. Hence the Torah states, "*Moses went and spoke*" – he didn't actually go somewhere with his legs, but his power went out and entered the heart of every Jew, so that everyone could elevate himself and do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, all by the power of Moses, the tzaddik of the generation. Hence it was not without reason that the Sages stated in the Zohar that we find the power and influence of Moses in every generation, in the 600,000 souls of the Children of Israel, for his power accompanies every Jew.

These were Moses' last words to all the Children of Israel, a testament that we must infuse within our hearts. How can we do so, and how can we achieve this?

We learn an important principle from the final words of Moses, the teacher of all the Jewish people. He said to them, "*I can no longer go out and come in. I can no longer go out and come in regarding words of Torah. The gates of wisdom have already been closed to me…but not to you! You are still at the beginning of the path, and you can continue on it! You can go out and come in regarding words of Torah. You can sit down to study, and Heaven can help you if you want, for "if one comes to purify himself, he is helped*" (*Shabbat 104a*).

We learn another important principle from his words: The power of a tzaddik has an even greater influence after his death, for it does not suddenly disappear. Even when a new tzaddik takes the place of the previous one, he receives the previous tzaddik's power, as Elisha said when his teacher the prophet Elijah ascended to Heaven: "*May twice as much of your spirit be mine*" (*II Kings 2:9*). His power is doubled, a power that is found in the heart of every Jew.

We must infuse these teachings into our hearts. They are always relevant, especially in the present days, a time of teshuvah, the beginning of the year 5766, when we all want to come closer to Hashem. We all want to fully return to Him and experience blessings in everything we do.

During this time we should think of "*going out and coming in*" – going and coming – as the Sages said concerning the verse, "*Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out*" (*Deuteronomy 28:6*). Here they stated, "*That your exit from the world shall be as your entry from it: Just as you entered it without sin, so may you leave it without [sin]*" (*Bava Metzia 107a*). We must think about how we can rectify our deeds and completely repent of our sins, so that we can enter the new year without sin, and instead be crowned with mitzvot and good deeds.

There is more. We know that we receive the great power of the tzaddikim of the generation, which constantly spreads an abundance of blessings upon us, as well as success and all that is good. We need a great deal of merit and many defenders on our side at the beginning of the year, during the days of judgment and selichot. We can receive this merit by the tzaddikim of the generation, who stand as our advocates to speak on our behalf. If we truly reach this level, we will enter the new year without sin, possessing only mitzvot and good deeds. We will merit a good year that is filled with blessings. Amen, may it be so.

Accepting Heaven's Decrees with Joy

It is written, "*Moshe went and spoke these words to all Israel. He said to them, 'I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in'*" (*Devarim 31:1-2*). There are several things that we need to understand here. First, we are not told where Moshe went in the expression, "*Moshe went and spoke.*" Furthermore,

how is it possible for Moshe to have gone somewhere, since he himself said that he could no longer come and go? It is also difficult to understand the beginning of the verse, "*[He] spoke all these words,*" which is followed by the repetition: "*He said to them.*" From the first verse, we know that Moshe began speaking to Israel, so why the need for the repetition?

Since the Shabbat on which we read this parsha is near Rosh Hashanah and the Days of Awe, let us first explain what the Prophet Hosea meant when he said: "*Return, O Israel, to Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem*" (*Hosea 14:2-3*). We need to understand the meaning of the expression "*take words with you,*" for it does not say which words a person must take with him in order to return to Hashem.

We may say that the prophet is telling the Children of Israel not to raise any questions about the way Hashem directs the world. For example, when person experiences misfortune, it is natural for him to think: "*Why me?*" "*Why did this happen?*" He can't imagine that his sins are the cause, "*for you have stumbled in your iniquity.*" Hence the passage states, "*Take words with you,*" meaning that everyone must take the questions and things that he wants to say, and he must carry them without letting them out of his mouth. He should be content on repenting, knowing that everything has happened on account of his sins.

This is what Moshe was telling the Children of Israel: "*Moshe went and spoke these words to all Israel*" – he told them not to ask pointless questions, but to accept Heaven's decrees with love. They would therefore spend their entire lives in teshuvah, for a person cannot know when he will die. As the Gemara teaches, "*Rabbi Eliezer said, 'Repent one day before your death.' His disciples asked him, 'Does one know on what day he will die?' He replied, 'All the more reason for him to repent today, lest he die tomorrow, and thus his whole life is spent in repentance'*" (*Shabbat 153a*). When someone experiences misfortune, he should focus on doing teshuvah rather than asking questions.

Don't Complain

Moshe used the same language as the Prophet Hosea, and he "*spoke these words*" as did Hosea: "*Take words with you.*" This means that a person must not ask questions or complain against Hashem, but instead he should attribute everything to his owns sins, which have caused these apparent misfortunes. That is why Moshe said these words to all Israel, in order for them to realize that when misfortunes arise, they must not complain about Hashem's ways. They must never say to Him, "*Why has this happened to me?*" Every person must say, both to others and himself, that it was certainly his own sins that were the cause.

The Torah first says, "*Moshe went,*" which echoes what is written in the Gemara: "*The word for 'walk' means nothing else but death, as it says: 'Behold, holech lamut [I am going to die]' [Bereshith 25:32]*" (*Sotah 12b*). Moshe said to them, "*Know that today is my last day in this world, and even the greatest tzaddik cannot be sure of not sinning*

until his final day," as our Sages have taught: "*Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die*" (*Pirkei Avoth 2:4*). Hence it is forbidden for a person to question Hashem until the day of his death, for on each day there exists the chance that he may sin, and Hashem will punish him for his sins.

This is the meaning of, "*Return, O Israel, to Hashem your G-d.*" In other words: Until your final day, when the soul returns to the place from which it came and cleaves to the light of the King's countenance once again (for the soul of every Jew is a divine spark, since what Hashem breathed into a body comes from Himself – *see Ramban on Bereshith 2:7*), you must repent, even until that very last day, for your sins have made you stumble. A person must attribute his misfortunes to his own sins, without complaining to G-d. He must also take words with him to say – on account of "*return to Hashem*" – and he must attribute everything to his own sins.

Several Principles of Teshuvah

We may also say that the term ad (*"to"*) comes from the same root as the term edut (*"witness"*). This means that Moshe told the Children of Israel to do such complete teshuvah that Hashem could witness that they would never return to their sins. As the Rambam wrote, "*What constitutes teshuvah? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart to never commit them again. Similarly, he must regret the past, and He Who discerns all concealed things will witness that he will never commit that sin again*" (*Hilchot Teshuvah 2:2*).

There may also be another allusion here: The term ad, read backwards, becomes da (*"know"*), providing us with some of the principles of teshuvah. We have already mentioned the first, namely that teshuvah is not complete unless the One Who discerns all concealed things witnesses to the fact that a person will never commit that sin again. Furthermore, the person himself should clearly realize that he will never commit that sin again; he must regret his deeds and take it upon himself to never commit them again. His teshuvah should not be partial, but complete.

Once Moshe said these things to the Children of Israel, he began to transmit what Hashem told him. Hence it is written, "*He said to them,*" for up until that point he had spoken to them about one thing, and now he was dealing with something completely different. The verse first uses a term whose root is dibur, which connotes severity. However it then uses vayomer, which designates a gentler way of speaking (*see Makkot 11a; Mechilta, Yitro BaChodesh 2*), for Moshe was speaking about the conquest of the land and its inheritance by the Children of Israel, which would make them rejoice.

Haazinu

Reprimanding Great and Small According to their Level

It is written, "*Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and may the earth hear the words of my mouth*" (*Deuteronomy 32:1*). This verse is to be understood as a stern reprimand to those who consider themselves to be great figures, people whose heads reach the heavens, and who think that they already know the entire Torah and therefore nobody can teach them anything. It is precisely such people that Moses addresses by saying, "*Give ear, O heavens.*" In other words: Although you are great individuals, you should still listen to what the Torah says, and if you unfortunately fail to listen, know that the Torah will ask you for an accounting.

In fact Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "*A heavenly voice issues from Mount Horev every day, saying: 'Woe to those creatures who neglect the Torah'*" (*Shemot Rabba 41:7*). We must also realize that the very existence of pride in a person's heart is an affront to the holy Torah, for it cannot endure with such a person, as the Sages have said: "*Words of Torah only endure with one who makes himself as nothing*" (*Sotah 21b*). It is therefore a duty for every person to humble himself. Even if he is fully versed in every Torah field, he should listen to and heed words of admonition and ethics from another great individual, even if he is not as great as himself. This is the sense of the expression, "*Give ear, O heavens, va'adabera [and I will speak].*" These words are directed to great figures who are compared to the heavens. With regards to them, terms such as va'adabera (*from dibur, to speak harshly*) are used. The term dibur is used for rebuke, as in the expression: "*These are ha'devarim [the words] that Moses spoke*" (*Deuteronomy 1:1*). Rashi states that these were words of rebuke. The reason that he used harsh language is that Heaven already had a grievance against them because of their pride, for they thought that they knew everything and that nobody could teach them anything. Hence we see that their heads reached the heavens.

This means that they already perfected their middot and their deeds, and therefore rebuke had to be directed to them with harsh language. This is why the Torah addresses a person even if he is still far from Hashem. Rav Chisda and Mar Ukva said, "*Every man in whom pride dwells, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world'*" (*Sotah 5a*). However if a person puts the utmost effort into heeding rebuke and working on his faults, especially pride, he will receive Hashem's help, as it is written: "*Present to Me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages can pass*" (*Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:3*). Actually, a person must realize that he cannot merit anything without Hashem's help, as Rabbi Shimon ben Levi said: "*Man's evil inclination gathers strength against him daily and seeks to slay him…. Were not the Holy One, blessed be He, to help him [man], he would not be able to prevail against it, for it is said: 'The L-RD*

will not forsake him to his hand' [Psalms 37:33]" (*Kiddushin 30b*). This is because the evil inclination is made of fire, as the Sages have said. The way to obtain help against it is to regularly study the holy Torah, for it too is made of fire, as it is written: "*Is My word not like a fire, says the L-RD*" (*Jeremiah 23:29*). In fact a person must realize that he is simply being asked to take one small step, for then he will receive Hashem's help. What can this be compared to? It is like a man who lights a great fire. If he slowly puts his hand into the fire, it will burn him. However if he passes his hand through it very quickly, nothing will happen to him. This is what the Sages meant by saying, "*Present to Me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle.*" It signifies that a person only has to make a small effort in order to create an opening and confront the evil inclination, even though it is made of fire, without worrying about being burned. This is because at the very same moment that he makes this effort, Hashem will save him and he will receive a tremendous reward. When a Torah scholar examines his life and wants to draw closer to Hashem and reach lofty spiritual heights, he must annul himself completely before Him, just as Moses did. By his self-annulment and humility, Moses was able to ascend to Heaven and receive the holy Torah, as it is written: "*You ascended on high; you led captivity captive*" (*Psalms 68:19*).

None of this applies for administering rebuke to regular individuals. With regards to them, one must take a completely different approach, as we find in the remainder of the verse: "*May the earth hear the words of my mouth*" (*Deuteronomy 32:1*). This expression deals with down-to-earth people, those whose lives are focused solely on the material concerns of the world. They too must heed the voice of the Torah and its rebukes, which must enter their ears and their hearts. This heedfulness will help them overcome their desires, their love of money, and their character flaws. This will only happen, however, when rebuke is administered to them with respect, as we read: *Imrei phi* ("the words of my mouth") – by a soft-spoke *amira* ("utterance"), as it is written: "*Thus tomar [shall you say] to the house of Jacob*" (*Exodus 19:3*). Here Rashi states that gentle language was used, not rebukes or reprimands, lest the Torah's words be rejected. Hence if such people are addressed with respect, the Torah's words will truly enter their ears. We must realize, however, that it is not enough to speak to people in a gentle manner; there must also be a willingness to listen on their part. They must be attentive so as not to miss a word, and by dint of their attentiveness these words will have an influence on them and they will change their way of life. To what can this be compared? It is like a person who is told, "*If you hear a certain number and remember it for a long time, you will be rewarded with a large amount of money.*" Upon hearing this, he will put an immense effort into not forgetting this number, for otherwise he will lose out on a fortune! The same applies here: If a person strives with all his might to create an opening as large as the eye of a needle, and he manages to keep it open, he will merit an immense reward. Hashem will widen this opening so that wagons and carriages can pass through.

The Evil Inclination's Victory Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Concerning the verse, "*When you go out to war against your enemy and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, do not fear them*" (*Deuteronomy 20:1*), the Midrash states: "*Do not fear the sins that you committed*" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Devarim 923*). This is difficult to understand, for before going out to war the Kohen would say to the soldiers: "*Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house*" (*Deuteronomy 20:8*). Rashi cites the Sages in saying that this refers to "*one who is afraid of his sins*" (*Mishnah in Sotah 44a*). That is, his sins may bother him, which is why he must leave the army and return home. Yet the aforementioned Midrash interprets the verse in the opposite way, meaning that Hashem even strengthens a person who committed sins, such that he has no reason to fear having sinned, and on the contrary he should go out to war with an assurance of victory.

We can explain this in the following way: The verse is alluding to the war that we fight on Rosh Hashanah against our accusers, which were created as a result of our sins. On this holy day, it is very likely that we will lose hope of being able to prepare ourselves for the judgment, since we know that we have no way of silencing our accusers and defeating them. After all, their accusations are completely justified and they are a thousand times stronger than us. This is particularly true when they have strong arguments that highlight our deliberate transgression of many Torah mitzvot and our tremendous neglect of Torah study, in which case we are seized with the fear of being unable to confront them. It is precisely for this reason that we must rejoice on this day, for doing so will confuse our accusers. In fact they will not understand what is occurring, for instead of crying and worrying over our terrible spiritual state (since we have no one to defend us, and even the Patriarchs are somewhat disappointed in our conduct during the year), our joy will shock all the angels of destruction and everything created by our sins.

Thus it is written: "*When you go out to war*" – to defend yourself on the day of judgment, which is Rosh Hashanah; "*and you see horse and chariot…you shall not fear them*" – you shall not fear accusers on that day, even though their very presence actually means that you have sinned. Instead, you must continue to confuse them by your joy, for the more you continue to serve Hashem with joy, the more confused they will become. They will no longer know where to turn, and in the meantime the Holy One, blessed be He, will have forgiven you.

This is what the Holy One, blessed be He, says to the Jewish people: Have no fear of this army, for all your sins are found in their hands." By the power of repentance, sins are transformed into merits, and accusers become defenders. Now since all our sins are in the hands of the Satan, he is obligated to transform them into merits and to defend the Jewish people, for they have completely repented. In fact this way of experiencing Rosh Hashanah confuses the Satan and his army, preventing them from accusing us. Thus we fulfill the verse, "*Let us fall into the hands of the L-RD, for His mercies are abundant*" (*II Samuel 24:14*), and we will not fall into the hands of the Satan.

A well-known question arises at this point: How can man, who is physical, defeat the evil inclination? How can he come into Hashem's presence after 120 years on earth and say before the celestial court, "*I raise my hands to the Most High G-d*"? After all, Hashem is completely spiritual, not material! Such a thing is too difficult to endure! This is why we must thank Hashem for having given us these days, days of mercy and kindness, a time for soul-searching, when we can repent and better ourselves. We can remove from our hearts every doubt that we had during the year. We can strengthen ourselves from now on and connect to the Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds. We can therefore return to our Father in Heaven, believe in Him, and ask Him to forgive us with love.

In fact during these days, which are days of spiritual awakening, Heaven is knocking at the door of every Jew's heart – "*the sound of my beloved knocking*" (*Song of Songs 5:2*) – and a celestial voice says to him, "*Let me in, My sister, My love*" (*ibid.*). With regards to these days, the prophets have said that Hashem is very close to those who call upon Him (*Rosh Hashanah 18a*). Hashem is ready to accept their repentance, for He is standing behind the wall, watching and knocking at the door of every Jew's heart and saying to him: "*My son, repent! Do complete teshuvah. Strengthen yourself in Torah and mitzvot, for then it will be good for you in this world and in the World to Come.*"

It is our duty to transform the evil inclination into something that is "*very good.*" We must transform materiality into spirituality. We must study Torah, for it is the antidote to the evil inclination, which exists to make us fall. It tries to make us sin in either impure or holy places, and we must overcome it and completely cleanse our hearts of all doubts. Improving ourselves is something that is entirely in our hands: We must do complete teshuvah, especially during these days, days of mercy and kindness – the Ten Days of Teshuvah – when Hashem is close to us and knocking at the door of our heart. We must improve our deeds, and the covenant will not be broken.

This is why we must awaken ourselves even more during the entire year, and especially during these days – "*Arise from your sleep, you who sleep. Awaken from your slumber*" – for these days are suitable for repentance. If we let them pass without doing anything, a heavy accusation will be raised against us, and we will be unable to answer the celestial court. If we do awaken ourselves, however, Hashem will certainly hear our prayers and supplications. He will enable us to completely return to Him, for we are His children, the pinnacle of Creation. After a long life on earth, we will be able to present ourselves in the World of Truth as vessels that are filled with blessing, completely overflowing with Torah, mitzvot, and good deeds.

May our prayers be accepted with favor before the Master of the universe, and may we merit a good year, a sweet year that is filled with blessings for the best of everything in the material and spiritual realms. May we be able to transform the material into the spiritual, and may we be inscribed in the book of the wholly righteous. Amen, may it be so.

Torah Study: An Absolute Prerequisite for Atonement

The Rambam writes, "*The very aspect of Yom Kippur atones for penitents, for it is written: 'For on this day he shall make atonement for you' [Vayikra 16:30]*" (*Hilchot Teshuvah 1:3*). This requires an explanation, for if the text had actually said, "*For this day atones,*" we would understand that it is Yom Kippur itself which atones for sin. Yet because it actually states, "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you,*" this indicates that the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives those who repent on Yom Kippur. Therefore how can it be said that the day itself procures atonement? Furthermore, we have to explain the meaning of the expression: "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins. Before Hashem you shall be clean.*" Since the verse states, "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you*" before stating, "*Before Hashem you shall be clean,*" we understand that Hashem atones for the Children of Israel before they repent and are cleansed. It seems that the verse should have stated, "*For before Hashem you shall be clean, and on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins*"!

The Study of Torah is Essential for Repentance

We may explain this according to the verse, "*Return, O Israel, towards Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem*" (*Hosea 14:2-3*). Why does the verse first say "*towards Hashem,*" but then says "*to Hashem*"? We also need to understand what the prophet means by saying, "*Take words with you.*" What exactly are the words that we must take?

The Sages have said (*Sifrei, Devarim 306*) that these "*words*" are words of Torah, as it is written: "*These words Hashem spoke to your entire assembly*" (*Devarim 5:19*). This verse is saying that although a person may repent of his evil deeds, he still has not performed teshuvah worthy of the name if he has not started to learn Torah without going back to his sins. One without the other is impossible. In fact if a person studies Torah without repenting of his sins, he will die without repenting. Yet if he repents of his sins without studying Torah, he will eventually return to his sins. This is because there is nothing more powerful in the fight against sin than words of Torah.

This is why the prophet examines what the mitzvah of teshuvah consists of. At first the sinner must stop sinning and mourn over his sins. This is what constitutes, "*Return, O Israel, towards Hashem*" – towards Him without having actually reached Him. This is not complete teshuvah. When does a person perform teshuvah that is considered complete? It is when he "*take[s] words*" with him, these being words of Torah. At that point he returns to Hashem, for the fact that he studies Torah constitutes an assurance that he will not return to his sins, since the Torah is a shield against the evil inclination. Furthermore, King David said: "*Turn from evil and do good*" (*Tehillim 34:15*) – first turn away from evil, and then do good.

Let us say that the essence of teshuvah consists of Torah study. In fact a person who repents but does not study Torah may transgress many serious prohibitions of

which he is unaware, since he never studied them. Hence after doing teshuvah, a person must immediately start learning Torah in order to know what is permitted and forbidden. In regards to this subject, we read in the Shulchan Aruch: "*Those who are vigilant begin…as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another*" (*Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5*). Since we have repented and regretted our sins on Yom Kippur, we immediately go and study Torah and fulfill mitzvot in order to sin no more.

Hence it is not written, "*For this day atones,*" but rather: "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you.*" We may have thought that since Yom Kippur itself procures atonement, a person's repentance will be accepted even if he does not study Torah after Yom Kippur. However the verse states, "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you*" – the day atones for one who seeks atonement, but it does not atone for one who does not seek atonement. If it had said, "*For this day atones,*" we would have thought that the day itself atones even if a person has not resolved to do anything. It is therefore written, "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you,*" i.e., for one who seeks atonement.

Atonement Erases Sins

One may object to this by noting that our Sages state, "*Rabbi said: 'For all transgressions of the Torah, whether he repented or not, Yom Kippur brings atonement'* " (*Shevuot 13a*). The answer is that teshuvah is one thing, while atonement is another. Teshuvah consists of the sinner repenting of his sins, whereas atonement consists of Hashem erasing his misdeeds, rendering them non-existent. Rashi explains, "*I am of the opinion that whenever the word kaparah is used in association with iniquity and sin…it always signifies erasing and removing. It is an Aramaic expression occurring frequently in the Talmud…. In Biblical Hebrew as well, the bowls of the Sanctuary are called kippurei zahav [Ezra 1:10] because the kohen wiped his hands on them*" (*Rashi on Bereshith 32:21*).

We must first realize that the Holy One, blessed be He, neither atones nor erases sin unless a person himself focuses on erasing it. When Yom Kippur has passed and a person begins to study Torah, perform mitzvot, and separate himself from sin, this clearly indicates that he actually wants to erase all the sins he committed up to that time, at which point Hashem will also erase them.

Teshuvah that is Not Serious

This is why it is written, "*For on this day he shall make atonement for you.*" It does not say that the day itself procures atonement, because the Torah is teaching us something else: On this day, reflect upon the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, will forgive you tomorrow when you study Torah and abandon sin. If you conduct yourself in this way, the Holy One, blessed be He, will fulfill what is written in the Torah: "*to cleanse you from all your sins. Before Hashem you shall be clean.*" This cannot happen, however, unless a person abandons sin and studies Torah. If he is content on simply repenting, his teshuvah will not be considered serious unless he begins to

carry out what he committed himself to doing on the day after Yom Kippur. In fact the masters of Mussar say that Yom Kippur does not begin until after Yom Kippur, and by this they mean what we, with G-d's help, have explained above.

Spiritual Accounting

May the Creator be praised for all the kindnesses that He demonstrates to us each day and at every hour. If today we wanted to write about the Creator's kindnesses towards us, time would be lacking, but His generosity would never be lacking. All the paper in the world would be insufficient to mention even the smallest part of all the kindnesses that He does for us day after day.

This is what we say in our prayers: "*To Him Who alone performs great wonders, for His kindness endures forever*" (*Tehillim 136:4*). Yes, Hashem does wonders for us at each instant. His kindness endures forever – it is eternal, without end. In the Nishmat Kol Chai prayer of Shabbat, we also say: "*Even if our mouth were filled with song as the sea…we would still be unable to thank You…for even one of the innumerable myriads of favors, miracles, and wonders that You have performed for us and our fathers before us.*"

At the same time, we completely fail to appreciate the miracles that Hashem does for us at every moment, such as when we enjoy a pleasant sleep, during which time the Creator neither sleeps nor slumbers, but protects us at each instant. Where else do we see such a thing? For example, would a king stay awake all night in order to watch over his servants as they sleep? He would almost be enslaved to them! Yet this is typical of Hashem: He watches over His servants to protect them from all harm.

Because of our many sins, we are so accustomed to our daily lives that such an occurrence seems normal, natural, and permanent. Yet when something doesn't turn out the way we want, we are filled with rage, to the point that we no longer sense G-d's guiding hand as it protects each and every one of us. Why is this so? It is in order for man to strengthen himself, to constantly take an accounting of his life before the Yamim Noraim (*Days of Awe*). It is also to reflect a little upon the fact that Hashem rules the world, that in looking into the Torah He created the world for Israel, and that all of Creation is only for the sake of Torah, which is the main thing.

It is not without reason that the soul descends into this world; it is uniquely to nourish itself with spirituality. In other words, the essential thing is to transform materiality into spirituality. Hence Hashem gave us Torah and mitzvot, for they lead man to where he wants to go, and through these he discovers the secrets of Creation.

This is also why He created the evil inclination, which is also called *tov meod* ("very good"). This is because it is precisely the evil inclination that causes a person to draw closer to Hashem when it tries to make him stumble. If a person masters his evil inclination, then he will uncover true light and draw closer to Hashem as a result. The evil inclination is not only found in unholy places, but also and precisely in holy

places. For example, it was found with the Kohen Gadol, who was forbidden from having any impure thoughts when he entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, for that is where the evil inclination lurked in order to make him stumble. We find proof of this with Moshe, who was in Heaven for 40 days and was not afraid to approach G-d and the angels. Yet in the Tent of Meeting, when the Cloud covered it, Moshe could not remain there. Instead, he would immediately leave it, for there was no evil inclination in Heaven, whereas on earth – in the Tent of Meeting – such was not always the case. Hence Moshe greatly feared that the evil inclination might overpower him.

We find the same thing with Adam and Eve, who before sinning felt neither fear nor shame, for they had no evil inclination. Yet after they sinned, the evil inclination made them stumble, and they were afraid and ashamed because they had fallen from the highest level to the lowest. Since that happened to them, what can we ourselves say? How much more should we be careful not to fall into the hands of the evil inclination, be it in a holy or unholy place! It is truly frightening.

A Jew is born pure, and he must also die pure, for how can he present himself before the King in a soiled garment? Furthermore, after 120 years on earth there will be a Judge and there will be a judgment; there will be reward and there will be punishment. If someone has any doubts about this, he should even repent over such doubts, since it is written: "*The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous*" (*Tehillim 19:10*). There is definitely a judgment, and a person must distance himself from the evil inclination as it seeks to chill his enthusiasm in serving Hashem, just as Amalek did, by telling him that all his wealth comes to him by chance, not through prayer. Hence he must distance himself from the evil inclination.

In order to do this, a person needs tremendous help from Heaven, and he must work diligently to avoid the grasp of the evil inclination and place himself under the influence of the good inclination.

How can we conquer the evil inclination? To do this, Hashem gave man days of spiritual awakening, days of grace in the month of Elul, in order that we may draw closer to Him. In fact the name Elul stands for Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li (*"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine"*). For his part, a person must first draw closer to Hashem (*"I am my beloved's"*) and then Hashem will draw closer to him (*"my beloved is mine"*). Hashem knocks upon the doors of the heart of every Jew who repents, and during those days He is very close to anyone who sincerely draws closer to Him.

That being the case, we are obligated to prepare ourselves in this world through Torah and mitzvot. In this way, we will know what to say on the Day of Judgment in the World above. We must make a special effort to spiritually awaken and strengthen ourselves in Torah, for that is the goal of Creation, transforming materiality into spirituality, especially during the Days of Awe. If we do this, Hashem will hear our prayers and we will have a good year, a sweet year blessed with all good things. We will also be inscribed, by signed decree, in the book of the completely righteous. Amen, may it be so.