

ONEG SHABBOS

הריני בא ללמוד תורה לשמה לעשות נחת רוח לאבינו שבשמים

חג השבועות
 1 סיון תש"פ
 29 May 2020
 ערב תבשילין • מגילת רות • יזכור

ספק יפקד ה' אתכם
 Issue 254

מוצאי שבת ר"ת			מוצאי שבת						קבלת שבת					
JLM	MAN	LON	JLM	BMTH	GLSCW	GHD	MAN	LON	JLM	BMTH	GLSCW	GHD	MAN	LON
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And Despite Everything...

Shavuos is the day that we commemorate when our ancestors stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. I'd like to share a story about our nation's timeless dedication to Torah, but I'll introduce it with a question:

The Gemara (Chagigah 5b) writes that Hashem "cries" about the following two people: one who can learn but does not, and one who cannot learn but does. The first category is understandable – Hashem is disappointed when we do not utilise our time to the maximum. But what is the second example? What does it mean that someone cannot learn but still does, and why does Hashem cry about that?

The following story takes place during one of the darker episodes of our nation's recent history. In 1827, the Russian Tsar released the "Cantonist Decrees". These terrible laws conscripted young Jewish boys into the Russian army from the age of 12 until 37; each Jewish community had to choose a quota of boys who would be sent and cut off from their family and friends, who knew that they would probably never see them again. Needless to say, living a Jewish life in the Tsar's army was practically impossible. Kosher food was not available and the army did not hide their attempts to baptise and convert the young Jewish boys.

There were some, however, who despite all of these pressures clung to the faith of their fathers and remained loyally Jewish until their release. But even for these determined few, it was difficult to reintegrate once again into the general Jewish community, since they

had spent years amongst loud drunkards and common criminals; having been reared in that environment for so long, meant that they too were unable to live normal, refined lives.

But they did not give up. One late nineteenth century eye-witness reported that, on one Shavuos, a group of Jewish Cantonist ex-servicemen came together to daven. Of course, most of them knew next to nothing about the service, but one of them knew a little more about than the others, and they had appointed him as their "rabbi" who would guide them through. The witness reported that this "rabbi" even delivered a sermon, and his message was so powerful:

"The Talmud relates that when the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai, Hashem encouraged them to accept the Torah, for if they would not – "there would be your burial place". Why did He say "there"? Surely it should say "here", at Mount Sinai?"

"The reason is", answered the rabbi, who due to his painful life appeared double his age, "that Hashem knew that our ancestors would accept the Torah; they had seen all the miracles of Egypt, they heard Hashem speaking and lived with Moses. There was no doubt that they would keep their faith. Hashem was telling them that they needed to accept the Torah for all their subsequent generations because it would be *there* that they would face the true test of faith. There would come a



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time when their descendants would not have the same education and positive exposure to Judaism, and it would be there that there would be a danger that they would lose their faith".

"And we", concluded the rabbi, choking back tears, "are *there*'. We never had the chance to learn about our own faith. We can hardly read Hebrew and many of us cannot even pray, but we will never lose the moment when our forefathers accepted the Torah at Sinai, and that moment impacts us forever".

Rav Ephrayim Wachsman explains that when Hashem cries for those who cannot learn but still try, these are not tears of sadness, but tears of pride. Some people never had the opportunity to learn how to read or learn, but despite it all they still come and try to learn something new. These are the people who cannot learn, but still do, and it makes Hashem so proud. ■

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ספר דברים

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ע"ה Mr J Grunwald

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We Won the Lottery of Life



Rabbi Eli Mansour
The Edmond J Safran Synagogue

Shavuot is famously known, among other things, as the Yahrzeit of King David. Less known is the fact that the second day of Shavuot marks the Yahrzeit of another very important and inspiring Jewish figure.

A young man named Valentin belonged to the prominent Potoki family in Poland, a fabulously wealthy family of devout Catholics who owned the spectacular Lancut Castle. Valentin travelled from Poland to Paris to study in a Catholic seminary, aspiring to become a minister. But while in Paris, he happened to come across an elderly Jew whose eyes were practically glued to the pages of a certain book. Valentin was struck by the man's devotion to his studies; he approached the man, inquired about what he was reading, and discovered, for the first time, the Jewish religion. This encounter triggered a lengthy, unlikely process which culminated remarkably in Valentin's conversion to Judaism.

His family, naturally, was shocked and mortified upon hearing the news. Valentin was summoned back to Poland, and sharply reprimanded by his family. They brought leading Catholic figures to speak to him, to try to change his mind and return to Catholicism; but he refused. They offered him great wealth if he returned, and threatened to leave him with nothing if he remained a Jew.

"No matter what you offer me," Valentin said, "I am remaining a Jew. I have found the truth, and it is worth more than anything."

Finally, Valentin was threatened with death. He heroically accepted his fate, rather than give up his new belief and lifestyle.

On the second day of Shavuot 5509 (1749), Valentin - whose name had been changed to Abraham - was tortured to death and burned.

The Chafetz Chaim, who lived over a century later, reportedly said that if ten Jewish men had been present at his execution and recited Kaddish, Mashiach would have come.

It is not coincidental that Abraham's execution occurred on Shavuot, the time when we read the story of another great person who gave up everything to become a Jew. Rut belonged to the family of the king of Moav; she enjoyed regal wealth, luxury and prestige, and she married into a wealthy, aristocratic Jewish family that had emigrated to Moav. After the tragic death of her husband and father-in-law, she could have very easily returned home to her life of royalty. But instead, she decided

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to join her mother-in-law Naomi, to go to Eretz Yisrael and embrace Torah, even though this meant subjecting herself to abject poverty. Upon returning to Eretz Yisrael, Naomi and Rut did not even have food to eat; Rut had to collect gleanings from Boaz's field just so that she and her mother-in-law would not starve to death. This is what Rut endured for the sake of joining Am Yisrael and committing herself to a life of Torah observance.

On Shavuot we also recall another famous convert. The Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot comes from Parashat Yitro which is named after the priest of Midyan, who sacrificed his life of wealth and fame in order to join Benei Yisrael in the desert. Like Rut and Valentin Potoki, he was willing to give up everything for the sake of Torah.

As we celebrate Matan Torah on Shavuot, we must stop to reflect upon the priceless treasure which we have been privileged to receive. The stories of Yitro, Rut and Valentin remind us of just how incalculably precious the Torah is, that nothing we can possibly have in this world will ever come anywhere close to the value of Torah.

Often, people complain about the difficulties entailed in religious observance. The prices of kosher food, the cost of Torah education, the loss of profit on Shabbat and Yom Tov, the inconvenience of praying three times a day. These among many other things, can make Torah life challenging. But the stories told above should put all these challenges in perspective, and reinforce our firm belief that what we gain by learning and observing the Torah far outweighs the costs and inconveniences.

The Gemara (Shabbat 88b) relates that at the time the Torah was given, the angels in heaven protested, insisting that something as precious as the Torah must remain with them. But they were wrong. The Torah belongs to us, the Jewish People. We are so beloved by Hashem that He gave us this precious treasure which even the heavenly angels want but cannot have.

One of my Rabbis in high school would tell the class, "Boys, you have won the lottery of life!" The Torah is more precious than anything we could ever have and Shavuot is the time to reflect upon the great privilege we have been given, the ability to study and live by Hashem's Torah. ■



For questions on Divrei Torah, please email the editor Rabbi Yonasan Roodyn at editor@oneg.org.uk



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ABSOLUTE UNITY



Rabbi Gideon Schulman
Rosh Chabura UK, Keter HaTorah



On Shavuos we read Megillas Rus. We have been taught that the reason for this is that Rus accepted upon herself the mitzvos of the Torah. But I'd like you to pause for a minute and think about what this really means.

Moving away from her family, taking on of another people's way of life, embracing the responsibility for keeping 613 mitzvos, becoming part of a hated nation. On the face of it, who in their right minds would choose to sacrifice so much?

My answer to you is that only someone who is willing to sacrifice so much could hope to be part of the Jewish people. Being a Jew isn't easy and it isn't rational or logical. We have to give of ourselves, to reach beyond who we are and our personal ego towards ideals which are greater than ourselves as individuals. Only then can we receive the rewards of being Hashem's people.

Another aspect of giving that runs throughout Shavuos is the theme of humility. In the midrash about the mountains arguing to have the merit of the Torah being given on them, Mount Carmel says to Mount Tabor: "Go back to your place; upon me the Torah is to be given!" Mount Tabor says to Mount Carmel: "Go back to your place; upon me the Torah is to be given!" However, Mount Sinai stands aside and said: "Who am I that the Torah should be given upon me?" Hashem hears the quarrel and says to them: "Go back to your places; for upon you I shall not give my Torah, but on Mount Sinai!"

This midrash reminds me of the Gemara (Yevamos 47a) on how to attempt to dissuade a prospective convert. "We say, 'What did you see that brought you to want to convert? Don't you know that the Jews nowadays are treated as pariahs and suffer great travail?'" And then comes this: "If he responds, 'Yes, I know — and I'm not worthy' we accept him immediately." Likewise, when Rus is asked by Naomi to immerse, keep the mitzvos and meet Boaz, she responds in a response evocative of the Jewish people's declaration (Shemos 19:8) of "Everything Hashem has spoken, we will do," saying, "Everything you've told me, I will do". Even when speaking as herself, she uses the words of the Jewish people – her ego is not important and she speaks with absolute humility.

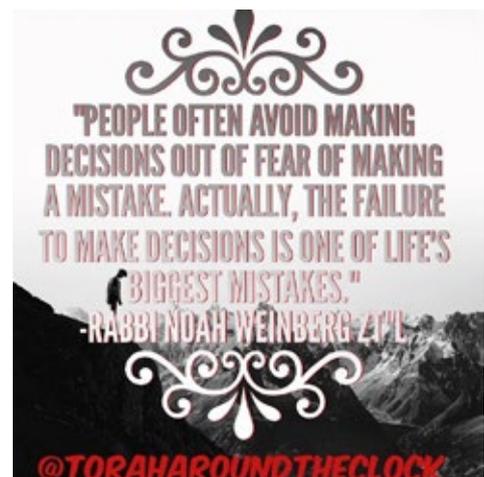
Most of us are not prospective converts or mountains, so what can we learn from these stories of sacrifice and humility?

According to the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh (Shemos 19:2) a prerequisite for *kabolas haTorah* were Klal Yisrael's absolute unity "as one person, with one heart,". We see this, as when preparing to receive the Torah, the pasuk says:

וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיִּחַנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר וַיַּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל לַיהוָה:

Israel encamped before the mountain on 1st Sivan. In this phrase, *vayichan* "encamped" is singular as they were like one man with a single heart (Mechilta D'Rashbi, 19). Israel can only receive Torah when it is united by love, and harmony. Another explanation is that the word *vayichan* hints at "*limtzo chen*" – to find favour in one another's eyes. Like Rus's sacrifice and Mount Sinai's humility, personal differences and squabbles became nothing in comparison to the gift of the Torah. Only through this giving of themselves, were the Jewish people able to become ready to receive.

On Shavuos, may we all be willing to see beyond our differences and beyond our egos; to be humble, united and willing to make the sacrifices that we need to uphold Hashem's Torah. May we never take it for granted; may we be willing to give every day in order to receive the greatest gift ever given to mankind. ■





TWO PARTS OF ONE WHOLE

A PUZZLING STORY

The Gemara in Shabbos (88b) relates a fascinating incident that occurred in the run-up to the giving of the Torah. Moshe ascends the mountain, and temporarily leaves the physical world for a spiritual dimension, in order to bring the Torah down to Earth. But the angels, who inhabit that world, are bothered by his presence. "What is a mortal doing amongst us?" they inquire of Hashem. "He's come to receive the Torah," is the reply. They're clearly not pleased with this, and they respond "You've had a beautiful treasure hidden for so long, and You'll now simply give it to mere flesh and blood? Give the Torah to us!"

Hashem turns to Moshe and asks him to justify why human beings should get the Torah. Frightened of the angels, Moshe doesn't dare to; but Hashem encourages him by telling him to hold onto His throne to keep himself safe. Reassured, Moshe turns to the angels and responds in classical Jewish form by posing a question back. "In the Torah it says 'I am the L-rd your Hashem who took you out of Egypt.' Did you descend to Egypt? Were you slaves to Pharaoh? Why then do you deserve the Torah?"

Seizing upon the angels' inability to respond, Moshe presses them further. "The Torah contains numerous commandments: remember the Shabbos, honour your parents, do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery. Do you work during the week that you require a rest day? Do you have parents you must honour? Do you have an evil inclination that you have to control?"

Persuaded by his response, the angels praise Hashem for choosing human beings to be the bearers of the Torah, bestow many gifts on Moshe, and allow the events to transpire as we know them.

Like every good story in the Gemara, this one begs to be understood. The angels weren't stupid - what were they thinking? Even the most basic read of the Torah shows that it is a complex book of rules that can only be observed by human beings. What did the angels *really* want from the Torah?

READING IT RIGHT

There are many beautiful explanations that shed light on this story, but the following explanation, based on the writings of the Tiferes Ya'akov, has a profound lesson to teach.

The angels knew that, as spiritual beings, they were in no way fit to perform the *mitzvos*. Nonetheless, they understood that there is another dimension to Torah - its careful and precise study. "We may not be able to *keep* the Torah as mortals can, but our spiritual essence and closeness to Hashem



Rabbi Simcho Stanton

Mesilah



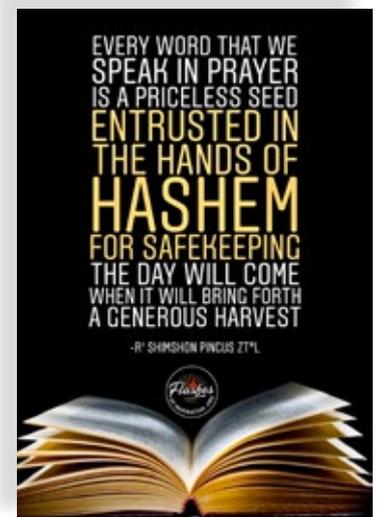
makes us far more geared towards learning the Torah and understanding its deeper meanings" the angels insisted. To counter their argument, Hashem wished that Moshe, with his human logical abilities, provide the response. But Moshe was discouraged, sensing that his mortality and physical restraints set him at a disadvantage to beings of fire. So Hashem told him to grasp onto the throne, thus demonstrating that although humans are mortal, they need not feel distanced from spirituality. We too can become closer to Hashem than even the angels themselves.

But what of their claim to be more suitable for Torah study? The answer, Moshe insisted, was simple. Do not think that learning Torah and keeping the Torah are two independent items that do not need to go together. Learning Torah is the key to true Torah observance! Torah is unlike any other subject; one's learning is useless if it does not provide the required outcome - becoming a better and a more observant Jew. As our Sages teach (see Avos 1,17) that "studying is not the primary goal, but rather the actions [that result from it]."

By demonstrating just how much of the text of the Torah relates to mitzvah observance, Moshe showed that the two must be inseparable. There really would not be a point in simply reading *between* the lines of the Torah for deeper explanations, if the lines themselves with all their commandments are ignored!

It is not always easy to find the required time for Torah study. However, it is sometimes all too easy to enjoy our learning and 'get involved', but not let it become a part of us; to not let it change our actions and the course of our lives. We must then remember: the Torah was only given to us and not the angels because of our connection to the physical aspects of the *mitzvos*. And when we have both parts of this one whole, we rise up, up, up, higher than the angels, and grasp right onto Hashem's own throne. ■

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Triple Whammy Against Corona



Rabbi Avrohom Tabor

Yeshivas ImreiBina,
Author of "100 Amos High"

To obtain the sefer "100 Amos High" or the series of shiurim based on the sefer please email to taboravrohom@gmail.com

The world is reeling under the relentless onslaught of the Corona virus; many are filled with fear and anxiety of what the future holds. Yet we have sources in Chazal that can save us from all types of danger.

Korbonos

The Chafetz Chaim (Chumash, *Parshas Tzav*) quotes a *Zohar* that says if someone learns the *halachos* of *korbonos*, there is a covenant in Heaven that not only can the prosecuting angels not make accusations against him, but on the contrary, they are forced to stand up in his defence and speak of his merits. This method was employed by Mordechai, who under the gloomy cloud of Haman's threat to wipe out all of the Jewish people, gathered all the children together to learn the laws of *menachos*. Chazal tell us when Haman saw this, he realized his plan was thwarted. The Chafetz Chaim concludes: "From here we learn that even in a time of excessive difficulty a person should keep learning about *korbonos* every single day, and by doing so he will be saved from all harm."¹

Thanking Hashem

I heard an emotional and inspiring speech from a Rabbi Reich in Yerushalayim who was recovering from Corona. He described how he was rushed to the hospital, short of breath and suffering terrible chest pains. He was lying on a bed, waiting for the doctors to decide when to attach him to

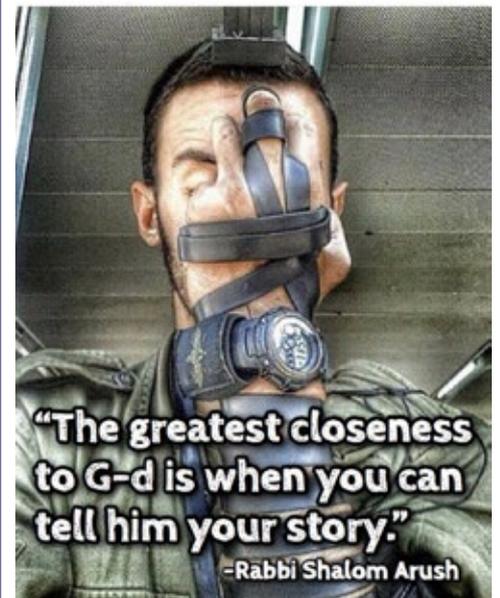
a respirator and his mind was filled with terrible fears and images of what might happen. Suddenly, he thought of the *pasuk* that we say every morning before *Boruch She'omar*: "What gain is there from my death, in my descent to the pit?" (*Tehillim* 30:10). David Hamelech was faced by the prospect of death and had to plead for Hashem to have pity and grant him life. There were many merits that he could have chosen to stand in his merit, but the one David chose was: "היודך עפר היגיד אמיתך" "Will the dust praise You, will it declare Your truth?" David's argument for life was that he would acknowledge all that Hashem had done for him, thank Him for it, and teach others about it. Based on this, David continues, "Hashem, hear and favour me, be my Helper. You have transformed my lament into dancing, You undid my sackcloth and You girded me with *simchah*, so that my soul will sing to You and not be silenced, Hashem, my G-d, I will thank You forever."

David taught us to be confident that if one thanks Hashem and publicizes the kindnesses Hashem bestows on us, Hashem will remove his difficulties and replace them with life and *simcha*. It is incumbent upon us to follow suite and to begin thanking Hashem for the multitude of kindnesses that He constantly showers us with. We know David Hamelech instituted saying 100 *berachos* a day to stop the tragic death of 100 Jews every day. Perhaps that idea was a result of this pledge of David – while looking death in the face – to thank Hashem forever.

A source for this idea is found in the Midrash. Two people met a blind, poor man. One gave him charity but the second declined to do so. Soon afterwards, the two met the Angel of

Death who told them that they were both destined to die, but since the first one gave charity he was granted by Heaven another fifty years of life. However, the second person's time was up. The man pleaded for mercy and promised to give charity, but the Angel told him it was too late. As a last request, the man asked for time to thank Hashem for all the kindness He did to him during his lifetime and began thanking Hashem profusely. Suddenly, the Angel of Death told him that because he thanked Hashem so much, the decree for him to die was torn up and he lived for many more years.

In these challenging, anxious times, Chazal have given us three forms of protection: learning about *korbonos*, giving charity and thanking Hashem profusely for His abundant kindnesses. Let us strengthen ourselves in these areas and be'ezras Hashem be guaranteed healthy and happy life for all the Jewish people. ■



¹ In light of this, the author has begun a series of daily 5 minute shiurim based on the sefer *Avodas Hakorbonos* written by the son in law of the Chafetz Chaim. To receive these shiurim please email taboravrohom@gmail.com.



CLIMBING THE LADDER

The Chovos Halevovos devotes an entire chapter of his book towards the tactic of the *Yetzer Horah* (evil inclination), who tries to plant arguments into our heads and to sway us from serving our creator to the best of our ability. One of the arguments of the *Yetzer Horah* is: "Look at the massive task you are expected to complete! You'll never be able to complete that, so why exert yourself towards a pointless cause?!"

This argument surfaces in my mind every year around Shavuot time. Let me explain why.

Shavuot is not only a historic remembrance of when our nation (approximately three million of us) stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. In truth, this day has much more meaning to each and every one of us personally. Each and every year, we are able to tap in to this acceptance of the Torah and once more take it upon ourselves. This includes the Mitzvah of *limud torah* (learning) as the Shulchan Aruch Harav writes "It is the duty of every person to study and know the entire Torah *SheBichsav* and *Torah SheBal Peh* with all its points and finer details, in other words: *Tanach*, *Talmud Bavli*, *Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Tosefta*, *Mechilta*, *Sifra*, *Sifri*, Tur with *Beis Yosef*, and *Shulchan Aruch* with its commentaries..."

But this task is huge; how is it expected of us to achieve this *mitzvah*? Is it not beyond our capabilities?

The Midrash Rabboh relates a parable in order to describe the attitude we should have towards this dilemma.

Once there were two servants of a king, who were both given the task of removing a huge mound of earth, so that a new palace could be erected in its spot. The first servant picked up his spade and went off to do his job. When he got to the building site, he took one look at the amount of earth that had to be removed, put his spade down and thought to himself: "Some jobs are just too hard to be done". The Midrash calls this person a fool. The second servant also went off to do his job but when he got

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Rabbi Yisroel Rose
Mesilah



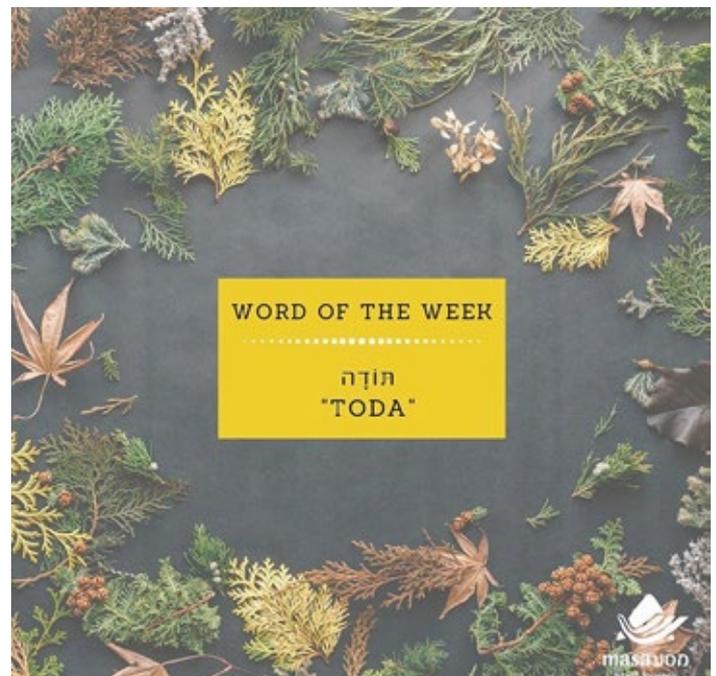
there he made a calculation: "If I dig two boxfuls today, two boxfuls tomorrow and two boxfuls for many days following, the job will be complete by the end of the year". With this thought in mind, he picked up his spade and got to work. The Midrash calls this servant the wise one.

So too, writes the Midrash, when it comes to Torah study. Two different people can look at the vast Torah knowledge that one is expected to attempt to master in his lifetime. The first one (the fool) takes one look, raises his hands in surrender and says "Impossible! This is too much for me! I'm not even going to try and attempt it". The second one (the wise one) says "If I learn two laws today and two laws every day after, eventually I will be able to attain a massive amount of Torah knowledge".

This Midrash teaches us, that for each of us on our own level, every rung we climb is one step closer to our ultimate goal.

With this attitude in mind, may all of us merit that we continue climbing our ladder and have a successful year ahead of Torah study. ■

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Smile Back



Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson
Yeshiva.net

While Sarah would often pick up her son Dovid from school, on one particular day, he decided to walk home. It was a short walk, just a couple blocks, and Dovid as a nine-year-old boy was certainly capable of independently doing so.

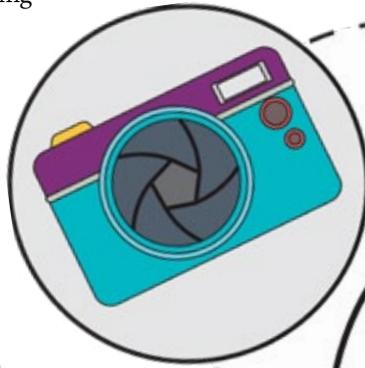
But this day was not like every other day, because today, it was pouring rain. The sky soon began to roar with thunder, as lightning pierced through the clouds. Sarah couldn't contain her worries and soon enough, jumped into her car and sped off to find Dovid and give him a lift home. But as she turned the corner, lo and behold, she noticed Dovid. He had already left school and begun to walk home himself, in the heavy rain. But, to Sarah's surprise, he walked so ever slowly, a skip in his step and a smile glued to his face. He was celebrating and literally dancing in the rain.

Suddenly, though, a booming sound of thunder echoed from the sky as Sarah jumped out of her seat. Lightning soon followed, creating a picturesque scene of dark clouds and striking light zipping in between. Sarah glanced turned over at her nine-year-old Dovid, who could do nothing more than smile and continue walking. Sarah was confused, and yet again, when lightning struck for the second time, she noticed Dovid looking up to sky with a beaming smile.

Rolling down the window, Sarah yelled out, "Dovid, I can take you home!" But Dovid didn't like that idea. "Mommy, please, I want to walk home myself!" Sarah couldn't understand. "Why are you smiling, Dovid?" "Mommy, don't you see, Hashem keeps on taking pictures of me! Every time He takes a picture, as the lightning flash goes off, I smile!"

If you smile as you read this, hold that smile. That is a Jewish emotion. That is a Jewish attitude.

The world is smiling at me, people are smiling at me, Hashem is smiling at me. It's our job to smile back. ■



If you smile as you read this, hold that smile. That is a Jewish emotion.

"Education is not just discipline, not just about teaching children how to behave. It is equally important to teach them to come out of their boxes and be fearless!"

-R' Shais Taub-



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Chief Executive of the Jewish Futures

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OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS. WILL WE ANSWER?

We're all reeling from weeks centred around coronavirus. We're mourning a human cost, in many cases, on a personal level. Most aspects of our normal collective life have been halted; at the time of writing this, shuls, batei midrash, schools and yeshivas are still under lock and key.

It's not the correct way to postulate on why specific bad things happen nowadays, with the age of *nevuah* being long gone. However, Chazal (Brachos 5a) enjoin us to learn lessons and grow from the challenges at times like this; the Rambam (Hilchos Ta'aniyos 1:3) tells us clearly that if we dismiss events of this magnitude as being random or by chance, that is pure *achzarius*.

Today humanity is united fighting for one cause, to vanquish COVID-19. This unity is miraculous in itself. In parts of the world guns have stopped firing, conflict-ridden borders have gone quiet, as people lay down weapons and aim their alcohol gel at a common enemy. But what next?

Current world events cry out to thinking people the world over, to take stock and improve things, to emerge out of all of this as different people, greater people and better people. At every major juncture for humanity in recent decades, important and influential Jewish voices have been there, making important contributions to the transitions that were taking place.

And now, again, we have an important voice, as seasoned experts in spotting the light at the end of the tunnel and racing towards it with the most positive possible mind-set. We are, after all to lead by example and be an *ohr la'goyim*.

But think of all the energy we waste squabbling with each other, often focussing on divisions rather than that which unites us. This is valuable energy that we could be using to reach our individual and collective potential as Klal Yisrael. Today we are presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do just that.

I would humbly suggest that most of us are painfully aware that disunity and lack of genuine connection between Jews is our greatest undoing, the most severe threat to our vibrancy as a People and perhaps the principal contributing factor. We are our worst enemy, painfully aware that *sinas chinam* - internecine hatred is the principle cause of our enduring *golus*. At a time when all of our connections have been challenged in the extreme, it possibly provides us the opportunity to look a little closer at which connections really matter, and dare I suggest, to take positive action to remedy the fractures.

It's very fitting for us to recognise this at the end of Sefiras HaOmer. We mark the ultimate transition of our people — from slavery in Egypt to standing at Mount Sinai, receiving



the Torah *ke'ish echad be lev echad* as a *mamleches kohanim ve'goy kadosh*. At the same time, we have mourned the 24,000 *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva who perished in a plague because they failed to treat each other with due respect. This dual significance is a poignant reminder of how easy it is for a time period of transition, that's all about great potential, to become something far less positive.

And so, today, we have big decisions to make. Will we respond to the challenge of these times, strong and unified, or deeper in internal conflict? To be our best, we need a change among us all to build unity and truly awaken some seismic shift across all of Klal Yisrael.

Building *achdus* is not rocket science. Many of us have become better at seeing the positive in others and showing appreciation in recent weeks. We've even been cheering for hospital staff outside our front doors. Our children have drawn pictures of appreciation to display in our windows. We've started looking at our refuse collectors, not as people whose noise wakes us up in the morning, but as people who are keeping our cities running in the midst of a crazy crisis.

I urge us to resolve, before we get back in to the full swing of life, to focus on the positive attributes of our brothers and sisters, rather than their failings. It does not necessarily cost very much nor require a complex plan of action.

In fact, I think we already have the basis of a practical strategy. To me, it stems from a concept most powerfully elaborated by Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. Towards the end

of his famous *tefillah kodem hatefillah*, he wrote: “*Aderaba - Contrary (to the norm), place in our hearts that each of us may see the positive attributes of our fellow man, not their deficiencies; and that we shall speak to one another in a straight forward way...*”

What we need is a shift of attitude. Firstly, to look for the good in others and not at their deficiencies; secondly to actually speak to one another in a straight and honest manner in this regard too. And with every day we can shift our attitudes a little bit, challenge our assumptions about fellow Jews, open our hearts in a genuine way towards them.

This pandemic has reminded us how exponential growth works. Coronavirus, at its worst, spread from person to person and the number of cases doubled in some places every three days. What if we had exponential growth of goodness and positivity?

Imagine if we started a wave of people recognising the good in others, telling them about it and inviting them to do the same.

Actually, we'd need to start with ourselves. The Torah says “*Va'ahavta le'reacha KAMOCHA*” - love your friend as YOURSELF. So start by listing three great qualities about yourself which are to be appreciated- by you. And then, start doing the same with others, sharing the qualities you have thought about and identified in them - and then asking each of them to pass on this genuine complement-giving to someone else.

List three genuinely good qualities of your closest family member and tell them. And then move out to the concentric circles of our world — to the nuclear family, wider family, friends, then members of your community. “I miss not seeing you and hope we'll be back to normal soon,” you could say to three people from your community. “But in the meantime, here are three things I have thought about and appreciate or value in you.....”

Move outside of your comfort zone. After talking to people from your community, speak to three people who aren't; perhaps even people from a community with a very different outlook, who wear different clothes and look different, perhaps even an outlook that clashes with yours, and build some bridges in exactly the same way. Namely, share three positive qualities of the individual or their community with three different people.

Ask each person you speak to if they would start this process for themselves; invite them to “pay it forward” and ask the people they contact to do the same.

Does it sound outlandish? A little, but would it not also have seemed unbelievable a few months ago to describe the isolated lockdown period we've all been living in. Something uniquely confusing has happened, which separated us all into our isolated worlds. We can respond with clarity, and a set of actions that bring forth unity from the time of isolation. As political leaders implement exit strategies from the coronavirus crisis, we can introduce an exit strategy from some of the worst traits of Jewish life.

We've seen what havoc a virus can wreak through such exponential growth. Let's try out using the principle of contagion to wreak goodness and bring about unity.

Opportunity knocks. Will we answer, as one? ■

#LOOK4THEGOOD

During our time of enforced separation, we have all been made aware of the need for togetherness. As we approach the festival of Shavuot, traditionally the time that the Jewish People stood together as one, we invite all to play their part in building connection and unity across all the Jewish People.

HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS BUILDING TOGETHERNESS, CONNECTION & UNITY

1 RECOGNIZE

Recognize 3 virtues in another person.



2 COMMUNICATE

Communicate those 3 virtues with them. Start with those people closest to you, then move out in concentric circles to your wider family and beyond.



3 REPEAT

Repeat this exercise outside your comfort zone. At each stage, invite each person you complement to “Pay It Forward” and do the same with another 3 people.



PAY IT FORWARD

R' Shamaryohu Fierstone

IS IT JUST COUNTING?

THE TRIBE OF SHIMON

The opening section of *ספר במדבר* enumerates the census of the various tribes. There is an almost uniform standard that records this information. There is one exception - the tribe of Shimon - where the formula is introduced with an additional unique and almost untranslatable word *פְּקֻדָּיו* (“its numbered ones”)¹ preceding the general introductory formula *בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת* (“as per the number of the names”). **HaRav Hirsch** notes² that since Shimon is the second tribe whose statistics are recorded, the noun *פְּקֻדָּיו* indicates ‘the complete equality and equal valuation of all the tribes’. Hence, the noun *פְּקֻדָּיו* can be understood as ‘its members are to be considered equal’ to the members of Reuven - the firstborn of Leah and Ya’akov. Thus, there is a precedent for all the other tribes that follow.

Rabbenu Bachye admits that he cannot find a satisfactory reason why the noun *פְּקֻדָּיו* is added. He tentatively suggests that it has *no* connection with the census formula. It indicates that the founder of the tribe of Shimon was involved in actions that were subject to criticism. First, his involvement (together with Levi) in the attack on Shechem, recorded in Bereishis (34:24), meets with the critical comments of Yaakov who terms their actions as *כְּלֵי חַמָּס* - weapons of violence (Bereishis 49:5). Further, Rabbenu Bachye cites Bereishis Rabbah (84:16) which identifies Shimon as the brother who physically incarcerated Yosef in the desert pit³. Thus the noun *פְּקֻדָּיו* is to be understood as “despite being subject to due punishment”, they are to be recognised as a distinct tribe of the nation.

THE TRIBE OF LEVI

The tribe of Levi had an elevated religious status. **Rashbam** explains⁴ that the members of Levi replaced the firstborn males of other tribes, who were originally destined for religious leadership. The Torah sets the age of redemption for the male firstborn at ‘one month’. Therefore, this became the appropriate age for the tribe of Levi to be listed in *their* particular census.

It is noted that the tribe of Levi were subdivided into three clans (Bamidbar 3:17). In the enumeration of the census material for clans #1 and #3 (Gershon and Merari), there is a similar formula to that used for the tribe of Shimon *פְּקֻדָּיהֶם*

בְּמִסְפַּר כָּל־זָכָר - “those numbered according to the numbers of all the males” (Bamidbar 3:22 and 34). The second clan, Kehas, has a shortened formula - simply *בְּמִסְפַּר כָּל־זָכָר* (Bamidbar 3:28) - “according to the numbers of all the males”.

Let us consider initially, clans #1 and #3. Levi was involved, with Shimon, in the attack on Shechem and conspired with Shimon⁵ in incarcerating Yosef in the desert pit. Therefore, the Torah formulates an implicit criticism of their past tribal founder [as it had with Shimon] The second clan, Kehas was that of Moshe. It would be considered incongruous to criticise Moshe’s clan.

Rashbam elucidates⁵ the phrase *וְלִוֵי אֶחָיו* שְׂמֵעוֹן וְלִוֵי אֶחָיו *שְׂמֵעוֹן וְלִוֵי אֶחָיו* [Bereishis 49:5]

Shimon and Levi are brothers, partners in trading violence. He explains that the noun *מְכַרְתֵּיהֶם* is best expressed in mediaeval French as *leur parentis*, (they had a *trading* brotherhood).

Yaakov’s displeasure is thus reinforced in a subtle form in the opening chapters of *ספר במדבר* as a veiled criticism.

It should be noted that the Biblical Hebrew root *פָּקַד* is used *both* negatively, taking into account a past misdemeanour⁶ (as indicated above) but it *also* has a positive connotation- recalling a good deed and healing⁷.

The fact that both tribes were respected and effective as tribal units, provides society with the important ethical lesson: that a past misdemeanour can be transformed to become the very source of correction and future positive behaviour. ■

1. see Bamidbar 1:22

2. see comment of HaRav Hirsch on Bamidbar 1:22

3. Torah based textual evidence is seen in the fact that Yosef specifically imprisoned Shimon temporarily when the brothers visited Mitzraim.[Bereishis 42:24]

4. see comment of Rashbam on Bamidbar 3:15

5. see Rashi’s comment on Bereishis 42:24. Levi is identified as the person to whom Shimon addressed ‘ Here comes the expert dreamer’ Bereishis 37:19

6. see comment of Rashbam on Bereishis 49:5

7. see, for example, Shemos 32:34

7. see Bereishis 21:1. The comments of Rashi and Ramban ad loc.



Forgive others, not because they necessarily deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace.

LEARNING FROM THE CROWNS



Rabbi Binyamin Klepner
Tiveria Kollel and Farmer

On Har Sinai the Torah was given, amidst thunder and lightning. The mountain was covered with flowers. A fence surrounded the mountain preventing us from coming too close. Moshe Rabbeinu, received the Torah from the Hand of the Almighty, and all of us - each member of Klal Yisroel - accepted.

Rebbe Akiva, the great Tanna, died at the hands of the Romans with the words of Shema Yisroel on his lips. The Mishna tells us as follows:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When Moshe ascended on high he found HaKadosh Baruch Hu, sitting and adding "crowns" to the letters of the Torah. Moshe said, "Ribono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe! Who has caused You this?" Hashem replied, "Many generations from now, there will arise a man named Akiva ben Yosef who will extract piles and piles of laws from each of these 'crowns.' Moshe said, "Ribono Shel Olam! Please allow me to see him." Hashem replied, "Step back." Moshe went and sat eight rows back (in the beis midrash of Rebbe Akiva). When he did not understand the laws being taught he felt disheartened. But at one point they came to a certain subject, and the students asked Rebbe Akiva, "From where do you know this?" and Rebbe Akiva replied, "It is a law that was given to Moshe on Sinai...When Moshe heard (that they were quoting him,) he was reassured. He then said to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam! Since you have a person as great as Rebbe Akiva, why did you give the Torah through me rather than through him?" "Be silent!" Hashem replied, "That was My decision." (Menachos

29b according to the Avraham Yaakov Finkel translation).

The Torah, the written Torah, was given to us along with the oral Torah. We see Moshe Rabbeinu learned the oral Torah, the Torah of Rebbe Akiva, just as Rebbe Akiva learned the written Torah, the Torah of Moshe. The nations of the world know that there is a Torah, a written Torah, but in their ignorance and arrogance, they deny the oral Torah, the Torah of Rebbe Akiva. It is the Torah of Rebbe Akiva, the oral Torah that has kept us alive as a people. From the Yidden living in Germany to the Yidden living in Afghanistan, for two thousand years since our dispersal, it has been the oral Torah, that has kept us united. Superficially different and one-and-the-same in true essence.

While learning in Yeshiva my grandfather (on my father's side) commented to me how fortunate I was and how much he envied me, for learning Gemara. He mentioned that his grandfather would sit and learn Gemara every day and greatly enjoyed sitting with a Gemara in front of him. He mentioned that it saddened him that he was never given the Torah education that would allow him the same enjoyment that his grandfather had. The Torah is our life and the length of our days, like the enjoyment of my great-great grandfather was Gemara. But truly, any of the many branches of the oral Torah is our joy and satisfaction.



אֲבֹתָנוּ
אָמְרוּ
מִצַּעֲפָצַע
קָרַעַתָּךְ

When we attach ourselves to the wisdom and *kedusha*, holiness, of the oral Torah, we attach ourselves to the wisdom and holiness of our sages. Just as Moshe adhered to the Torah of Rebbe Akiva, so too, we adhere to the Torah of Rebbe Akiva. Within the oral Torah, whether Midrash, Mussar, Chassidus, Halachah, Mishna, Talmud, Mishna Torah or Mishna Berurah, Rashi or Rabbeinu Tam, let us grab hold of one of our Tree's many branches and hold on for dear life. ■



CHESED CONNECTION OF THE WEEK



Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum
Torah Sweets Weekly

In last week's Parshah, Bamidbar, (Bamidbar 3:1), the Torah writes, "And these are the children of Aharon and Moshe." One verse later, the Torah states the names of Aharon's children – Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Isamar. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 19b) points out a seeming omission. If the Torah was going to

it turns out, were very high in the proverbial chain. We see also that Elazar was a very close *talmid* of Moshe, as the verse states (Bamidbar 31:21) that when Moshe forgot the *halachos* of purifying *keilim*, Elazar was the one who taught it to the nation and said it over in Moshe's name. However, there was another very special student that Moshe cultivated, as the verse

(Shemos 33:11) says, "that the attendant of Moshe

was Yehoshua – who did not leave Moshe's side at all." The Gemara

(Temurah 16a) says that when Moshe was leaving this World, he asked Yehoshua: "Ask me any questions you may have." Yehoshua answered: "Did I ever leave you for even one minute and

go to another place? Didn't

you write about me in the Torah that I never left you?" (implying that he had no questions as he inculcated every aspect of every lesson Moshe taught). The reason that Yehoshua was chosen as the successor to Moshe was due to his unwavering dedication (Bamidbar 27:18), which Rashi explains (ibid. 27:16) was reflected in his constant presence and consistent effort to drink the Torah wisdom. There is a Torah verse (Iyov 6:14) which discusses someone who withholds kindness from their friend, a point that the Talmud (Kesubos 96a) explains to refer to a student that the Rebbi prevents from being *meshamesh* him (serve him as an attendant, thereby allowing the student to learn from them). The Torah is what moulds us and makes us into different, more elevated individuals. One may have biological parents (to whom they owe honour and respect), but one's spiritual

parent is one's Rebbi/Torah teacher. Therefore, a Rebbi who holds back a student holds back a great *chesed*.

True, Moshe was the great teacher for the entire nation, which is significant praise to him. Yet, another great praise of Moshe is that he allowed a student of his to shadow him wherever Moshe went. Moshe didn't demand privacy or ask for "some space." This way, Yehoshua was able to learn everything and continue transmitting the Torah in a pure and uninterrupted way. A Rebbi shouldn't hide things from a student (like the poisonous secular line, "I taught him everything he knows, but not everything I know") or push them away (if at all possible). A Rebbi is always supposed to look to teach his students and let them understand what one is doing – this is an important *chesed* that's incumbent on the Rebbi.

As we approach Shavuot, let us realise – and inculcate the precious message – that our Torah moulds us, as our portion teaches "one who teaches another Torah, it is considered as if one gave birth to them"; for the Torah moulds the spirituality of the Jewish nation. ■

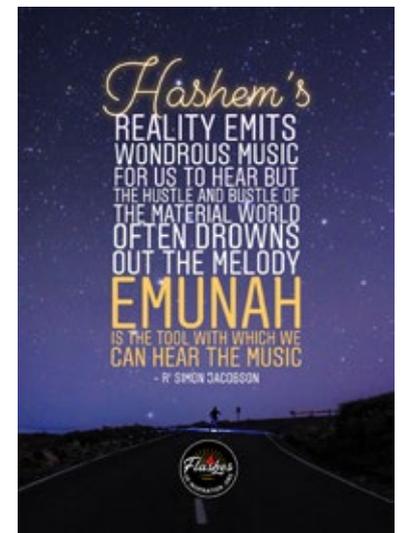


list
the

children
of Moshe

and Aharon, how come only Aharon's children were listed (and not Moshe's)? The Talmud deduces from this sequence that Aharon's children were Moshe's children because Moshe taught them Torah, and anyone who teaches someone else's children Torah, it's as if they had fathered them.

In essence, all the Jewish people learned Torah from Moshe, and therefore were considered his children. However, the children of Aharon were special *talmidim*. The Talmud (Eruvin 54b) explains that Moshe first learned the Torah from Hashem. Afterwards, he taught the Torah to Aharon; then to the children of Aharon, then to the elders, and only finally, to the rest of the Jewish people. Aharon's children,



Distinctive Insight

GRAFTED TREES

וקים להו לרבנן דחמשא בשיתא לא ינקי מהדדי ומנלן דהא דקים להו לרבנן (דחמשא בשיתא) מילתא היא דאמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן מאי דכתיב לא תסיג גבול רעך [אשר גבלו ראשונים] גבול שגבלו ראשונים לא. - פה תסיג

And the Rabbis ascertained that five [vegetable types] planted in [a patch of] six [tefachim] are not nourished from each other. And from where do we know that what the Rabbis ascertain is significant? As R' Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R' Yochanan: What is that which is written: Do not assail the boundary of your friend [which the ancient ones set out]? Do not assail the boundary that the ancient ones established.—85a

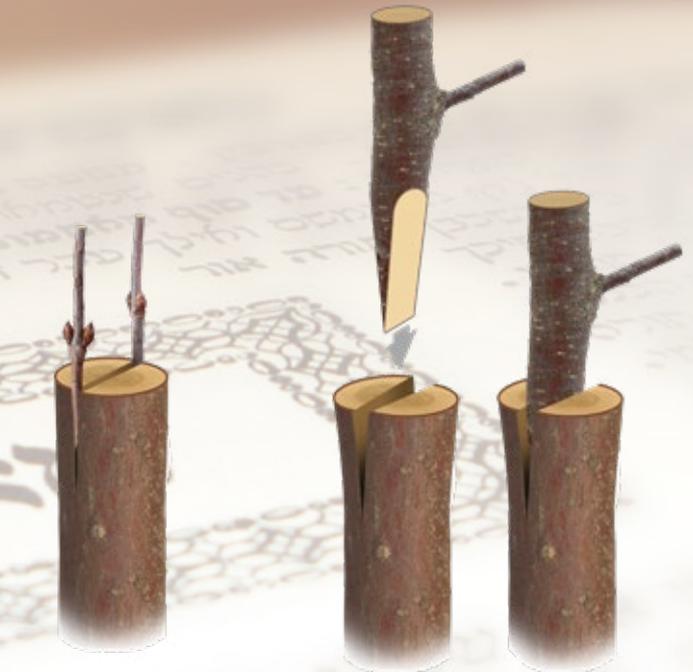
Teshuvos Maharsham¹ cites a question concerning a Jew who bought an orchard full of fruit trees from a non-Jew, that was grafted in manners that rendered them kilayim (products of forbidden mixtures). Is the Jew obligated to uproot these trees?

Maharsham first notes that some Rishonim permit a Jew to retain kilayim that he has acquired, but the consensus is that it is forbidden to retain kilayim.² However, we do not find that a person who does retain kilayim is punished by flogging (in the time of the Sanhedrin). Why not?

Maharsham explains why there is no מלקות, based upon Tosafos³ here, who ask why a person who plants kilayim is only flogged once (see Chullin 82b). Why is he not flogged twice, once for the prohibition of planting kilayim itself and another for “assailing the boundary?” Tosafos give two reasons: 1) The prohibition of “assailing the boundary” is primarily directed against theft of one’s neighbour’s land. As such, it is a prohibition that is subject to restitution (return of the land), for which lashes are not imposed; 2) The prohibition of “assailing the boundary” refers to more than one form of forbidden activity. As such, it is a generic prohibition, for which lashes are not imposed either.

But Tosafos only considers the law of a person who plants kilayim. What of a person who retains kilayim? We have seen that most Rishonim forbid the retention of kilayim. The source of this prohibition is this verse: “Do not assail the boundary of your friend.” Yet, as explained here by Rashi,⁴ “Do not assail the boundary of your neighbour” means that it is forbidden for a person to plant adjacent to his friend’s field, as this saps his neighbour’s land’s strength. Does this prohibition relate to retention in one’s own field?

We see that Tosafos are of the opinion that although the verse focuses on assailing the boundary of one’s neighbour, it also pertains to the planting of kilayim within one’s own



field. Otherwise, Tosafos might have answered that the Gemara in Chullin concerns planting kilayim in one’s own field, while the prohibition of “assailing the boundary” pertains only to a case in which the planting caused a kilayim problem to affect one’s neighbour’s field.

But how does one “assail” one’s own field? On the basis of Rashi’s interpretation, Maharsham explains that in planting kilayim in one’s own field, and causing different species to deprive each other of nourishment, one is literally “assailing” one’s own field (and just as in the case in which you assail your friend’s field by “stealing” his property you must make restitution, here too you must make “restitution” to your own field by uprooting the kilayim).

On the basis of this definition of the prohibition, Maharsham suggests a distinction between planted kilayim and grafted kilayim:

From a botanic perspective, two species planted as kilayim deprive each other of nourishment, but two species grafted together enhance each other’s nourishment. Thus, in retaining grafted trees one is not “assailing” one’s field. On the contrary, one is “supporting” one’s field.

Hence, the prohibition to retain kilayim derived from the verse: “Do not assail the boundary of your friend” is not applicable to grafted kilayim.⁵

On the basis of this premise, and additional analysis and consideration of the issues involved, Maharsham concludes that the Jew who purchased the orchard need not uproot the grafted trees - but that he should sell them to a non-Jew.⁶ ■

¹ שו"ת מהרש"ם חלק א' סימן קע"ט. ² עיי"ש במהרש"ם: בשו"ת מהר"י אסאד חו"ד סימן ש"ג ושם הביא דעת הכלבו דסובר דמותר לקיים כלאים וכ"ה דעת הריטב"א קידושין ל"ט. אך דיש לומר דהריטב"א מודה דמדורבנן אסור אבל הכלבו מתיר לגמרי. וע' מהרש"א סוטה מ"ג ב' דס"ל דליכא שום איסור במקיים כלאים. ³ ד"ה לא תסיג גבול. ⁴ ד"ה גבול רעך ליטע סמוך למיצר, להכחיש קרקעו כשיעור אשר גבלו הראשונים. ⁵ עיי"ש במהרש"ם: ולפ"ז נראה דבהרכבת אילן שידוע שאין ההרכבה מכחיש האילן אדרבא גורם הטבתו ושניהם נעשים אילן א' ויניקתם רק כשיעור אילן א' פשיטא דל"ש בזה השגת גבול ולכן מותר לקיימם מן התורה. ⁶ עיי"ש במסקנת מהרש"ם: ועל כל פנים לדינא שחורות ולבנות ופירות גרוועים שבאותו מין עם היפים שבהם לאו כלאים ניהו ואם כן בהרכבות כאלו יש להקל גם לתחלה. ואם ההרכבות גם במבשא"מ א"י יש לעשות על ידי מכירה לעכ"ם שאינו מרכיב בעצמו וכמ"ש ר"מ.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

4 SECRETS OF FRIENDSHIP

1. BE A VAULT:



People are drawn to friends they can trust. If they know you respect their lives, they respect you as a person of dignity and feel safe in their friendship with you.

2. FOCUS ON OTHERS' GOOD POINTS:



Everyone has their faults, but nearly everyone wants to do the right thing and feel valued. If you focus on people's mistakes and flaws, you'll become that bitter person who is always encountering disappointment. If you focus on the good intentions and sincere efforts of other people, you'll become that happy, upbeat person whom everyone likes to have around them.

3. BE FREE WITH COMPLIMENTS:



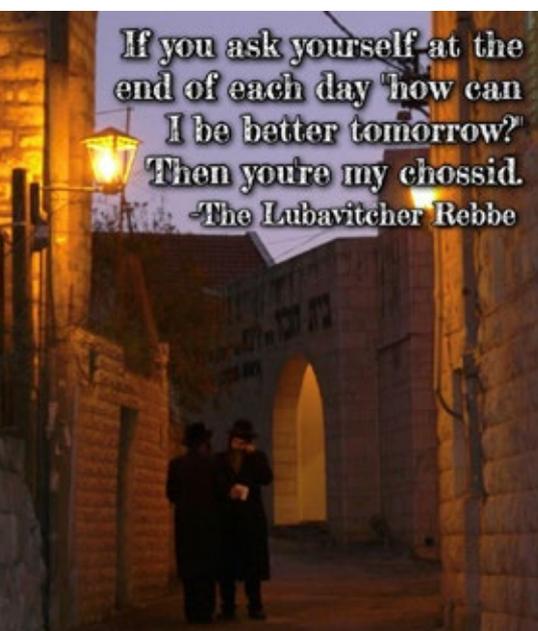
Spread good feelings with positive words and people-building compliments. When you notice the good, verbalize it. You'll be surprised at how many smiles you bring to people's faces.

4. LET GO OF CYNICISM:



You might believe that your sarcastic comments and your genius at seeing people's dark side buy you a following of friends.

However, that kind of connection is usually hollow and devoid of real joy. It takes just as much genius to see the bright side, and in doing so you'll be drawing people toward you who truly feel good being in your company.



SHEMIKAS HALOSHON

FOOD FOR
THOUGHT
TO SPARK
CONVERSATION



THEY SHOULD
HAVE PUT
A WARNING ON IT!

IF A JEWISH MANUFACTURER
PUTS SOMETHING ON THE
MARKET THAT YOU BELIEVE IS
UNSAFE, ARE YOU ALLOWED TO
WARN PEOPLE ABOUT IT?

THE DILEMMA

You bought a skin cream made by your local holistic, organic, vegan, no-animal-testing health product store. The proprietor makes the cream herself, using her own secret recipe. You try it, but instead of smoothing your skin it gives you a rash. May you tell your neighbor, who is thinking of buying the same cream?

THE HALACHAH

First of all, you must bring the problem to the manufacturer's attention and try to resolve it directly. Secondly, you may not call something "dangerous" unless it really is. If you had an allergic reaction to something or over-indulged in or misused a product, that doesn't qualify it as "dangerous."

Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hil. Loshon Hara 10:2

The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation

Reviewed by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Lowy. For discussion only; actual halachic decisions should be made by a rav or halachic expert on a case-by-case basis.

Shvilei Pinchas



Harav HaGoan
R' Pinchas Friedman

Translation by Dr. Baruch Fox



“Grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and respond to them”

By Serving Hashem Yisrael Influence the Dinor River which Is Filled by the Sweat of the Holy Chayos Carrying the Kisei HaKavod

In honour of Shavuot, which approaches auspiciously, let us examine a subject pertaining to “*zman matan toraseinu*” — the events surrounding the giving of the Torah. Our blessed Sages teach us that when Moshe Rabeinu ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah on behalf of Yisrael, a vehement argument ensued with the ministering angels. The *malochim* argued: “מה לילוד אשה בינינו” — what is a mere mortal doing up here amongst us? It is more appropriate to give us the Torah rather than a lowly creature of flesh and blood.

In the midst of this heated confrontation, Hakodosh Boruch Hu instructed Moshe to respond to the *malochim*; however, Moshe feared that they would incinerate him with the vapours emitted from their mouths. Finally, Hakodosh Boruch Hu promised to protect him by saying: “אחוד בכסא כבודי וחזור להן תשובה” — **grab hold of My Kisei HaKavod and supply them with an answer.** Here is the dialogue that ensued between Moshe Rabeinu and the *malachei hashareis* as depicted by the Gemara (Shabbos 88b):

בשעה שעלה משה למרום, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה, רבונו של עולם מה לילוד אשה בינינו, אמר להן לקבל תורה בא. אמרו לפניו חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לך תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנברא העולם אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם, מה אנוש כי תזכרנו וכן אדם כי תפקדנו, ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ, אשר תנה הודך על השמים. אמר לו הקב"ה למשה החזיר להן תשובה, אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם מתיירא אני שמא ישרפוני בהבל ששפיהם, אמר לו אחוז בכסא כבודי וחזור להן תשובה...

אמר לפניו, רבונו של עולם תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, אמר להן למצרים ירדתם, לפרעה השתעבדתם, תורה למה תהא לכם... שוב מה כתיב בה, לא תרצח, לא תנאף, לא תגנוב, קנאה יש ביניכם, יצר הרע יש ביניכם. מיד הודו לו להקב"ה, שנאמר ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ, ואילו תנה הודך על השמים לא כתיב."

When Moshe ascended to the heights, the ministering angels said to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, “Master of the Universe! What is someone born of a woman doing amongst us?” He replied, “He has come to receive the Torah.” They said to Him, “The coveted treasure that was stored by You for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created! You intend to give it to flesh and blood?! (Tehillim 8, 5) What is a mortal that You should remember him or the son of man that You should recall him? (ibid. 2) Hashem, our Lord, how grand is Your name in all the earth that You bestow Your glory upon the heavens.” Hakodosh Boruch Hu said to Moshe, “Give them an answer.” Moshe said before Him, “Master of the Universe, I fear lest they burn me with the breath in their mouths.” Hakodosh Boruch Hu said to him, “Take hold of My Kisei HaKavod and respond to them”.

Moshe said to Him, “Master of the Universe, what is written in the Torah that You are giving me? (Shemos 20, 2) “I am Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Eretz Mitzrayim.” Addressing the *malochim*, he said, “Did you descend to Mitzrayim? Were you enslaved by Pharaoh? Why should you have the Torah?” ... “What else is written in it?” (Shemos 20, 13) “You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal.” Addressing the *malochim*, he said, “Is there envy among you? Is there a *yetzer hara* among you?” Immediately, they conceded to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, as it is said (Tehillim 8, 10):

“Hashem, our Master, how grand is Your name throughout the land! Now, it is not written: “Bestow Your glory upon the heavens.”

Hakodosh Boruch Hu Was Advising Moshe to Reveal the Amazing Power of Teshuvah

To avoid being incinerated by the vapours coming from the mouths of the *malochim*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu advises Moshe: “אחוז בכסא כבודי” — **grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and provide them with a “teshuvah.”** At first glance, this entire scenario is surprisingly surreal. Clearly, Hakodosh Boruch Hu did not want the *malachei hashareis* to harm Moshe, His loyal servant. So, why was it necessary for Moshe to grab hold of the Throne of Glory? There is no way that the *malochim* would have dared harm him!

We find a wonderful explanation in the writings of the Shela haKadosh (Maseches Shevuot). He explains that the *malochim*'s argument: “What is a mortal that You should remember him?” insinuates that human beings do not deserve the Torah, because they are influenced by the *yetzer hara* and are liable to sin.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu instructs Moshe to respond to this by explaining to the *malochim* that a *tikun* exists for the sinner; he need merely perform *teshuvah* - repentance, which reaches all the way up to the Kisei HaKavod. This fact is expressed unequivocally in the Gemara (Yoma 86a):

“גדולה תשובה שמגיעת עד כסא הכבוד” — **the power of teshuvah is so great that it reaches up to the Kisei HaKavod.** This then is the implication of Hakodosh Boruch Hu's advice to Moshe: “Grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and provide them with a “teshuvah.” Here, the word “teshuvah” does not merely mean provide them with an answer; it implies that Moshe should reveal to the *malochim* the amazing power of *teshuvah*. When Yisrael perform *teshuvah*, they can rectify all wrongdoing; for, as we learn from the Gemara, *teshuvah* ascends to the Kisei HaKavod.

The Secret of the River Dinor that Falls upon the Heads of the Reshaim in Gehinom

I would like to elaborate further on this explanation regarding the profound intent of Hakodosh Boruch Hu's remark to Moshe Rabeinu, a loyal servant in the presence of his Master: “Grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and provide them with a “teshuvah.” We will refer to what we have learned in the Gemara (Chagigah 13b). The Gemara expounds on the passuk (Daniel 7, 10): “נהר דינור נגד ונפק מן קדמוהי ונו” — **a river of fire was flowing forth before Him, i.e. from before the Kisei HaKavod.** This prompts the Gemara to ask: “מהיכן נפיק?” — **where does it originate from?** i.e. what is the source of this river of fire?

The Gemara answers: “מזיעתן של חיות” — **from the sweat of the “Chayos.”** There is a prestigious group of heavenly angels known as “*Chayos hakodesh*” — which literally means “beasts of the holy realm.” This name reflects the fact that they were created in the images of beasts — a lion, an ox, an eagle and a cherub; they were assigned the prestigious task of carrying the Kisei HaKavod upon which Hakodosh Boruch Hu sits, so to speak. Due to their immense fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, they would perspire; their perspiration formed the river of fire - “nahar dinor.”

Next, the Gemara inquires: “וליהיכן שפיק” — where does the stream of fire empty? “על ראש רשעים בגיהנום” — **Rav Zutra the son of Tuvia said in the name of Rav: Upon the heads of the wicked in Gehinnom.** We learn from this Gemara that the fire of Gehinnom emanates from the sweat of the *Chayos hakodesh* who bear the Throne of Glory.

The kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, in his work ‘Asarah Maamarot’, reveals to us the connection between the fire of Gehinnom and the sweat of the *Chayos hakodesh*. Although it may appear as if the *Chayos hakodesh* are transporting the Kisei HaKavod; in truth, that is not the case. The Kisei HaKavod is, in fact, carrying them. This phenomenon is actually described in the *piyut* for the Mussaf service on Rosh HaShanah, in the *kedushah* of

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‘Keser’: “נראות נושאות והם נושאות עם כסא” **they appear to be carrying, but they are being carried along with the Throne.**

Actually, the Throne only carries its carriers whilst Yisrael are properly serving Hashem and pleasing Him. When, however, they are not serving Hashem properly, *chas v’shalom*, and there are many wicked people among them, they cause significant distress and turmoil above. This latter scenario is depicted by the passuk (Devarim 32, 18): “צור ילדך תשי ותשכח א”ל” — **you ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you, and forgot G-d Who brought you forth.** Rashi comments: **When He comes to do good to you, you anger Him and weaken His resolve to do good on your behalf.**

Due to Hakodosh Boruch Hu’s distress whilst sitting atop the Kisei HaKavod, the Throne no longer carries its carriers. In fact, just the opposite is true; it becomes a heavier burden for the *Chayos hakodesh*. The increased burden causes them to toil and expend more effort, causing them to perspire. As we have learned, their perspiration forms the “nahar dinor,” the river of fire. Seeing as this perspiration is a result of the wicked people’s actions below—transgressions which increase the burden of the Throne upon its heavenly bearers—it is only fitting, measure for measure, that this sweat is emptied out on the heads of the wicked in Gehinnom. This is the gist of the Rama of Pano’s revealing insight.

The Neshamos of Yisrael Are Carved Out from beneath the Kisei HaKavod

Let us add a tantalizing thought to achieve a better understanding of the insight from the Rama of Pano. We previously explained (in an essay for parshas Bamidbar) the significance of Hakodosh Boruch Hu sitting on His Kisei HaKavod. It is written (Yeshayah 6, 1): “**ה' יושב על ואראה את**” — **I saw Hashem sitting upon a high and lofty throne.** The concept of sitting upon the Kisei HaKavod represents a king sitting upon his royal throne. This is evident from the passuk (Esther 1, 2): “**בימים**” — **in those days, when Achashveirosh sat on his royal throne, which was in the capital city of Shushan.** Rashi comments: **When the kingship became his.**

Now, our sacred sources teach us that the purpose of creation was for Hakodosh Boruch Hu to be called King. The source for this notion is found in the Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer (3). Seeing as there cannot be a king without a people, Hakodosh Boruch Hu only became King, for all practical purposes, when Yisrael accepted the Torah and its Mitzvos at Har Sinai. We express this fact in *tefilas Arvis* as follows: “**ומלכותו ברצון קיבלו עליהם**” — **they accepted His Sovereignty over them willingly.** Thus, Hakodosh Boruch Hu sitting upon His Kisei HaKavod indicates that He is our King sitting upon His royal throne, as it is written (ibid. 29, 10): “**יושב ה' מלך לעולם**” — **Hashem sits enthroned as King forever.** Similarly, we recite in the tefilah Nishmat: “**המלך היושב על כסא רם ונושא**” — **the King Who sits on a high and lofty throne.**

Based on this idea, we learn why the *neshamos* of Yisrael are hewn from beneath the Kisei HaKavod, as it states in the Zohar haKadosh (Tzav 29b): “**כל הנשמות גזרות מתחת כסא הכבוד**”. By accepting the Torah and fulfilling Hashem’s mitzvos, as loyal subjects honouring their master’s will, they establish Hakodosh Boruch Hu as King of the World. Thus, it turns out that the Kisei HaKavod is supported by the *neshamos* of Yisrael, who choose Hakodosh Boruch Hu as their King. This empowers Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so to speak, to sit atop His Kisei HaKavod and rule over the entire world. This clarifies very nicely the insight of the Rama of Pano. The shortcomings of the *reshaim*—who rebel against Hakodosh Boruch Hu’s sovereignty by committing countless sins and iniquities—reach the Kisei HaKavod. For their negative behaviour and actions cause Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so to speak, to vacate the Kisei HaKavod and abandon His position as King of the World. This makes the Kisei HaKavod heavier to bear, causing the *Chayos hakodesh* to exert more effort and sweat even more. Their sweat generates the river of fire known as Nahar Dinor; it spills its contents on the heads of the *reshaim* in Gehinnom as their punishment for sinning and causing this sequence of events.

By the Sweat of Your Brow Shall You Eat Bread

This sacred idea of the Rama of Pano’s provides us with a better understanding of Hakodosh Boruch Hu’s decree after Adam HaRishon sinned by partaking of the Eitz HaDa’as (Bereishis 3, 19): “**בזיעת אפריך**” — **by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the earth.** Let us refer to the Midrash (B.R. 19, 7) related to the passuk (ibid. 8): “**They heard the sound of Hashem Elokim walking in the garden toward the direction of the sun.**” **Going is not written here but rather walking** (hence, it is referring to Hashem and not to the sound). **This indicates that He jumped up and ascended. Previously, the Shechinah dwelled primarily with the inhabitants below; after Adam HaRishon sinned, the Shechinah went to the first level of heaven.**

As a consequence of the *cheit Eitz HaDa’as*, Adam HaRishon and all of the *neshamos* contained within him caused Hakodosh Boruch Hu tremendous anguish; hence His Shechinah left the earth. His anguish made the Kisei HaKavod a heavier burden for the *Chayos* to bear. As a result of their increased labour, they sweated profusely, and the river of fire was generated to punish the *reshaim*. To make amends for his sinful act, Adam HaRishon was punished “*midah k’neged midah*”—measure for measure: “**בזיעת אפריך תאכל לחם**”—he would sweat in order to feed himself and his family.

It is with great pleasure and delight that we will now introduce a fascinating idea presented by Rabbi Chaim Vital, ztz”l, in Sha’ar HaMitzvos (Va’eschanan) in the name of his teacher, the Arizal:

“**I witnessed my mentor exerting tremendous energy while engaged in halachah to the point that he was sweating profusely. I asked him why it was necessary to work so hard. He replied that one must learn in depth to shatter the klipos. They appear in the form of difficult questions that prevent a person from understanding the halachah.**

Therefore, it is imperative to go to great lengths and to exert one’s energy while studying halachah. For this reason, the Torah is referred to as “toshiyah,” because it usurps a person’s strength, weakening the person who engages in its study. [Translator’s note: the name “toshiyah” derives from the Hebrew root meaning ‘to weaken’.] **My teacher would also say the same with regards to pilpul and delving into the halachah. For, the purpose of the investigation is to shatter the klipos that appear as difficult questions. For, they are the cause of those difficult halachic questions, making their answers comprehensible only with difficulty and tremendous effort.**

In keeping with our current discussion, we can propose an explanation for the need to labour in the study of Torah to the point of sweating. The difficult halachic questions were generated by the *klipos*, who were generated by the *cheit Eitz HaDa’as*; they prevent a person from achieving a good understanding of the Torah and its principles. Furthermore, due to that monumental sin, Adam HaRishon caused the Kisei HaKavod to be a heavier burden for its bearers, causing them to sweat profusely. Therefore, to rectify this situation and our part in the sin, we must labour in the study of Torah, studying it in depth to the degree that we sweat. Thus, we will shatter the *klipos*.

At this point, it delights me to introduce an insight from the Yismach Moshe (Beshalach). He writes that there are two ways to fulfil the Divine decree of: “**By the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread.**” Firstly, there is the simple, straightforward way; one must toil and sweat to earn a living and feed oneself. Secondly, one must toil and sweat to achieve a better understanding of the Torah, which is called “bread,” as we find in the passuk (Mishlei 9, 5): “**לכו לחמו בלחמי**” — **come and partake of My bread.**

Therefore, if a person fulfils the decree of “**בזיעת אפריך תאכל לחם**” by sweating to attain the bread of Torah, the burden of his livelihood is removed from him; he will no longer be required to sweat to earn his bread. This phenomenon is expressed by the Mishnah (Avos 3, 5): “**כל המקבל עליו**” — **עול תורה מעבירין ממנו עול מלכות ועול דרך ארץ** —all who accept upon

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themselves the yoke of Torah, the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly affairs are removed from him. As explained, this is man's *tikun* for Adam HaRishon causing the *Chayos hakodesh* to sweat by eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*.

The Incredible Power of Teshuvah

Based on the vital principle we have learned from the Rama of Pano, we can better comprehend Chazal's statement: גדולה תשובה שמגעת עד "גדולה תשובה שמגעת עד ה' אלוקיך." —the power of *teshuvah* is so great that it reaches up to the Kisei HaKavod, as it states (Hoshea 14, 2): "Return, O Yisrael, unto Hashem, your G-d." For when a person commits a sin, he causes the holy Shechinah anguish, which makes the Kisei HaKavod more difficult for the *Chayos hakodesh* to bear. Conversely, when a person performs *teshuvah*, he pleases the Shechinah; as a result, the Kisei HaKavod carries its carriers.

This then is the interpretation of the statement: גדולה תשובה שמגעת עד "עד כסא הכבוד". The *teshuvah* a Jew performs is so powerful that it affects the Kisei HaKavod. To prove this point, the Mishnah cites the passuk: "Return, O Yisrael, unto Hashem, your G-d." In other words, a Jew's *teshuvah* reaches Hashem, his G-d. Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so to speak, receives additional strength due to a Jew's *teshuvah*, providing the Throne the power to carry its carriers. This is the tremendous power of *teshuvah* and its effect on the Kisei HaKavod.

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the words of the *paytan* instituted for the *kedushah* of Shacharis on Rosh HaShanah: ויורש "י ליצו בעדינו חיות אש"—and the fiery *Chayos* will advocate on our behalf. In other words, the fiery *Chayos hakodesh* that carry the Kisei HaKavod will defend us before Hakodosh Boruch Hu sitting on His Throne of Glory. Seeing as they carry the Kisei HaKavod, they are the beneficiaries of Yisrael's *teshuvah*. They sense the intensity and sincerity of that *teshuvah* by the lightening of their sacred load.

We have now achieved a better understanding of the explanation of the Shela haKadosh. Let us review. Hakodosh Boruch Hu instructed Moshe Rabeinu: "Grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and respond to them." He wanted Moshe to refute the argument of the *malachei hashareis*: "What is a mortal that You should remember him or the son of man that You should recall him?" After all, man has a *yetzer hara* and is likely to sin. With this argument, they intended to prove that they were superior to Yisrael and worthier recipients of the Torah.

To which Hakodosh Boruch Hu said to Moshe: "Grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and provide them with a 'teshuvah.'" Prove to the *malochim* that the *neshamos* of Yisrael are intimately connected to the Kisei HaKavod. For, their mitzvah of *teshuvah* has a profound effect upon the Kisei HaKavod. If they sin, *chas v'shalom*, the *Chayos hakodesh* must exert themselves to carry the Kisei, causing them to sweat. If, however, they perform *teshuvah*, the *Chayos* are carried by the Kisei. This proves conclusively that the *neshamos* of Yisrael, that are hewn from beneath the Kisei HaKavod, are superior to the *malachei hashareis*. By electing Hakodosh Boruch Hu as their King, He sits majestically upon the Kisei HaKavod.

The Reason the Neshamos of Tzaddikim Bathe in the Nahar Dinor

Following this exalted line of reasoning, we will explain in greater depth Hakodosh Boruch Hu's directive to Moshe Rabeinu: "Grab onto My Kisei HaKavod and respond to them." We learned from the Rama of Pano that the sweat of the *Chayos hakodesh* spills on the heads of the *reshaim* in Gehinom, because due to their transgressions, the *Chayos* are not transported by the Kisei HaKavod. On the contrary, they are forced to exert themselves to carry it, causing them to sweat profusely. With this in mind, we must endeavour to explain a curious statement in the Zohar haKadosh (Vayikra 16b). Just as the *reshaim* are punished in Gehinom by the waters of the Nahar Dinor; similarly, the *neshamos* of the *tzaddikim* bathe in its waters and are purified by them. What connection do the *tzaddikim* have with the Nahar Dinor—the fiery river generated by the sweat of the *Chayos*?

After all, the *tzaddikim* make life much easier for the *Chayos hakodesh*, eliminating the need for them to sweat. For, their good deeds are pleasing to Hakodosh Boruch Hu; and, in their merit, the Kisei HaKavod carries its carriers.

Thankfully, Hashem has opened my eyes and shown me how to reconcile the words of the *tzaddik*, the Rama of Pano. We will refer to the writings of the Bnei Yissaschar (Nissan 3, 9). He explains that there are two distinct ways to serve the Almighty. Firstly, there is "עבודת משא"; secondly, there is "עבודת מתנה". The first type of service is mentioned in parshas Nasso in relation to the sons of Kehas, who transported the Aron (Bamidbar 7, 9): "ולבני קהת לא נתן כי עבודת הקודש עליהם בכתך"—and to the sons of Kehas he did not give, because the service of the holy is upon them; they carry on the shoulder. The second type of service is mentioned in parshas Korach (ibid. 18, 7): "עבודת מתנה אתן"—a service that is a gift. The Bnei Yissaschar explains the nature of these two types of service as follows:

"עבודת משא" is service characterized by "yirah". The person does not enjoy the exertion; he merely carries the burden of the workload out of fear. Whereas "עבודת מתנה" is characterized by "ahavah." The person enjoys the exertion and the toil of the service. It is truly a gift from the Almighty. As the Gemara depicts it, it is enjoying a taste of Gan Eden while still in Olam HaZeh.

Let us expand on his sacred explanation. The Gemara (Sotah 35a) explains that the Aron containing the two *luchos* carried its carriers. Accordingly, the sons of Kehas did not have to exert themselves to transport the Aron. On the contrary, the Aron carried them. Yet, due to their fervent desire to serve Hashem, they tried to carry the Aron, even though it was unnecessary to do so. This is the meaning of the passuk: "Because the service of the holy is upon them; they carry on the shoulder"—they exerted themselves, attempting to carry the Aron on their shoulders.

We can now suggest, with the utmost reverence and love, that, in truth, because of the *tzaddikim*—who serve Hashem and act according to His will—the *Chayos hakodesh* do not have to exert themselves to carry the Kisei HaKavod. Hence, they do not sweat, because the Kisei carries its carriers. Yet, when they see the great pleasure the *tzaddikim* derive from serving Hashem—"עבודת מתנה"—it motivates them to exert themselves and serve Hashem in a similar manner—"they carry on their shoulder." As a result of their efforts to carry the Kisei HaKavod, they sweat profusely.

This provides a very nice explanation of the fact that the *tzaddikim* bathe in the waters of the Nahar Dinor to sanctify themselves, whereas the *reshaim* are punished by the fiery waters of the Nahar Dinor in Gehinom. For, there is the Nahar Dinor generated by the sweat of the *Chayos* caused by the sins of the *reshaim*; it causes the Kisei HaKavod to be a heavier burden upon its bearers. That Nahar Dinor pours its contents on the heads of the *reshaim* in Gehinom punishing them appropriately. On the other hand, there is the Nahar Dinor that is generated by the exertion of the *Chayos*, who were inspired by the *tzaddikim*; they learned how to serve Hashem with awe and devotion. It is in this Nahar Dinor that the *neshamos* of the *tzaddikim* immerse themselves to purify themselves. For, their sacred service caused it to exist.

At this point, we can comprehend Hakodosh Boruch Hu's directive to Moshe:

"אחוז בכסא כבודי וחזור להן תשובה". He was instructing Moshe to prove to the *malochim* that there are *tzaddikim* among the people of Yisrael who are greater than the *malochim*. In the words of the Gemara (Sanhedrin 93a): "גדולים צדיקים יותר ממלאכי השרת"—*tzaddikim* are superior to the ministering angels. This is evident from the fact that they have the power to influence the *Chayos hakodesh* with their sacred *avodah*. They inspire them to rise to a higher *madreigah* by exerting themselves to carry the Kisei HaKavod in the sense of "בכתך ישאו"—carrying it on their shoulders even when it is unnecessary. This proves conclusively that *tzaddikim* are superior to the *malachei hashareis*.

POWER OF SHAVUOS



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CHAZAK

There is a great and often overlooked power to the holiday of Shavuot. We know it as the celebration of the receiving of the Torah which is no doubt true. But I'd like to explore Shavuot by approaching it through a different angle, offering an amplified depth of understanding of this awesome day.

Our rabbis teach us that each and every holiday doesn't only live in the past; they also resonate in our present and carry within them the energy force that was implanted in them in their first occurrence. Pesach carries within it a great and latent power of freedom. As the day that liberated our people in history, it then became that day in our Hebrew calendar, which made it a fortuitous time for that specific achievement for all of eternity. Thousands of years later, we continue to have the chance to use the days of Pesach to become free once again, not only from Egypt but from all things that constrain us. Shavuot, by extension, is a day where we can acquire a new and relevant acceptance of Torah, morality, self-sacrifice and human excellence, a renewed receiving of the Torah of sorts.

However I think there is something else that doesn't get the press-time that it should. You see, we are taught that when the Jewish nation stood at the foot of Mount Sinai all those years ago, ready to accept the Torah, they stood as one man, with one heart. "And Israel camped there opposite the mountain." The singular use of the word *Yisrael* and the singular verb of *vayichan* combine to teach us that they were as one, completely united in heart and in soul. When Rashi quoted this, he added one more ominous point from the Midrash: "They camped there as one." This teaches us that their regular travels did not take place in a unified fashion, which is reflected in the fact that it speaks about them using plural terminology: "*vayisau vayachanu*". There was something special, epic almost, about this coming together. It happened in an unusually unified way, and therefore, its importance is magnified. Why did they fight, or not get along, on other journeys, but here, when it came to Shavuot, they did so as a unified nation?

The answer is in the power of Shavuot, which also teaches us a fundamental life lesson: the key to Torah, and perhaps all transformative life experiences, is for these to be experienced as a sole entity, free from the usual friction. Hashem's intention for our world was to challenge humanity to shine. But through greed, selfishness, and passion, we became a fragmented universal being, shattered into what would become trillions of individual people, all beautiful shards of light trying to shine to the best of our ability, and in doing so, outshine those around us. This was not the will of Hashem, because what He wanted, more than anything, was for us

to shine together, as the prerequisite to receiving the light of the Torah is unity. Torah could only be infused into the world when the people receiving it stopped seeing their own needs as primary and started to act and breathe as one.

Since that seminal day in time, Shavuot now carries within its holy hours the key to achieving unity within diversity. The Jewish people achieved their historic unity through their willingness to recognize that they were not at the centre of the universe, but that at the epicentre of their universe was Hashem. When we examine what was expected of them in their service of Hashem, it was the emulating of His nature, the giving without the expectation of receiving in return, uniting as one and loving one another as they did themselves. In that moment, our unity was not a joyous coincidence that simultaneously happened to occur with the receiving of the Torah. More profound than that, one could even say, the unity itself was the receiving of Torah. They stood together and looked to the heavens as "one nation, with one heart", a complete unit.

"Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction." - Antoine de Saint Exupery.



A funny thing happens when we stand together and look in the same direction. Not only do we see the same thing, but perhaps more importantly, we see the same thing from the same perspective; when you come to think about it, this is nothing short of miraculous. It was in this great miracle, right there and then, that we merited to see Hashem. Even more remarkable than that, we recognized Him, because for the first time in history we were Hashem-like; we were like Him. When we are kind, we see and recognize kindness around us. It works the other way too. When we are negative and cynical, we even look at acts of kindness as "strategic kindness", and our view of goodness can be marred by our own deficient outlook. We see the world through the lenses that ultimately reflect back to us who we really are. At Har Sinai, Am Yisrael was completely united with one another, and so too was completely united with Hashem. The mechanism that helped them to accomplish that almost insurmountable mission was the Torah. We saw Hashem in ourselves, and our highest selves reflected

back in Him.

Our world is in dire need of repair and perfecting. There are many who think the way to achieve this is to bring Torah to the world by being a "light unto the nations". Yet what we are learning is that it is fundamental to achieve unity first. We are taught, "*Derech erez kadma laTorah*" - respecting others comes before Torah. Most people understand this saying on a basic level: that one needs to have good manners before one can talk about religion. But that can't be what this verse means, as the Torah spends so much time talking about *derech erez*, good character/behaviour! In fact, one would probably learn about the *derech erez* he needs to embody before he learns Torah, from the Torah itself!

According to what we've learned though, there is a pearl of much deeper wisdom being communicated here. When we received the Torah, the prerequisite was *derech erez*, love, unity.

The Torah is teaching us that the only thing that can bring Torah, G-dliness, and morality to a world starving for it, is an abundance of goodness, kindness, and justice - which are all the values expected of every Torah Jew.

In light of this fact, we may ask ourselves, what it is that stops us from loving? What makes us feel apart instead of feeling like a part? The answer is the deeply rooted instinct for survival. We are hardwired to look out for ourselves and to ensure we make our next dollar at the expense of the next guy. To truly not feel threatened by others requires a deep sense of belief in Hashem. I must have faith that whatever He wants me to have in my life is what I'll get. This fundamental understanding will allow me to give, and allow others space to recognize that they have their own journey. If I disagree with them, it might be because Hashem made them different to me. It is in that belief system that the answer to humility lies. Humility can be hard to come by.

On a national level, it seems like it was almost the only time this absolute cohesion could exist, in what became the greatest revelation in the history of the world, where Hashem showed us there was nothing in this world that was beyond His control, or outside of His plan. Only those who left Egypt in clouds of glory and myriad miracles embedded into their collective memories, having eaten manna bread from the heavens, could ratify this. It was those who experienced His plentiful giving during the exodus from Egypt who knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that He had enough for us all. It was through this profound realization that we merited to become one.

"*Vayichan sham yisrael neged hahar*" means the "Jewish people camped there opposite the mountain". But the word *vayichan* is also understood to communicate grace or "*chen*". They found favour in each other's eyes. They looked at each other kindly and favourably. It is in that watershed moment that Hashem opens the commandments, and the first words ever spoken by Hashem to humanity as a group are, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha* - I am Hashem your Hashem". "*Lo yihyeh lecha elohim acherim* - there is no other Hashem but Me". When we examine these words through this approach of unity, we realize what Hashem said is indeed of earth-shattering magnitude. There is only one "I" in this world and that is Hashem. Everything else is "we". When this belief becomes an integral part of our consciousness, we begin to realize there is no place for a person to feel separate or better than another, because the only creation that stands as its own entity is Hashem Himself, only He is one. The rest of creation is a team, a family, a collective whole.

This principle is a game changer for how we experience life and our own sense of our place in the trajectory of Hashem's creation of the world. The *gematria* or numerical value of תורה is 611. The Talmud (Makkot 23) teaches us in the name of Rav Hamnuna that the תורה that Moshe gave us was 611, because the first two of the Ten Commandments were given to us by Hashem. Therefore, תורה צוה לנו משה - Moshe taught us 611 of the 613 mitzvot. The number 611 is also the numerical value of גמילות חסדים, acts of kindness. They are one and the same.

So, this year, when we receive the תורה, let us also think of the power of connection that has been imbued into this day. It is on this day in history that there lies the power to look at others with favourable eyes, to understand them and not to judge. We can let go of our jealousy and pettiness, revelling in, and celebrating, the successes of others with true joy, with no grudge; because we realize that "their success doesn't come out of my pocket, but was always destined for that person". Instead, we focus on the fact that the Supreme Being of our world, who is limitless on every level, is waiting to shower us with every possible *beracha*, but only when we ask for the nation as a whole and not just for ourselves. "*Hashem yivarech et amo bashalom.*"

This Shavuot, may we merit for Hashem to bless us with the greatest blessing in this world; its very purpose, the blessing of peace. ■

I Knew It...



Rabbi Moshe Tuva Lief
Morah D'Asra of Agudath Israel Bais
Binjamin in Brooklyn

As a father living in Williamsburg, New York, began readying himself to walk to shul for an all-night learning program on Shavuot, his little eight-year-old son approached him. "Tatty, can I come with you?" Looking back at his son all dressed up, the father smiled. He knew that his son would probably not last the entire night, and would likely be better off staying at home. "I think you should stay here for the night," replied the father. "Maybe next year." And with that, the father gave his son a hug and a kiss and gently closed the door.



The father proceeded to make his way to shul, around and about the streets of his neighbourhood. Finally arriving at the doorstep before the shul, he began to think, "What did I do? My little boy wants to learn Torah tonight. So what, if he learns for only a few minutes? Why should I deprive him of this opportunity?" And with that, the father turned around and retraced his steps all the way home.

Opening the door to his house, there he saw his son standing in front of him, dressed in his suit and tie, ready to go. "How did you know I was coming back?" asked the father. "Tatty," replied the little boy, "I davened to Hashem. I knew you would come back."

That little boy was Shimshon Pincus.

The same Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l, who went on to inspire thousands of Jews and spread Torah to the far corners of the world, knew as a little boy that his Father in Heaven truly listened to his prayers. ■



