

AVRAHAM WEINROTH

By the Light of the
Maharal

Illuminating the weekly *parshah* and
the festivals with the brilliance of

Rabbi Yehudah
Loew of Prague

לאור
המהר"ל

 FELDHEIM

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ISBN 978-1-68025-578-2

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Page layout: E. Chachamtzedek

DISTRIBUTED BY:

Feldheim Publishers
POB 34549 / Jerusalem 9134402 Israel
208 Airport Executive Park
Nanuet, NY 10954
www.feldheim.com

DISTRIBUTED IN EUROPE BY:

Lehmanns
+44-0-191-430-0333
info@lehmanns.co.uk
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DISTRIBUTED IN AUSTRALIA BY:

Golds World of Judaica
+613 95278775
info@golds.com.au
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Printed in Israel

את אחיי אנוכי מבכה

ספר זה מוקדש
לשני אחיי היקרים והאהובים

אחי הגדול בכול
גאון אמיתי, חריף ובקיא, רב חסד ואמת
איש אשכולות, ספרא וסייפא, מוח ולב
סנגור בכל הווייתו
גדול הסנגורים בדורנו
מי שלא שמע את יעקב טוען, לא שמע סנגור גדול מימיו
הרב עו"ד ד"ר **יעקב** ב"ר משה אהרן **וינרוט** ז"ל
גלב"ע ז' בחשון תשע"ט

אחי היקר והאהוב
אציל הנפש, טוב ומיטיב, חכם הרזים ויקר היקרים
כולו יאה, כולו נאה, משכמו ומעלה ונחבא אל הכלים
ה"ה **צבי יצחק** ב"ר משה אהרן **וינרוט** ז"ל
גלב"ע ו' באדר תשע"ח

יהי ספר זה ותורה שתילמד מכוחו
לעילוי נשמתם הטהורה
ותהא נשמתם צרורה בצרור החיים
בלע המוות לנצח ומחה ה' אלוקים דמעה מעל כל פנים
(ישעיהו כ"ה, ח')

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Dedicated in loving memory

to my dear father

R' Moshe Aharon Weinroth *z"l*

ben R' Mordechai Eliezer Weinroth *z"l*

and to my dear mother

Mrs. Dreizel Weinroth *a"b*

bas R' Aryeh Aftergut *z"l*

True believers with all their hearts



מכתב ברכה מאת הגאון הגדול הרב **ברוך מרדכי אזרחי** שליט"א
חבר מועצת גדולי התורה וראש ישיבת "עטרת ישראל"

בס"ד, חנוכה התש"פ

כבוד ידידי היקר מאד מאד
הרה"ג **אברהם וינוט** הי"ו נ"י ויצ"ו
אחדשה"ט בהוק"ר,

קבל נא בזאת ברכתי מעומק הלב, מזל טוב, מזל טוב, לך לביתך ולכל אשר לך, לרגל חגך הגדול, בצאת ספרך "לאור המהר"ל" לאור עולם. הנני מאד מאד מתפעל מרבגוניותך ופוריותך הנאדרים בקודש. די בהסתכלות בתוכן העניינים בספר זה, כדי להיווכח בברכת ה' עליך. **נדיד הדבר, לראות נושאים כל כך רחבים, הפרושים בעמקות ובבקיאות נפלאים כבספריך, כשהכול מוגש בהסברה, בבהירות, ובסגנון הנפלא והייחודי כל כך.**

אמנם כבר הצגנוך בספריך הקודמים, בתארי את גידולך הנפלא בין כתלי ישיבתנו הקדושה, אך איני יכול להתאפק מלחזור על נפלאותיך, כפי שהכרתיך מאז היותך נער, בהנחותך הקב"ה אל ביני עמודי ישיבת "עטרת ישראל", שם התגלית מהר מאד **כעילוי בכישרונותיך, וכצמא ומשתוקק ל"דבר ה' זו הלכה", אך גם לא פחות מזה, כרחב אופקים ברבדי המוסר, ההשקפה והמחשבה, כשכל כולך חפוף ביראת שמים עמוקה. במשך הזמן, ברוך ה', התעלית בכל, גם בלמדנות, גם ביראת שמים, גם במחשבה, השקפה ומוסר. והנה, בשנים האחרונות פרשת כנפיך גם לדאות במרחבי מחשבתם של אושיותינו, ענקי רוח, כמו ה"קדושת לוי" והמהר"ל מפראג. הצלחת בעזרת ה' **יתברך לחדור עד שנעשית ב"ה "טופח להטפחה", ביכולת נפלאה לפענח עמקות מחשבת המהר"ל זיע"א, לעשותה מובנת ונגישה לכל משתוקק לתורתו. בכך הפלאת עשה בעה"י, ברוך תהיה וברוך טעמך הטוב.****

דומני כי אחטא להכרת הטוב אם לא אתפעל בפניך, תוך תודות וברכות גם על חסדך ורב טובך. אינני חפץ להיות "מברך רעהו בקול רם", אך איך יתכן להתעלם, כי גם בניך האישי בנה תוך יסודות של "עולם חסד יבנה". והלא התורה והחסד לא רק שזורים יחדיו, אלא שגדלות אמיתית בונה הארותיה, גם אלו ה"כשרוניים" גם אלו ה"מידתיים", על יסודות אלו, כמורכבות אחת, תוך השפעת גומלין עצומה של "אלו על אלו" ו"אלו מאלו".

לכן קבל נא ברכתי המאליפות מקרב לב אוהב ומוקיר.

היו נא, אתה ונוות ביתך תחי', ברוכים מלאי נחת ועונג מצאצאיכם ומכל אשר לכם.

ביקרא דאורייתא

ברוך מרדכי אזרחי

פה קרית ישיבת "עטרת ישראל", קרית ספר מודיעין עילית
נר שמיני דחנוכה התש"פ

מכתב ברכה מאת הגאון הגדול הרב **דוד כהן שליט"א**
חבר מועצת גדולי התורה וראש ישיבת "חברון כנסת ישראל"

בס"ד, טבת תש"פ

מכתב ידידות

לידיד נפשי ואהובי הנעלה והדגול פרופ' הרב **אברהם וינרוט שליט"א**
שמחתי מאוד לראות את ספרך החדש לבאר פרשיות התורה והמועדים בדרכו של
מאור עינינו המהר"ל זיע"א.

עברתי על חלקים גדולים מהספר ומאוד נהניתי לראות איך כבשת דרך סלולה
בדרכו של המהר"ל להעמיד באור יקרות את פרשיות התורה הסתומות ולהאיר את
אור המועדים למבקשי חכמה ובינה.

לדעתי יש תועלת גדולה מאוד בספר הזה לכל המשתוקקים לפתוח להם שערי בינה
ודעה באור תורתו הנפלאה והעמוקה של המהר"ל, שהם דברי תורה מאירי עיניים
ומרחיבים הנפש, הדעת והבינה, להבין ולהשכיל ביסודות התורה ובאור המועדים.

בע"ה יתקבל הספר הזה באהבה ובחיבה כמו שנתקבלו ספריך הקודמים ותרבה
הדעת והבינה.

כולי מלא התפעלות איך הצלחת להוציא מתחת ידך יצירה נפלאה זו, על אף כל
טרדותיך המרובות, ומצטרף הספר הזה לשלשלת הזהב של הספרים המיוחדים
במקצועות החשובים והיסודיים ביותר אשר הביאו הרבה תועלת וברכה.

יעזרך ה' יתברך להמשיך במפעליך הגדולים ולזכות את ישראל באורה של תורה
בינה ודעת, מתוך בריאות נאמנה מנוחת הנפש ונהורא מעליא.

המברך באהבה
דוד כהן

מכתב ברכה מאת גאון ההוראה, פאר הדור, שר התורה, בעל ה"מעשה אפוד"
רבי ישראל שניאור שליט"א

בס"ד, יום שישי כ"ט כסלו, נר חמישי דחנוכה, ה'תש"פ

שמחה רבה בליבי לראות את הספר החדש "לאור המהר"ל על פרשה ומועד", פרי עטו של ידידי ומכובדי הדגול, תלמיד חכם מופלג וירא שמיים מרבים, נודע בשערים, רודף צדקה וחסד, הרב **עוה"ד פרופ' אבי וינרוט שליט"א**.

וכבר איתמחי גברא בהוצאת ספרים תורניים חשובים ומועילים, כגון הספרים "ביטחון והשתדלות", "עיוני תפילה", "עשות משפט", "לאור קדושת לוי", אשר רבים ניאوتו לאורם, והם רק מקצת מספריו התורניים אשר הצליח להוציא ברוב שקידתו ועמלו בתורה, ובאוצרות כשרונותיו הנפלאים אשר חננו השי"ת. זאת לצד עיסוקיו המשפטיים הרבים והמסועפים, כנודע וכמפורסם.

וכעת הגיש בפניי את ספרו הנוכחי "לאור המהר"ל על פרשה ומועד", אשר בו הגדיל לעשות, פרש ופרס בפני המעיינים את תורתו של רבינו המהר"ל הקדוש זצוק"ל, יחד עם תוספות של גדולי בעלי המוסר בדורות האחרונים, כהגר"י הוטנר זצ"ל, והגרא"א דסלר זצ"ל, ועוד, ואף הוסיף הערות חשובות מדיליה.

זאת למודעי, אשר אין כאן אוסף של עיונים, הארות והערות בדברי המהר"ל, מחוכמים ומחודדים ככל שיהיו, אלא יש כאן מלאכה של חכמה, בהרצאת והדגמת "צורת הסוגיה" של רבנו המהר"ל אשר תורתו מאירה ובהירה ומתייחדת בשלימות הכללים והפרטים כאחד. והספר שלפנינו מוליך את הלומד בדרך סלולה המאפשרת לו לקלוט תמונה מעוצמת חכמתו המופלאה והמקיפה של רבינו המהר"ל זצוק"ל. ובהרבה עניינים טרח המחבר וליקט מדברי תורתו של המהר"ל מכמה מספריו, בבחינת דברי תורה עניים במקום אחד ועשירים במקום אחר, והביא בפני הלומדים תמונה שלמה ומאירה. ובנוסף על כך אף יגע המחבר להעמיד מן הדברים תמצית וסיכום של דרך חיים והנהגה, בכל פרשה ופרשה ובכל מועד ומועד.

והנני מלא שמחה לראות שזכה כדי מידתו, ומשמיא קצו ליה, בהוצאת ספרים אשר עלו ועולים על שולחן מלכים, מאן מלכי רבנן, וכבר שיבחוהו ת"ח גדולים וחשובים על ספריו הקודמים, וכמה נפלא לראות פרי עמלו ויגיעתו בתורה, ממנו יראו וממנו ילמדו כל העוסקים במלאכה, לעשות מלאכתם עראי ותורתם קבע, ולהתמסר לתורה בשקידה ובעיון עד אשר יעשו פירות.

ובוודאי יועיל הספר המיוחד הזה לעילוי נשמות אחיו היקרים, ידידי המנוח הדגול הרב ד"ר ער"ד יעקב ב"ר משה אהרן וינרוט ז"ל, ואחיו אציל הנפש הר"ר צבי יצחק ב"ר משה אהרן וינרוט ז"ל, אשר נודעו לכל מכיריהם באופיים הנאצל ובמעשיהם הטובים, תומכי תורה ורודפי צדקה וחסד, ככוכבים לעולם ועד.

ואחתום בברכה להמחבר שליט"א, שיזכהו השי"ת להמשיך ולשקוד על התורה בישוב הדעת, ולחבר עוד חיבורים מועילים לכלל ישראל, ויזכו הוא ורעייתו מנב"ת תליט"א, לאושר ונעושר, בריות גופא ונהורא מעיליא, זרעא חיא וקימא די לא יפסוק ודי לא יבטול מפתגמי אורייתא, ולא תמוש התורה הזאת מפיו ומפי זרעו וזרעו עד עולם, אכ"ר.

הכ"ח למען התו"ל
ישראל שניאור
פה עיה"ת בני ברק

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Introduction

There's Nothing Haphazard about Major Events

☛ Perceiving a Mosaic

THERE ARE TWO traditional approaches to understanding a *sugya* of Gemara.

One involves first examining details and formulating questions, which one subsequently uses as building blocks for constructing an all-encompassing concept that ties them together and accommodates them all.

Alternatively, the scholar can reverse the order, first establishing a conceptual framework and then assigning each detail its place and configuration. This involves first analyzing the logical underpinnings of the Gemara's discussion and extracting from them a principle with which all the various details can be reconciled, fitting the rationale at which he arrived.

Both methods must sometimes contend with stubborn details that don't align themselves with the central idea, and both also demand the ability to discern which elements are fundamental and which are secondary.

In elucidating difficult topics of halachah and Jewish thought, the Maharal follows neither approach. He neither works from details to build up an all-encompassing framework, nor does he lay a foundation upon which to position the details. In fact, we do not see the

Maharal engaging in any process whatsoever. He immediately grasps the entire picture, perceiving it as a mosaic, much in the way that an impressionist perceives a scene that he is about to reproduce. In this type of perception, nothing is positioned haphazardly — there are no wayward details that must be stepped around. Every tiny speck of color is significant and plays a role in yielding the larger picture.

☛ The Details Have Significance

IN A NUMBER of places in his writings (e.g., *Netzach Yisrael*, Chap. 5), the Maharal lays down a principle: “Nothing is haphazard about major events.” In other words, if the Torah sees fit to inform us that an event of major significance, such as *Matan Torah*, happened in a particular place and at a particular time, this indicates that these details have significance that reflect the event’s essential nature, which in turn is what determined these details.

Following this approach, the Maharal elucidates many seemingly minor nuggets of information. He explains, for example, why the pieces of wood that Noach used for building the *teivah* were fifty *amos* long, why Chazal say that the *tzohar*, the *teivah*’s source of light, was a luminous stone rather than a window, why the tunic worn by Moshe during the seven days of the Mishkan’s inauguration was white and had no hem, and why the Chanukah miracle of the cruse of oil lasted specifically for eight days rather than seven. At first glance, these facts seem insignificant, for the wood for the *teivah* surely had to be of some length, so what is special about this particular length? Because such details seem unimportant, the student assumes that there is no reason to spend time pondering them and, to the contrary, they should be de-emphasized in order to concentrate on the main lesson. Thanks to his “impressionist” perception, however, the Maharal is bothered by questions that the regular scholar doesn’t find at all puzzling, using them as springboards for revealing the significance of numerous details — and the resultant panorama is spectacular, startling in its profundity, originality, and novelty.

☛ The Circumstances Reflect the Event

WHILE IT IS obvious that every letter in the Torah is necessary and carries deep meaning, the Maharal carries this idea one step further. He introduces the idea that a topic's details don't stand in isolation from it or from one another, but rather dovetail with the underlying principle that lies at the heart of the matter. Once this is grasped, the impossibility of this or that detail being otherwise suddenly becomes clear — we realize that they must be exactly as they are.

Thus, explains the Maharal, when we grasp Torah's significance, we also understand why the Torah had to have been given precisely when and where it was given. As the Maharal writes (*Tiferes Yisrael*, beg. of Chap. 26), "Just as the timing of the Torah[']s giving] was not haphazard, neither was the fact that it was given in the desert, for time and place share the same characteristics,* as is known to those who comprehend." Similarly, he writes in *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 54) that none of the individual events in Yaakov's life were haphazard, for "Had Yaakov's experiences been happenstance, i.e., his descent to Egypt,** the redemption as well that came about as a result of that descent to Egypt would have been a matter of happenstance, which would render the entire world order happenstance, for exile and redemption are the basis of the world order."

☛ One Example of How All the Details Center upon the Core Concept

LET US EXAMINE just one example out of many where the Maharal relates an array of details to a single core concept, showing how each of them fits into the larger picture of which it is an integral part.

* In other words, both are functions of specific physical coordinates upon a continuum (in the case of time, these are of the celestial bodies) that delineate the event itself.

** Meaning, had it been incidental, brought about merely by the effects of the famine and the availability of food in Egypt.

In *maseches Chullin* (7a), the Gemara mentions the principle that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not lead a righteous individual — or even his animal — to sin by unwittingly consuming forbidden food. The Gemara then relates the incident from which this becomes apparent: Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was traveling to redeem some captive Jews when he encountered a frothing, fast-flowing river that he was unable to cross. He addressed the river, bidding it to split to allow him to cross, whereupon the river split. Rabbi Pinchas later arrived at an inn where his donkey was given barley that it refused to eat, maintaining its refusal even after it was beaten. Rabbi Pinchas asked the innkeeper whether tithes had been separated from the barley. Once the barley had been tithed, the donkey immediately ate.

The Gemara's account leaves the reader mystified. Why was it necessary to begin by mentioning the purpose of Rabbi Pinchas' journey and then describe how the river split for him? Surely it would have sufficed to tell us that when Rabbi Pinchas' donkey was offered untithed barley, it refused to eat until the tithes were taken. In *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 41), the Maharal addresses these questions as follows:

1. A person's name indicates his essence. The reason that the name of Rabbi Pinchas' father, Yair (which means "He shall illuminate"), is mentioned is to tell us that he provided light for others.
2. This trait characterizes a person who engages in redeeming captives — who are in dark surroundings (i.e., in prison, *beis ha'sohar*, which is related to *sahar*, moon, which is visible in the dark of night). Rabbi Pinchas qualified for the appellation "ben Yair (son of light)" because he would lead captives out of darkness.
3. The waning hours of the day when darkness gathers are referred to as *erev*, which is related to *eruv*, meaning a mixture, because whereas in daylight, one can make out details, during twilight, objects are blurred and can be indistinguishable; they can appear to be merged together.

4. The forenoon, the first hours of daylight when clear vision is again possible, are called *boker*, which is related to *bikur*, surveillance, as in *bikur cholim*, assessing a patient's condition and needs, for as the saying goes, "*Orei'ach l'rega ro'eh kol pega* — A visitor immediately notices every deficiency." Sharp discernment (*bikur*) is the opposite of lack of clarity (*eruv*).
5. Another faculty with the property of discernment is the intellect. As Chazal tell us, "If there is no comprehension, how can any distinction be made?" (*Yerushalmi, Berachos 5:2*). The intellect is similar to light in that it makes it possible to avoid the confusion of darkness and obscurity.
6. "Light" therefore denotes spirituality and intellectual function, whereas "darkness" represents man's physicality that renders him unable to distinguish between good and evil.
7. Man is engaged in a constant struggle between his spiritual (his soul and intellect) and material (his physical desires) components. If he succeeds in controlling himself and reigning in his desires, his spirit elevates his physicality; his material component becomes refined and no longer blurs the distinction between good and evil.
8. A person who succeeds in overcoming his own physicality will also merit overcoming the material obstacles in his path, and matter will part or give way before him. This is the significance of the river splitting for Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair while he was on his way to redeem the captives, to lead them from darkness to light.
9. Untithed produce (*tevel*) denotes a mixture of holy *terumah* and mundane, regular produce. This mixture, *eruv-erev*, is diametrically opposed to the essence of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, who was on his way to redeem captives and lead them from darkness to light and from *erev* to *boker*.
10. A donkey (*chamor*) symbolizes crass physical matter (*chomer*) and thus the inability to discern.
11. However, whatever was attached to Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair

also radiated light, for Rabbi Pinchas’s luminosity penetrated his environment and shone from the things that surrounded him. His donkey was thus unable to eat *tevel*, a mixture, which was in opposition to its essence.

12. We now understand why the Gemara relates the story from the very beginning; this is no collection of incidental details. The first piece of information — that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was en route to redeem captives and lead them out of darkness and *erev* — is central to our understanding and is inseparable from the ending, where the donkey refused to eat food that was a mixture of good and evil.

With his “impressionist” perception, the Maharal catches every minute detail of the story, demonstrating each detail’s wondrous significance and its relation to the central message.

☛ Sharp Perception Reveals Fine Detail

WHAT WAS THE source of the Maharal’s unique “impressionist” perception? Clearly, visual acuity enables the viewer to discern even the very finest details.

And how did the Maharal attain his sharp vision? This is addressed by his assertion (*Gur Aryeh, Devarim 6:7*) that a person must learn in such a manner that the Torah permeates his being, like an acquisition that merges with its owner, becoming part of him. His understanding of what he learns must be sufficiently deep that he fully assimilates it, which is only possible if he absorbs it in its full sharpness and clarity.

The Maharal bases these comments on Chazal’s interpretation of the *pasuk* in *keriyas Shema*, “*V’shinantam l’vanecha* — You shall drill them into your disciples” (*Devarim 6:7*). Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni 840*) relate the word *v’shinantam* to *shanun*, meaning sharp or incisive. The obligation to “drill them into your disciples” thus means “that Torah teachings should be [ready] upon your lips with utter

clarity, so that if someone asks you [something], you should not hesitate, but rather should answer him immediately.” Chazal juxtapose this interpretation to the *pesukim*, “Like arrows in the fighter’s hand, so are the youths (i.e., his disciples)” (*Tehillim* 127:4), and “Your arrows are sharp” (ibid. 45:6), implying similarly that a teacher must convey Torah to his disciples such that they absorb it not fuzzily but clearly, with razor sharpness.

The Maharal explains:

The reason [for this insistence that Torah be imparted with utter clarity] is that a person’s Torah knowledge must [be able to] be called “*his* Torah,” as it says, “He contemplates his (i.e., his own) Torah day and night” (*Tehillim* 1:2), and it is also referred to as his acquisition, as it says, “For I have given you a good acquisition” (*Mishlei* 4:2). But if a person hesitates when repeating them (i.e., *divrei Torah*), it cannot be called “*his* Torah” or his acquisition, for something can only be termed a person’s acquisition if it is his own, but if he stumbles when saying over Torah and is unsure of himself, it is not wholly his.*

According to the Maharal, acquiring Torah by definition means that it becomes carved into a person’s heart such that he is every bit as proficient in its understanding and experiences it with the same immediacy as he does every other realm of his life.

How is a student’s successful acquisition of Torah — such that he is fully proficient in it — connected to sharp discernment and an eye for fine detail?

* The Maharal then goes on to explain how children ought to be taught and how Torah instruction ought to be provided, noting, “I shall mention something of these matters, even though this is not the place for doing so, for my patience is at an end upon witnessing how Torah’s ways are being spoiled [by its being taught in a way] such that if he [i.e., the student] is asked about Torah — he is at a loss to respond.”

☛ Sharp Perception as a Consequence of a Person's Merging Fully with His Torah

IN *PACHAD YITZCHAK* (Shavuot 24), Rav Yitzchak Hutner explains that as a person succeeds in making Torah part of himself, he heightens the clarity and sharpness of his Torah knowledge to the same degree with which he experiences every other aspect of his life. As significant as every detail is for him and as familiar as he is with it, as sharply as he discerns every fine distinction, as thorough and methodical his acquaintance with his every circumstance — so will be the quality of his Torah knowledge, provided it is every bit a part of him and as immediate for him as every other aspect of his life. According to Rav Hutner, the word Chazal use for hesitation, “*gimgum*,” is composed of *gam v'gam* (lit. also and also), denoting ambivalence and wavering between two possibilities without being able to resolve one's doubts, whereas thorough Torah knowledge that a person has fully assimilated into his being renders him unequivocal and sharp as a razor.

In Rav Hutner's words:

Chidud (sharpness) and *chad* (one) share the same root, for a sharp knife becomes as one with the substance it is cutting through, remaining flush with the interface as it slices straight and clean. If the knife is blunt, though, it and the substance remain separate entities; instead of cutting cleanly, it shifts from side to side. It wavers, it is *me-gamgeim*, for the word *gimgum* simply comprises the word *gam* twice, i.e., this as well as that. When *divrei Torah* are sharp upon your lips and you are not ambivalent in conveying them, this demonstrates that the Torah is thoroughly absorbed within you. By virtue of becoming one with the Torah, *divrei Torah* are clear upon your lips. Thanks to having become integrated into you, they are sharply focused.

☛ Vitality Sharpens Perception and Discernment of Fine Detail

THE VITALITY AND excitement of the study process whereby Torah becomes a person's acquisition — to the point where he and his

Torah knowledge become one — sharpen his focus and perception, enabling him to catch every nuance. When a person “lives” the topic he is studying, he remembers it and remains familiar with its every detail. Like any experience that he fully “lives” through, it becomes seared into his memory, with every detail noted and assigned its position and relative importance in the greater picture. When a person recounts some exciting experience, he paints a detailed, vivid picture, omitting no detail, for everything has importance for him and occupies its special place in the overall scheme. He grasps how some early detail eventually changed the entire outcome. The Maharal thus shows that keen perception is imparted by study on a level that inculcates Torah into the student’s very life, and by his thorough assimilation of the Torah, he learns to the point where it is fully his, inseparable from him. This perception facilitates “mosaic” vision, in which every detail is apparent and is significant in the overall scheme. This “impressionistic” view reveals a spectacular, multicolored, and highly original vista that leaves the observer wondering how he can have repeatedly passed by this very topic without noticing its beauty. This is what the Maharal’s Torah achieves.

☛ Originality

BUT THERE IS much more.

The Maharal’s Torah is indeed blessed with this spectacular “mosaic” perception in which every detail plays a role in yielding the overall panorama and can unexpectedly trigger an extensive discussion that helps build part of a fundamental edifice of correct thinking, encompassing the entire topic. However, this is by no means all. The beauty of the Maharal’s elucidations lies in their depth, their novelty, and their extraordinary originality.

In *Gur Aryeh* (*Devarim* 26:3), the Maharal explains the unique quality of toiling in Torah study, which yields innovative insight. We can add that anyone who invests deep thought into some Torah topic arrives at a fresh, original insight that is his alone. In *Pachad Yitzchak*

(Shavuos 17), Rav Hutner cites an example from halachah to explain this idea.

☞ Wisdom Has No Market Value

THE HALACHAH IS that if someone demands an exorbitant price for agreeing to sell medicine to a patient, the patient need only pay the medicine's market value. Any consent on the patient's part to pay more than that was extracted under duress and is therefore not binding. However, if a doctor demands an exorbitant sum for treating the patient, the latter must pay the agreed upon sum. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 336:3) states the reason for this difference: "[When treating a patient,] the doctor has sold him his wisdom (i.e., expertise), which is priceless." In other words, whereas a product has a market value — because many people produce similar or identical items that compete for the buyer's patronage — this is not true of individual expertise. The results of people's study and training are not shared uniformly, but rather are unique to each individual. Human wisdom is characterized by originality and innovation and is thus an area in which a person expresses his own uniqueness.

Novel insight is yielded by profound, reflective study. Every person has his own way of thinking deeply and the novel Torah insights that only he can access. In our Shabbos and festival prayers, we ask, "Grant [us] our portion in Your Torah," which can be understood as a request that each and every one of us should merit attaining his own, unique understanding of Torah. In-depth study creates new and unique insights that didn't exist before, bringing to light unrevealed aspects of a topic. Toil is a precondition for creativity. Toiling in Torah study doesn't mean searching hard for sources. There is no qualitative difference between Torah and any other branch of knowledge in regard to seeking information. Searching for a source is akin to searching for a *lulav*. By contrast, toiling in Torah demands deep thought, mental exertion, delving to ever deeper levels of comprehension — and ultimately, gaining novel insight and understanding.

☛ The Maharal's Torah

STUDYING THE WEEKLY *parshah* and the lessons of the festivals through the lens of the Maharal's teachings opens our eyes to a new, altogether different panorama that is startling in its originality and spectacular in its beauty. The new light it sheds on the *parshah* enables us to uncover profound, splendid, unexpected, and novel layers of meaning. A *parshah* examined in light of the Maharal's teachings is an altogether different *parshah*; it is one experience before studying the Maharal and an entirely different experience after having done so, having been exposed to a new, clear light that illuminates the entire *parshah* and its myriad details, yielding novel clarity and comprehension. This book represents an attempt to provide the reader with a glimpse of this wondrous illumination, which will make Shabbos truly pleasurable, be a source of real festival joy, and provide a vivid and exciting learning experience!

☛ My Elder Brother

THIS *SEFER* IS dedicated to my late brother, R' Yaakov ben R' Moshe Aharon Weinroth ז"ל, who was my superior in every respect. Yaakov was a true genius who was gifted with an "impressionistic" perception and was a profound, innovative, and original thinker. He was the leading defense attorney of his day; if you missed hearing Yaakov arguing a case, you've never heard a great attorney in your life. When Yaakov took up a defendant's cause, his attention would suddenly be drawn to seemingly insignificant details that — as he showed — actually changed the entire picture. He was able to do this because he fully identified with other people's suffering. His personal identification with the defendant afforded him an "impressionistic" view that enabled him to see things in a different, true, and original way. A person's originality attests to the independent flow of his spirit, like a burgeoning wellspring, that allows him to see that which others cannot. The source of this flow of originality is his robust vitality

and his special “mosaic” perception. It is my prayer that the Torah arising from the study of this *sefer* will provide merit and elevation for his soul.

Avraham Weinroth
Elul 5782 / 2022

Maharal
on the
Torah

Bereishis

The Earth's Sin and Man's Sin

☛ The Earth's Sin

WE TEND TO think of Adam Harishon's sin with the *eitz hada'as* as being the first sin. The truth is, though, that there was an earlier sin. The earth, from which man was created, did not obey *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* instructions.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded, "The ground shall be covered with vegetation: plants that reproduce by seed, tree-fruits (*eitz pri*) that yield fruit (*oseh pri*) according to their kind, whose seed is contained within it [to reproduce] on the ground" (*Bereishis* 1:11). Rashi explains that *eitz pri* means, "The wood should taste the same as the fruit," i.e., the tree itself should also be fruit.

The earth only partly complied, as the Torah tells us: "The ground sprouted vegetation: plants that reproduce by seed...and trees that produce fruit (*v'eitz oseh pri*)..." (*ibid.* 1:12). While the trees produced fruit, their wood did not have the taste of the fruit. In other words, just one of Hashem's two stipulations that (1) the tree should produce fruit, and (2) the wood should taste like the fruit was fulfilled. Consequently, as Rashi (*ibid.*) points out, "When man was cursed on account of his sin, the earth was also punished and cursed."

Addressing Adam following his sin of eating from the *eitz hada'as* (*ibid.* 3:17–19), *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, "Since you heeded your wife's voice and ate from the tree about which

I commanded you saying, ‘Do not eat from it,’ the earth shall be cursed on your account; through toil shall you eat it[s produce] throughout your life. It will sprout thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread through the sweat of your brow...” Rashi (ibid.) explains that the ground’s vigor was compromised as a result of this curse, and it thereafter sprouted harmful and troublesome growths.

☛ Understanding the Significance of the Earth’s Sin

THIS ACCOUNT GIVES rise to several major questions:

1. How are we to understand ascribing sin to an inanimate object or substance? Does it possess the free will necessary for sinning?
2. What is the significance of the tree itself tasting as good as its fruit? Isn’t it enough that the fruit be edible?
3. If this was important, why didn’t the earth comply with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s* instructions?
4. Rashi’s attribution of the earth’s curse to its own sin (1:12) seems to contradict his explanation of Hashem’s words to Adam, “The earth will be cursed *on your account*,” where Rashi writes: “This is comparable to a person who falls into bad ways, whereupon people curse the parent who nurtured him.” This analogy implies that the earth was punished for its role as the source of man’s sin, because he was created from it — just as a person’s crimes tend to be attributed to the parents who raised him — rather than on account of its own failing to produce trees tasting like their fruit.
5. Why did the earth receive its punishment only when Adam was punished — why not immediately?

It seems clear that man’s sin with the *eitz hada’as* and the earth’s sin are somehow connected. What is this connection, and what is its significance?

☛ The *Eitz HaDa'as* Was Wheat

A BEGINNING IS an auspicious time. The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) tells us that special mitzvos are to be performed at the onset of seasons of bounty in order to invoke Hashem's blessing. On Pesach, which marks the beginning of the ripening of the grain harvest, the *Korban Omer* is brought; "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'Bring the *Omer* before Me on Pesach so that the produce in the fields should be blessed.'"

On Shavuos, which marks the beginning of the ripening of the tree fruits, the *shtei halechem* are offered: "Since Atzeres (i.e., Shavuos) is the season of the tree fruits, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'Bring the *shtei halechem* before Me on Atzeres so that you experience blessing in the tree fruits.'" On Sukkos, which marks the beginning of the rainy season, water is poured onto the altar: "Why did the Torah tell us to pour water on Sukkos? *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'Pour water before Me on Chag (i.e., Sukkos) so that the year's rains should be blessed.'"

We see that on Shavuos, an offering prepared from wheat is brought in order to invoke blessing in the tree fruits. But what is the connection between wheat, which grows directly from the ground, and fruits, which grow on trees?

Rashi provides us with the answer — wheat is considered a tree. According to one opinion (*Sanhedrin* 70b) regarding the identity of the *eitz hada'as*, "The tree from which Adam Harishon ate was wheat, because a child doesn't learn how to call to his parents until he tastes grain." Rashi (ibid.) explains that its name, *eitz hada'as* (Tree of Understanding), indicates that human intellect develops and matures through the consumption of its yield.

But how can a grain that grows from the ground be termed a tree?

☛ Adam's Sin Brought the Tree's Fruit Down to Ground Level

CHAZAL ASK THIS very question (*Bereishis Rabbah* 15:7) and answer that at that time, wheat stalks "towered like cedars." At the time

of Creation, wheat reached the same height as cedar trees, but this changed with Adam's sin. Prior to the sin, there were no earth fruits; only trees — not fruits — grew from the earth. Adam's sin caused the earth to produce fruits of its own as well as trees. What is the deeper significance of this change?

☛ Due to Its Physicality, the Earth Prevents the Attainment of Perfection

THE MAHARAL (*GUR ARYEH*, *Bamidbar* 18:15) explains that the concept of *cheit*, sin, denotes *hachata'ah*, missing the mark, in which sense it is used in *Shoftim* 20:16, “aiming his stone within a hairsbreadth, without missing.” Another example of this usage: Bas Sheva told David Hamelech that were Adoniyahu to succeed him [instead of her son Shlomo, as he had promised her], “I and my son Shlomo will be *chata'im*, lacking” (*Melachim I*, 1:21). Bas Sheva and Shlomo had not sinned in any sense; she meant that they would be missing out, i.e., deprived of what was rightfully theirs.

Accordingly, the Maharal (*Gur Aryeh*, *Bereishis* 1:11) explains that the ground didn't sin in the sense of willfully deciding to disobey Hashem's command, but rather, being wholly material, it was inherently lacking, producing a physical and thus by definition imperfect yield.

This was a direct consequence of its lack of free will. It was created consisting of a substance and nature that stand in contradiction to Heavenly perfection. As the Maharal puts it, “On account of its imperfection, it always falls short of perfection.” In other words, due to its physical nature — the polar opposite of spiritual perfection — it is incapable of bringing forth a complete, perfect yield. This deficiency found expression in the growth of trees that did not taste the same as their fruit.

However, we still need to understand in what sense a tree that itself tastes like its fruit represents perfection.

☛ The Earth's "Sin" — According to the Fruit Independent Distinction

ACCORDING TO THE Maharal, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* instructed the tree and the fruit to have the same taste in order to maintain the correct relationship between provider (the tree) and recipient (the fruit), avoiding a situation where the latter rises up against the former and assumes greater importance. Perfection thus lies in the fruit's negation before its maker, i.e., the tree. When the fruit has taste that the tree lacks, this sends the opposite message: its superiority lends it self-importance, feeding an illusory sense of independent existence. This disconnection in the fruit's relationship with the tree — cutting off its reliance upon its source and origin — introduces gross imperfection. In human terms, self-aggrandizement and ego cultivation through disconnection from one's roots is damaging, not beneficial.

☛ Perfection Arrives through Self-Negation and by Maintaining the Correct Relationship between Recipient and Provider

IN THE MAHARAL'S words: "Had the earth not placed a wedge between the fruit and the tree, the fruit, which is the recipient and perforce deficient, would have remained secondary in importance to the principal [player], the tree. Now, though, the fruit was no longer secondary — herein lay the earth's 'sin' [i.e., its imperfection; its falling short of the mark]."

The ground produced a fruit that elevated itself higher than the trunk, failing to negate itself to the tree from which it grew. It developed an independent, autonomous identity, adopting an inappropriate attitude to the rock from which it was hewn. This falls short of perfection; this exaggerated sense of self and of self-worth is the ever-present shortcoming of the material realm in relation to the spiritual realm.

☞ The Difference between Tree Fruit and Ground Fruit

THE GROUND'S IMPERFECTION, evident in yielding produce superior to its source, is more acute in regard to tree fruit than it is in regard to ground fruit. While it behooves a tree fruit to remain connected to and reliant upon the source of its vitality, ground fruit has no corresponding entity that nurtures it, no parent plant that cradles it in its embrace in its earliest stages. Although the ground is a source of nutrients and a matrix for growth, ground fruits develop directly from a rotting seed, whereas tree fruits have a recognizable “parent” that provides for them.

In this connection, it is apt to quote the Ritva's remarks (in his commentary to *Rosh Hashanah* 12b) concerning the differing stages of development at which tree fruits and ground fruits are considered to be formed. [The time of year when these stages are reached determines to which year's produce they are assigned for purposes of *ma'aser*.] Whereas tree fruits are considered formed as soon as the tree produces buds, ground fruits are only considered formed when they reach a third of their full size.

The Ritva explains that a tree draws from the ground everything it needs in order to produce its fruit, storing this bounty within it. Only after its roots and trunk have absorbed all the vital nutrients necessary for its fruits does it begin to produce them. The tree thus blossoms and buds only after everything is ready. When the buds appear, the fruit is already present, stored as potential within the tree. Its subsequent development is merely the realization of that potential. Ground fruit, however, is a child of the moment; its growth depends on its constant nourishment by the ground. It never exists “in potential” — its growth is an ongoing, dynamic process. It is therefore not considered to have come into existence until it has attained a more advanced stage in its development.

☛ Wheat Became a Ground Fruit, Detached from Its Source

THIS INSIGHT ALLOWS us to fully understand Rashi's comments that although the earth itself sinned, it was cursed only because of Adam's sin. The loss of wheat's status as a tree and its "demotion" to being a ground fruit symbolizes a recipient's disconnection from the source of its vitality and the creation of new sense of a detached "self." This was the essence of the sin of the *eitz hada'as*.

Since the ground's "sin" in yielding trees whose fruits were superior to their source presaged Adam's similar sin, its punishment was delayed until Adam was punished for detaching himself from his Source.

☛ The Sin of the Tree of Understanding

THE GROUND'S "SIN" and the sin of the *eitz hada'as* were manifestations of the identical shortcoming. Prior to sinning, despite having been formed from the earth, Adam was utterly subservient to his Heavenly Source. The soul that had been placed within him suffused his entire being; there was no disconnect whatsoever between him and the constant stream of spiritual bounty that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bestowed upon him.

Upon sinning, Adam became detached from the Heavenly Source of his vitality, becoming an independent entity with both a physical and a spiritual aspect, influenced and controlled by one no less than the other. Good and evil are engaged in a constant struggle within him and are intimately acquainted, being in constant contact at the interface of his physical and spiritual components. The term *da'as* is used in the sense that intimate acquaintance refers to direct, unimpeded contact, as in the *pasuk*, "Adam knew his wife, Chavah" (*Bereishis* 4:1).

This independent sense of "self" with its physical element, a result of Adam's detachment from his spiritual source and moorings, is the root of every sin that man commits.

Thus, man fell short of perfection and assumed a physical nature disconnected from his Source in the very same way that the earth, due to its material nature, fell short of perfection by producing imperfect fruit disconnected from its source.

☛ This Sin Brought Man's Physical Sense of Self into Being

IN HIS COMMENTARY to *Bereishis* 2:9, the Ramban provides further insight into this understanding of Adam's sin. According to the Ramban, prior to sinning "Adam *instinctively* behaved in an appropriate manner, as did the heavens and all their constellations — honest workers whose actions are true and who never veer from their designated function — whose doings contain no element of either love or hatred." Adam "neither chose this nor spurned that; he ate without experiencing taste and listened without enjoying song."

In other words, man's decisions were purely intellectual, lacking any element of personal preference springing from a desire for physical pleasure. Eating from the *eitz hada'as* brought man's physical sense of self into being. The Ramban explains that the term "*da'as* (understanding)" in the words "*eitz hada'as tov va'ra* (the Tree of Understanding Good and Evil)" denotes independent intent. He notes the term's use in this sense by Chazal (*Pesachim* 6a) regarding the obligation to search one's house for *chametz* before setting out to travel in advance of Pesach when "*da'ato lachzor* (he intends to return)" during Pesach — his intention is synonymous with his desire.

This sin brought into being man's physical "self" with his desire for pleasure. His choices between good and evil became subject to considerations of benefit and enjoyment rather than purely intellectual, ethical, and moral concerns. Henceforth, man was biased, and his choices between good and evil were obscured by partiality. He is more than capable of declaring evil good and the opposite — simply

because physical desire misleads him into believing it is so. His sense of self with its physical agenda now became a factor in his “decisions for or against, for good or for evil.”

Man’s personal bias springs from his uncoupling from his Spiritual Source into which he had been utterly subsumed prior to his sin.

☛ Man’s Sin and the Ground’s Sin

WE CAN NOW appreciate why the ground was cursed after man sinned. These two sins were not concurrent yet unrelated events. They represent the selfsame phenomenon of a recipient’s detachment from its provider.

As we have seen, Rashi explains the confluence of the two sins’ punishments as being “comparable to a person who falls into bad ways, whereupon people curse the parent who nurtured him.” The Maharal explains this as follows: “Because man was created from the earth and it was the cause of his sin, for the ground is physical, as it says, ‘For you are dust, and to dust you shall revert’ (ibid. 3:19), and [possessing] a physical element is the cause of sin.”

One’s sense of independent self — which contains within it a focus on pleasure-seeking — represents evil’s interface with good, with the former invading man’s very being with its insatiable desire for physical gratification. The primordial sin was the failure to attain perfection due to a physical entity’s adoption of its own independent identity and its reluctance to be subservient to spiritual existence. This was both man’s sin and the ground’s sin. Its ultimate rectification will be achieved by negating the self consequence of the physical self and aspiring for spiritual perfection.

Noach

The *Teivah* Was a Microcosm of This World

☛ Why Record the Measurements of the *Teivah*?

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU was poised to destroy the world, and its sole remnant would be Noach and those with him. To facilitate their survival, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commanded Noach to build a *teivah*, conveying detailed instructions for its construction.

The Torah tells us: “Make for yourself a *teivah* of *gofer* wood — you shall make the *teivah* with compartments — and you shall coat it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the *teivah* shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall provide light for the *teivah* and taper [the roof] until it is one cubit across at the top and position the entrance of the *teivah* at its side. You shall make it with a lowest, a second, and a third level” (*Bereishis* 6:14–16).

The level of detail into which the Torah enters is puzzling in several respects:

1. Although the *teivah* physically protected its occupants, their survival inside it was altogether miraculous. Under normal conditions, a *teivah* of that size could not possibly hold (as Chazal in *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* tell us it did) three hundred and sixty-six species of domesticated animals, three hundred

and sixty-six species of birds, and three hundred and sixty-six species of creeping creatures, as well as every kind of wild animal, among them huge creatures such as elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, bears, etc. Containing all the members of such a passenger list as well as an entire year's supply of food for them all could only have been possible through a miracle. Since the *teivah's* mission was miraculous in any case, surely the miracle could have taken place whatever the *teivah's* size. Why then did Hashem provide Noach with such detailed and precise instructions for the *teivah's* construction?

2. What lessons are we supposed to learn today from the *teivah's* specifications? Why does the Torah see fit to convey every detail of the means of Noach's rescue to all future generations?
3. Miracles aside, the *teivah's* division seems to have been grossly imbalanced, with all the animals crowded together on one level, while a few people — four couples in all — occupied another entire level.

Moreover, Rashi (*Bereishis* 5:32) explains that the reason Noach had no offspring until he was five hundred years old was because "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'If they are evildoers, they will be destroyed by the flood, causing this tzaddik to suffer, and if they are righteous, I will trouble him with building many *teivos*.'"

Why would extra *teivos* have been necessary if Noach had more offspring? If he had another ten children, couldn't a level of the *teivah* that was large enough to hold all the living creatures in the world have held eighteen people rather than eight? The precision in the size and division of the *teivah* needs to be explained.

☞ Why Did the *Teivah* Take So Long to Build?

NOACH NEEDED TO be particular not only about the *teivah's* size, but also about how he built it. It was a very long project. He didn't

take premade cedar beams to build it. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Noach* 5) tells us, “When the Generation of the Flood failed to repent, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Noach, ‘Make for yourself a *teivah* of *gofer* wood.’ Noach arose, repented, and planted cedars ... which he watered, and they grew.”

Preparing the *teivah* was thus a very drawn-out process that kept Noach busy for a hundred and twenty years. Not only needn’t it have taken so long, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* could have rescued him without his going to all that trouble, for “Hashem’s salvation arrives in the blink of an eye.” This question is asked by Rashi (on *Bereishis* 6:14), who writes, “Many avenues of rescue are available to Him, so why did He trouble him with this construction?”

Rashi explains that the *teivah*’s lengthy construction was “so that the members of the Generation of the Flood would see him busy with it for a hundred and twenty years and ask him, ‘What is this for?’ and he would tell them, ‘*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is going to bring a flood upon the world’ — perhaps they would repent.”

The reason the building took so long was so that people would repent. But how likely was it that the sight of one person building a huge *teivah* would lead them to worry about a flood and repent? And how did the long duration of the building help? If anything, hearing a person giving dire warnings for a hundred and twenty years does away with any chance of people’s heeding him, for throughout the long years he spent warning them, nothing happened. Why then did Noach have to spend a hundred and twenty years building the *teivah*?

☛ Were Noach’s Efforts in Vain?

IF THE SOLE purpose of Noach’s century-plus building marathon was to arouse his contemporaries to repent, it seems to have failed — but was that its only goal?

We see in the Midrash that the *teivah* changed Noach himself, refining and purifying him. The Midrash comments on the *pasuk*, “You shall make the *teivah* with *kinim* (compartments)” that “Just as a *kein*

(a pair of birds that builds a compartment-like nest together) purifies a leper, so the *teivah* purifies you” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 31:9). The *teivah* is likened here to the *kein*, the nest or pair of birds that a leper brings on the day he becomes pure (see *Vayikra* 14:1–7).

Thus, although the toil he invested in building the *teivah* didn’t help the rest of his generation, it helped rectify Noach himself. Was this the purpose of his hundred and twenty years of building? And what was it about the *teivah* that brought about Noach’s correction? In what respect did this “complete tzaddik” (*Bereishis* 6:9) need to improve?

☛ What Is Significant about the *Teivah*’s Source of Light?

SO SIGNIFICANT ARE the details of the *teivah*’s construction that Chazal debate how to understand them. On the *pasuk*, “You shall provide light for the *teivah*” the Midrash brings the following disagreement regarding the nature of this light: “Rabbi Abba bar Cahana said — it means a window. Rabbi Levi said — it means a pearl” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 31:11). Explaining the second opinion, the Midrash continues, “Throughout the twelve months that Noach spent in the *teivah*, he needed neither the sun’s light by day nor the moon’s light by night, for he had a pearl that he hung in the *teivah*. When it dimmed, he knew it was day, and when it brightened, he knew it was night.”

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal raises several difficulties with this Midrash:

Why was this new, wondrous miracle necessary when the *teivah* already had a window from which Noach dispatched both the raven and the dove after the floodwaters had receded, as stated clearly by the *pasuk*, “It was after forty days that Noach opened the window of the *teivah* that he had made. He sent forth the raven...” (ibid. 8:6)?

Window aside, why was any miraculous light source necessary? Why not make do with an ordinary candle or lamp?

And above all, in his writings the Maharal establishes the principle that “When it comes to significant events, there is no happenstance.” In other words, if the Torah informs us, for example, of the particular day of the week on which the Torah was given, this detail must be significant in grasping the essence of the entire event. Why is it necessary for us to know the *teivah*’s source of light?

☛ A Floating Microcosm of the World

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal provides us with a key to gaining profound understanding of the *teivah*’s significance.

The *teivah* was much more than a type of sophisticated lifeboat designed to protect Noach and his family from the floodwaters. It was built to be a tiny, compact microcosm of both the world whose destruction it outlived and of the future world that its passengers would rebuild. We encounter this idea of successive worlds in the Midrash that notes that Noach’s name is mentioned three times in the opening *pasuk* of the *parshah*: “These are the descendents of Noach — Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noach followed G-d’s ways” (ibid. 6:9). The Midrash explains that Noach witnessed three worlds: a settled world, a world destroyed, and then another settled world. The *teivah* was thus an entire, self-contained world. There was one world that existed before the Flood, another world that developed after it, while during the Flood there was the *teivah*, which was a microcosm of the world.

☛ The Divine Creative Energies Were Preserved in the *Teivah*

IN FACT, THE *teivah* had to be a microcosm of the world in order to facilitate the preservation of the Divine creative energies that sustain the world. The new world that was created after the Flood drew its vitality from G-d’s one-time act of Creation through His utterances during the Six Days of Creation. These Divine creative

energies did not disappear with the arrival of the Flood and the world's destruction; the very same Divine creative energies that sustained every moment of the pre-Flood world's existence continued unabated throughout and were immediately active in building and sustaining every moment of the post-Flood world's existence. There had to be some means of preserving these energies, some physical vessel in which they could be active and manifest themselves until the time arrived for the new world to develop.

Throughout this period, these Divine creative energies continued operating within the microcosm of the world that Noach's *teivah* represented.

☞ A Microcosm of the World Needs a Parallel Light Source to the Heavenly Bodies

THE IDEA THAT the *teivah* parallels the entire world explains its need for an independent light source. The Maharal explains: "In order that it should not lack light, he affixed a stone in it that provided them with illumination, so that it would completely resemble the world as a whole. If Noach wanted to use the light of a lamp, he was allowed to do so, but the Torah commanded that this [pearl] should be in it for the aforementioned reason — affixed in it were stones resembling the sun, moon, and heavenly bodies."

During the Flood, the Divine creative energies were not channeled into the regular operation of the heavenly bodies. This was revealed to Noach after he left the *teivah* when Hashem told him, "As long as the earth exists, the sowing season and harvest season, the cold season and hot season, summer and winter, day and night will not cease" (ibid. 8:22). From here, Chazal derive that "The constellations did not function throughout those twelve months" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 25).

In other words, the heavenly bodies did not operate during the Flood. There is even an opinion that there was no summer and no winter during the year of the Flood. If the heavenly bodies are

inactive, where and how did their Divine creative energies manifest themselves? The answer, as we have seen, is in the *teivah*'s light source — the luminous pearl that remained dim for part of the day and brightened during the other part in order to distinguish between day and night.

Noach indeed had lamps and a window, but he was commanded to install a pearl as well so that there would be a complete parallel between the *teivah*-world and the pre-*teivah* world with its heavenly bodies in the sky.

☛ The *Teivah*'s Details

Parallel the Features of the World

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS the detailed instructions for the *teivah*'s construction in light of this idea, stressing the significance of each detail, which corresponded to some feature of the world that preceded the *teivah* and the world that was to follow it.

Our world is sustained by sublime, Divine creative energies that are channeled to flow to the finest details of Creation. The parallel between the physical world and the *teivah* therefore had to include corresponding details to express the components of these energies. Thus, no detail of the *teivah* was incidental; each one held profound significance, mirroring the totality of the world's metaphysical structure.

☛ Details That Mirror Fundamentals of Creation

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS: "It appears to me that the Torah set out the *teivah*'s construction with wisdom so that it should perfectly parallel the world as a whole. It therefore had 'a lowest, a second, and a third level,' just as the world itself is three worlds."

In other words, just as our world exists on three levels, which are known as *beriah* (creation), *yetzirah* (formation), and *asiyah* (action), the *teivah* too had three levels in the form of its three floors. The same progression that exists in our world between the three levels

of existence — the most sublime one being altogether spiritually elevated and the lowest being distanced from its spiritual source and consequently coarse and materialistic — was reflected in the progression of the *teivah*'s three floors. This is why the top floor was designated solely for people, on account of their distinction. The middle floor was designated for living creatures in general, while the lowest floor was reserved for the world's basest physical needs. These particulars reflect no practical, functional necessity; eight people did not require so much living space. Rather, every feature of the *teivah*'s construction arose from its role in preserving and maintaining the Divine creative energies that would later find expression in the post-Flood world.

We now understand that had Noach's family been larger, the *teivah*'s precise design and layout would have to be duplicated for them, as stated by Rashi.

In line with this principle, the Maharal explains (in his work *Ohr Chadash*) why the *teivah* had to be fifty *amos* wide. He cites the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Esther 1056*) where we are told that Haman sought to hang Mordechai on gallows that were precisely fifty *amos* high because this was the length of the piece of wood that his son Parshandasa had taken from the *teivah*. The significance of this number in the context of the *teivah*, explains the Maharal, is that "The world extends to forty-nine (gateways), and the entire world was washed away during the Flood and derived its salvation from the fiftieth gateway, which is 'above the world.' Therefore, Noach's *teivah* was fifty *amos* [wide]."

☛ The *Teivah* Perfected Noach

NOACH TOILED FOR a hundred and twenty years at building a miniature world — within which Hashem preserved the Divine creative energies that He implanted in His world — and then toiled for a further year to sustain it, working from morning to night to feed and tend the living creatures it held.

Among these Divine energies is the fundamental idea that “The world shall be built through kindness [i.e., selfless giving]” (*Tehillim* 89:3). The miniature world of the *teivah* was founded upon and sustained by Noach’s selfless giving as he worked long hours to feed and care for all the different living things in his charge. Through the *teivah*’s construction and his sojourn there, Noach attained perfection, for he thereby became a full partner in building the miniature world of the *teivah* and in the kindness upon which it was founded. A human being can achieve no greater rectification.

Noach didn’t simply construct a *teivah*. He built a world in miniature, parallel in its essence and workings to the physical world that preceded the Flood and the one that would come after the Flood. Within the miniature world of the *teivah* were secreted the Divine creative energies through which the post-Flood world would be rebuilt. This is why we encounter such particularity regarding the *teivah*’s specifications and its light source. Among these energies was Divine kindness. So, while Noach toiled selflessly day and night in the *teivah*, caring for the animals without respite, he was rectifying the world — and thereby achieved his own personal rectification.

Lech Lecha

Avraham's Shield

☛ Protecting Avraham from the Loss of His Merits

HASHEM REVEALED HIMSELF to Avraham following the battle between the kings in the Valley of Sodom. As the Torah tells us, “After these events the word of Hashem addressed Avram in a vision saying, ‘Avram, do not be afraid, *anochi magen lach* — I will act as protection for you — your reward is very great” (*Bereishis* 15:1).

Rashi explains: “After these events’ — after this miracle of having killed the kings, Avram was worried and said, ‘Perhaps I have received the reward for all my righteous deeds?’ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* therefore told him, ‘Avram, do not be afraid, I will protect you from any punishment; you will not be punished for all those people that you killed. And as for worrying about having received your reward, your reward is very great.’”

According to Rashi, Hashem told Avram that He would protect him in order to calm Avram's concern that he might be punished, while the promise, “Your reward is very great” communicated to Avram that even if some of his merits were consumed by the miracles he experienced, he still possessed many merits, and great reward awaited him in the next world.

☛ *Magen* Means for Free

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 6), the Maharal offers a novel explanation of “*Anochi magen lach*.” He interprets the word *magen* not as a

shield or as protection from punishment, but rather as “free,” as we find in the *pasuk*, “She shall go out for free, gratis” (*Shemos* 21:11), where Onkelos translates *chinam* (for free) as “*magan*.” We find similarly that the Gemara in *Bava Kama* (85a) states, “*Asya b’magen, magen shavya* — A doctor who heals for nothing (i.e., without charging) is worth nothing.”

So, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Avram “*Anochi magen lach*,” He meant that He had awarded him the miracles for free, and thus, Hashem told him, “Your reward is very great,” without any deduction from your merits.

☛ How Can Reward Be Free?

HOW, ACCORDING TO the Maharal, are we to understand Avraham receiving these miracles “at no cost” when the Gemara (*Shabbos* 32a) establishes a principle that if a person benefits from a miracle, it reduces his merits? When a person merits a miracle, a special Divine intervention to save his life, by definition he “cashes in” his merit, and it no longer awaits him in the World to Come. Reward and punishment are precisely measured. Every good deed a person does yields reward, and every good thing he receives represents some of his reward and thus diminishes his store of merits.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, for example, was sent a gold ingot shaped like a foot to relieve his terrible poverty, but he hurriedly requested that it be withdrawn after seeing in a dream that keeping it would diminish his merits in Gan Eden (*Ta’anis* 25a). How did Avraham being saved in the battle with the kings differ?

The Maharal (*ibid.*) explains: “This is the reward of those who practice kindness — they consume the yield [of their acts of kindness] in this world for free, for their main reward endures for the World to Come. Therefore, his (i.e., Avraham’s) reward was ‘very great’ in the World to Come.”

In other words, there is a class of reward that is given for free in this world, representing yield that doesn’t detract from the principal

that remains in store for the World to Come. As a person who embodied kindness, Hashem applied the Mishnah in *Pe'ah* 1:1 to him: “These are the things whose fruits a person consumes in this world, while the principal endures for the World to Come: honoring parents, practicing kindness, etc.”

The reward for the mitzvah of practicing kindness thus flows into two channels, principal and yield, such that a person receives more than his “investment” — the principal remains in its entirety for the World to Come, undiminished by the yield received in this world “for free.”

The question remains, though: how are we to reconcile these free gifts with the fixed principles of reward and punishment? What makes the mitzvah of practicing kindness special such that receiving reward for it in this world in no way diminishes the reward that waits in the World to Come?

☛ Practicing Kindness to Others Draws Divine Kindness That Ensures the Giver Loses Nothing

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the world’s creation was an outgrowth of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s kindness, as it says, “The world will be built through kindness” (*Tehillim* 89:3). A person who practices kindness attaches himself to the Divine trait through which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world. Just as Divine kindness is a dimension of giving that detracts nothing from the Giver, a person who practices kindness merits — measure for measure — Divine kindness at no loss whatsoever. Besides the reward for his mitzvah, which endures for the World to Come, the giver receives the yield of his kindness while in this world, the purpose of which is to render his giving the sort from which the giver loses nothing.

A person who practices kindness thus consumes the yield of his deeds in this world, while the principal awaits him in the next world, as the Mishnah in *Pe'ah* teaches us.

☛ Avraham's Magen

IN LIGHT OF the above, we understand why Avraham, whose overarching trait was kindness, merited reward that deducted nothing from his merits. Practicing kindness is like a wellspring, which provides ongoing bounty from a source that is never depleted. For all the kindness he did, Avraham merited reward bearing a bountiful yield that detracted nothing from the principal. This is the message Chazal convey with their formulation for the conclusion of the first blessing of every *Shemoneh Esrei*: *baruch atah Hashem magen Avraham*. As our forefather, Avraham implanted his trait of kindness in us, which enables us to access the free reward of practicing kindness in this world.

☛ Kindness That Costs the Giver Nothing Is Obligatory

THE MAHARAL'S COMMENTS imply that unadulterated kindness consists of giving that detracts nothing from the giver and that this is typical of practicing kindness. However, we need to deepen our understanding of this idea. We can appreciate that for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, giving takes nothing away, because His beneficence is boundless and because the concepts of loss and of lack are irrelevant to Him. How does this idea relate to man, though, who draws upon resources that are limited and finite? How does the concept of non-depleting giving apply to human beings?

Moreover, we can apparently speak of true kindness only when a person is prepared to give something up — which he will no longer have — for someone else. If he isn't losing anything thereby, he isn't practicing kindness. In fact, a person who refuses to benefit his fellow Jew when he will lose nothing thereby is considered to be adhering to "the practice of Sodom," and we compel him to give (*Bava Basra* 12b). Giving that costs the giver nothing isn't even considered kindness, but rather is obligatory. What then does the Maharal mean?

☞ Growth and Procreation Are Akin to Creation *Ex Nihilo*

RAV YITZCHAK HUTNER (*Pachad Yitzchak*, Rosh Hashanah, *Kuntress Hachessed 2*) cites the above comments of the Maharal and explains that in our physical world, it indeed generally holds true that quantities of material resources are finite and that channeling a larger amount in one direction comes at the cost of limiting what will be available elsewhere. He notes, however, that there are naturally occurring exceptions. While growth and propagation do involve a degree of depletion at their source, the resultant expansion and proliferation greatly exceed the original loss. Although the seed that yields a tree disintegrates in the ground, the tree that grows as a result of this process far surpasses the lost seed. So it is with human reproduction — the “raw materials” that are used are infinitesimal in comparison to the resultant human being.

Growth and procreation are a direct continuation of the process of the world’s creation, when expansion and proliferation didn’t come at the expense of any existing quantity of matter, because the world was created *ex nihilo* (from nothing).

☞ Kindness Is Also Akin to Creation

IN ACCORDANCE WITH this principle, any process comparable to Creation also has the property of furthering growth and expansion without causing any lack. Since the world was created through kindness — “The world will be built through kindness” — practicing kindness also allows beneficence that doesn’t detract from its source. Any individual who acts as a source of bounty, channeling good to others, is thus part of the process of Creation, and the more he gives, rather than becoming depleted, the more his resources multiply. An example of this can be seen in nursing infants: the more that is given, the more there is to bestow and the greater the supply.

Rav Hutner notes that similarly, “A person engaging in an act of kindness is thereby elevated to the level of the Divine semblance and becomes a propagator of the trait of kindness in the world. His reward is therefore a type of ‘something from nothing,’ whereby the yield of his deeds in no way diminishes the principal. Such a person ‘consumes the yield of his deeds in this world, while the principal awaits him in the next world.’”

☞ In the Physical Realm, Giving Inevitably Involves Giving Something Up

IDEALLY, ANYONE WHO gives and who practices kindness should lose nothing thereby. As Rav Hutner writes, “The inner essence of the trait of practicing kindness, in its intrinsic purity, consists of bestowing good and multiplying that which exists, without any depletion in the bestowing wellspring.”

However, reality seems to contradict this ideal, for we see in practice that a giver lacks what he has given. Although *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* may replenish his loss from some other source, sending him a bonus from His storehouse to make good his lack, right now it appears that giving means losing something.

Rav Hutner presents this paradox as follows: since the world’s creation, no new physical matter is being created from nothing. In our material world, practicing kindness “is grafted together with that which we can sense and feel.” In other words, we must practice kindness amid the physical reality in which we find ourselves and in which there can be no increase in one direction without a corresponding decrease elsewhere. “This grafting of kindness together with physical reality prevents pristine kindness being recognized as a means of facilitating addition without any subtraction,” observes Rav Hutner. Where then is the Maharal’s concept of kindness without depletion apparent?

☛ Torah Study — Increase without Any Decrease

THERE EXISTS ONE realm in which kindness clearly consists of giving without absorbing any loss whatsoever.

This takes place in the realm that remains unadulterated by any constraint of physical substance, where the process of “creating something from nothing” has never ceased.

Where is this realm? It is the realm of Torah study.

☛ Torah of Kindness

RAV HUTNER CONTINUES, “The creative energy within the trait of kindness, whose source is the element of kindness in the primordial act of creation — ‘The world will be built through kindness’ — becomes apparent only when kindness is partnered with wisdom. This is why Torah studied in order to teach it to others is referred to as ‘Torah of kindness.’”

This emerges from the Gemara in *Sukkah* (49b), where Chazal comment on the *pasuk*, “She (i.e., the Torah) opens her mouth in wisdom, and the Torah of kindness is upon her lips” (*Mishlei* 31:26) — “Is there [one] Torah of kindness and [another] Torah that is lacking kindness? [Surely there is only one Torah!] Rather, Torah that a person teaches others is ‘Torah of kindness,’ while Torah [studied] not in order to teach others is ‘Torah lacking kindness.’”

Note that kindness is considered a quality of the Torah itself — the Torah a person teaches is not referred to as “Torah accompanied by kindness,” but rather as Torah whose whole inner content is transformed and now receives the new title of “Torah of kindness.”

If a person reads Torah out aloud to a blind man, he performs two mitzvos simultaneously: Torah study and practicing kindness. However, in this case the Torah and kindness are not bound together to become a single, new entity known as “Torah of kindness.” In contrast, when practicing kindness by teaching

Torah to others, the teacher's bestowal of Torah upon his disciples is not merely an act comprised of both Torah and kindness joined together, but rather is imbued and suffused with kindness. Here, "kindness" is the adjective that captures the essence of such Torah. Such Torah is the embodiment of kindness.

☛ Avraham's *Magen* in Our World

TORAH OF KINDNESS is Torah that a person teaches others. Such Torah represents giving that detracts nothing from the Torah teacher — in fact, it enriches him, deepening and broadening his own wisdom. In *maseches Ta'anis* (7a), we find: "I have learned much from my teachers, but I have learned even more from my colleagues, and I have learned the most from my disciples."

It is regarding Torah taught to others that the definition of kindness as generosity that leads to no depletion is fully apparent. The kindness contained within teaching Torah is wholly spiritual. Kindness in this realm facilitates increase, broadening, and expansion without depleting its bestower. This is the meaning of *magen Avraham* — a free gift from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* through which a giver can bestow benefit and blessing while experiencing no loss or depletion.

Pure, unadulterated kindness results in expansion that in no way depletes its bestower.

Within the constraints of physical reality, where creation *ex nihilo* no longer takes place, anything formed anew necessarily detracts from its former situation. In the realm of Torah study, however, which is wholly spiritual, the physical world cannot prevent kindness from manifesting as expansion that detracts and depletes nothing and no one.

Vayeira

The Natural Consequence of Practicing Kindness

☛ Why Was Avraham Upset by the Absence of Guests Who Needed His Kindness?

PARSHAS VAYEIRA OPENS with an account of Avraham Avinu — who was weak and in pain after having circumcised himself just two days earlier at the age of ninety-nine — sitting “at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day” (*Bereishis* 18:1). Rashi (*ibid.*) explains why the Torah finds it necessary to mention the particularly hot temperature: “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* removed the sun from its sheath so as not to trouble him with visitors, and because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* saw Avraham’s distress that no visitors were coming, He brought the *malachim* to him in human guise.”

We need to understand why Avraham was upset by the fact that nobody was traveling through the desert on such a hot day and in need of hospitality. Did he want people to need his kindness simply so that he could supply it to them? Wasn’t it preferable that people should be well off without needing help from others?

In his work *Emunah U’vitachon* (Chap. 1), the Chazon Ish relates an anecdote that makes this very point:

A certain pious man once invited a wayfarer to be his Shabbos guest; the man’s family eagerly anticipated greeting their guest, for

they too loved having visitors. However, the person in the *beis ha-knesses* who was in charge of allocating guests to the various hosts didn't know about the pious man's invitation, and he sent the guest to another home. The pious man returned home on Friday night without the guest, and his family was disappointed and upset. He told them, "A guest is not like one of our belongings that we trade. My only concern was that our guest should have what he needs and receive a Shabbos meal, but it makes no difference to me whether he receives it from me or from someone else."

Why then was Avraham upset?

☛ Kindness That Avraham Bestowed on His Guests through an Intermediary Was Bestowed on His Descendants through an Intermediary

WHEN AVRAHAM EVENTUALLY noticed three passersby, he addressed them, offering, "Let a little bit of water be brought now, wash your feet, and rest beneath the tree. I shall bring a piece of bread so that you may satisfy yourselves; afterwards you may leave. I ask this of you since you have honored me by visiting your servant" (*ibid. pesukim 4–5*).

Avraham's offer of water was made in the third-person passive — "Let... water be brought" — rather than the first person: "I shall bring water" as was the case with his offer of bread: "I shall bring... bread." Noting that Avraham didn't bring the water himself but sent a member of his household to fetch water from the well, Rashi writes, "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* repaid Avraham's descendants [for this kindness to his guests] through an intermediary, as it says, 'Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock' (*Bamidbar 20:11*)." In other words, Bnei Yisrael received water through an intermediary — Moshe — rather than receiving it directly from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Rashi's comments are based on the Gemara (*Bava Metzia 86b*) that states, "Everything that Avraham did for the ministering *malachim* by himself, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* [later] did for his descendants by Himself;

whatever Avraham did through an intermediary, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* did for his descendants through an intermediary.”

The Gemara then lists Avraham’s kindnesses to the *malachim* and shows how each of them was repaid to his descendants:

“About Avraham it says, ‘And Avraham ran to the cattle’ (*Bereishis* 18:7), and correspondingly, the Torah writes in relation to the quails whose meat Bnei Yisrael ate in the desert, ‘And a wind traveled from Hashem’ (*Bamidbar* 11:31).” They received their meat directly from Hashem.

“About Avraham it says, ‘He took butter and milk’ (*Bereishis* 18:8), and the Torah writes about the manna that Hashem brought down from heaven for Bnei Yisrael, ‘I am going to rain down bread for you from heaven’ (*Shemos* 16:4).

“About Avraham it says, ‘He was standing over them beneath the tree’ (*Bereishis* 18:18), and about his descendants it says, ‘I am going to be standing there before you on the rock’ (*Shemos* 17:6).

“About Avraham it says, ‘Avraham was going with them to accompany them’ (*Bereishis* 18:16), and it says correspondingly, ‘And Hashem went ahead of them by day’ (*Shemos* 13:21).

“In contrast, regarding the water, about which Avraham said, ‘Let a little bit of water be brought,’ i.e., through an intermediary, Bnei Yisrael didn’t receive water in the desert directly from Hashem, but rather through Moshe serving as an intermediary, as it says, ‘You shall strike the rock, and water will come out from it so that the people may drink’ (*Shemos* 17:6).”

☞ Measure for Measure That Extends beyond the Realm of Retribution

NOWHERE IN CHAZAL’S writings do we find that Avraham is censured for having sent an emissary to bring the water.

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal asks, “Why did Avraham do everything by himself except for bringing the water, which he had done through an emissary?” and explains, “The answer appears to be that

one cannot be busy with two things at the same time: fetching bread and bringing water. He therefore did one thing himself and the other through an emissary. Should one ask that in that case, shouldn't he have brought the water himself, because that was brought to them first? It is apparently preferable that anything involving expense should be done by the host himself so that the guests can see that he is doing it wholeheartedly, whereas he did not have to attend himself to the water, which involved no expense."

The question now arises, since Avraham made every possible effort to show his guests hospitality and is in no way considered blameworthy for having sent someone else to bring water because it was in their best interests that the water arrive quickly, the principle of "measure for measure" that the Gemara invokes — which is usually associated with punishment — seems out of place. Why didn't *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Himself give water to Avraham's descendants?

☛ Kindness Evokes Further Kindness That Is Its Mirror Image

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that Hashem repaid Avraham for this mitzvah in the precise manner that Avraham performed it, because "measure for measure" is not relevant only to punishment, but also to the mitzvah of practicing kindness. Why should this be so?

An act of benevolence will automatically yield a harvest of kindness that reflects the original act, just as a fruit reflects the content of the seed that yielded it. In no way is this punishment — it is simply the natural consequence of the original kindness.

The natural consequence of an act of kindness that a person carries out through an emissary is thus further kindness carried out through an emissary — just as an image in a mirror precisely reflects a person's actions — irrespective of having been compelled to act through an emissary for his guests' sake.

The Gemara (*Mo'ed Katan* 28b) tells us similarly that a person who eulogizes others will merit having people eulogize him, a person who

buries others will merit having people attend to his burial, etc. There are certainly people who do not eulogize the dead during their lifetimes because they occupy themselves with other important mitzvos — if they are not eulogized, this is not a punishment, but rather the natural cause and effect process that operates in regard to acts of kindness.

“Therefore,” writes the Maharal, “every act of kindness that Avraham did for the *malachim* was repaid by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to his descendants, who did for them just as Avraham had done, for the fruit that Avraham planted yielded fruit.”

☛ Without Planting There Is No Harvest

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS this in light of the Mishnah’s statement (*Pe’ah* 1:1) that practicing kindness is one of the mitzvos “whose fruits a person consumes in this world, while the principal endures for the World to Come.” In other words, kindness yields reward as a return in this world, while its principal reward remains undiminished for the next world. Thus, a person who does not practice kindness and does not plant will reap no harvest — not as a punishment, but as the natural consequence of his inaction.

☛ Only Actual Deeds Provide a Yield

RAV YITZCHAK HUTNER (*Pachad Yitzchak*, Rosh Hashanah, *Kuntress Hachessed* 3) deduces from the above comments of the Maharal that the mitzvah of practicing kindness has a double consequence:

One is the reward for the mitzvah, like any other mitzvah a person does.

A second consequence is a return kindness to the benefactor as a natural result of his act of kindness.

The difference between these two is straightforward: if a person planned to do an act of kindness and was prevented from doing it. For example, the situation of the intended recipient improved such that he no longer needs that particular favor. Regarding reward for

doing a mitzvah, the operative principle is, “If a person planned on doing a mitzvah, yet circumstances prevented him from doing it, Scripture considers him as having done it” (*Berachos* 6a). But even though the would-be benefactor deserves reward as though he had actually performed the kindness, there will be no automatic yield from his planned act, since in the natural way of things, a person who has not planted cannot harvest.

This explains Avraham’s distress at the absence of any passersby. Nobody needed help, and he himself was thus prevented by circumstances from benefitting others. However, he would thereby lose the yield of acts of kindness, which comes only from actual deeds, not merely from the desire to do kindness.

☛ Feeling Gratitude Is a Natural Consequence of Receiving Kindness

SINCE THE WORLD operates according to the principle that every kind deed naturally yields kindness in return, explains Rav Hutner, we should witness this not only between man and Hashem, but in the realm of interpersonal relations as well.

“The same spiritual principles regulating the trait of kindness that operate in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s* world,” he writes (*ibid.*), “are at work in the human world too.” This is why the recipient of a favor naturally feels a debt of gratitude within his heart to his benefactor, urging him to somehow reciprocate the kindness he received. As Rav Hutner puts it, “When the trait of kindness operates in a normal, healthy manner, it is inevitable that this seed [of gratitude] will sprout offshoots of kindness.”

☛ Ingratitude Requires Actively Uprooting the Trait of Kindness

UNDERSTANDING GRATITUDE ON the part of a recipient to be a natural consequence of the kindness that was shown him leads us to

the conclusion that an ingrate is acting unnaturally. A beneficiary who shows ingratitude, says Rav Hutner, “is tantamount to someone physically uprooting the offshoots of [further] kindness that were planted in his heart.” Showing ingratitude involves actively uprooting the naturally arising feelings of gratitude in one’s heart towards one’s benefactor. Ingratitude is thus not merely passive laziness or the lack of a positive trait. It is an unworthy trait that a person actively implements against the natural order whereby kindness automatically calls forth reciprocal kindness. Therefore, notes Rav Hutner, “Anyone who has merited studying under truly wise scholars knows how seriously they viewed the subject of gratitude; they regarded any person in whose nature they sensed ingratitude as unworthy of being taken seriously.”

☛ An Ingrate Has Corrupted Himself

THIS IS WHY, writes Rav Hutner, ingratitude “is evidence of greater degradation than physically injuring someone else.” True, to physically assault another person is to act contrary to the dictates of kindness, but “an ingrate destroys and attacks the trait of kindness itself — this is akin to an educator who implants the trait of cruelty in his charges.”

While a person who inflicts damage certainly acts wrongly, he has not ruined himself. He can be influenced to realize the error of his ways. On the other hand, by uprooting a worthy trait naturally implanted within him, an ingrate corrupts his very essence.

☛ Ingratitude Amounts to Heresy

THIS IDEA HAS very far-reaching consequences. Chazal teach: “Anyone who denies having received benefit from his colleague is tantamount to denying that he receives benefit from the Creator” (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:8). Since the kindness a person receives naturally arouses feelings of gratitude within him and a desire to reciprocate, a person

who shows ingratitude and refrains from practicing kindness towards a colleague who benefitted him is behaving unnaturally. Not only is he denying the private kindness he has received, he is denying kindness's essential property of fostering natural feelings of gratitude. He denies the existence of the working principle incorporated by the Creator into His creation — “The world will be built through kindness” (*Tehillim* 89:3). The ingrate turns his back on all of this.

☛ What Right Has the Ingrate to Exist?

THERE ARE FURTHER, even more profound implications. Based on the Maharal's comments, Rav Hutner concludes that the purpose of man's entire existence is rooted in gratitude and that an individual who shows ingratitude thereby undermines the basis of his own existence.

One of the fundamental ways of explaining *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* creation of this world focuses on Him being the Ultimate Good Who by definition desires to bestow good on others. The purpose of man's creation was thus to enable the Creator to bestow good on him. The ultimate good is indeed to bask in Hashem's closeness. However, man must earn this closeness and not receive it as an undeserved gift, for accepting reward gratis shames the recipient and is referred to by the *sefarim* that discuss these matters as *nahama d'kisufa*, bread of shame. Man's soul therefore descends into this world within physical “garb” (i.e., his body), thereby exposing him to worldly desires and compelling him to choose between good and evil. Having overcome his physical urges and chosen the path of good, his soul ultimately merits returning to its Creator and basking in His closeness, having squarely earned this privilege rather than being given it as charity.

According to this approach, man was created in order to spare him the shame of receiving “bread of shame.” However, an ingrate has no difficulty in consuming such fare, because taking favors without feeling any compulsion to reciprocate is quite acceptable to him.

He is happy to leave any benefit he receives as a free gift for which he gives nothing in return. Such a person need not have been created for the purpose of sparing him from eating “bread of shame,” for he has no difficulty whatsoever in doing so.

A person who shows ingratitude and is content to receive free favors thereby denies the purpose for which he was created and renders his existence superfluous.

We have seen here that in the way of the world, acts of kindness call forth further acts of kindness.

The message of the *pasuk*, “The world will be built through kindness,” is that built into the world’s natural order is that kindness begets further kindness.

This is a separate and parallel system to that of “measure for measure,” which operates in the realm of reward and punishment. Just as a seed yields fruit as part of the natural order, unrelated to reward and punishment, a seed of kindness yields fruit in kind as a natural consequence.

There are certain automatic consequences of this reality. Firstly, a seed bears fruit only if it actually is sown; intentions, however noble, are insufficient. Although a person who desired with all his heart to perform an act of kindness but was prevented by circumstances from doing so will receive reward for his intention, there will be no natural consequence of an act of kindness, because there was no act. This is why Avraham Avinu was pained at being prevented from performing the mitzvah of providing for wayfarers. By the same token, an act that Avraham was unable to perform for his guests himself naturally yielded an act of kindness performed by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for his descendants indirectly.

A further automatic consequence is that showing ingratitude is to act in an unnatural manner and oppose basic human nature. Behaving in this way diminishes a person’s life force and undermines the basis of his existence. The world occupied by an ingrate is not the world that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created, for in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s world, such a person has no place.

Chayei Sarah

Comeliness and Eternity — Who Deserves These Praises?

✦ A Seven-Year-Old's Beauty in Comparison to That of a Twenty-Year-Old

WITH THE DEATH of Sarah, the Torah sums up her life: “Sarah’s life spanned one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of Sarah’s life” (*Bereishis* 23:1). Why not simply write, “one hundred and twenty-seven years”? Why does the Torah break this number down into hundreds, tens, and units, repeating the word “years” after each number? Rashi explains: “This is why ‘year’ is written with every [number] grouping: to tell you that there is a lesson to be derived from each one on its own. When she was one hundred, she was like a twenty-year-old in terms of sin — just as a twenty-year-old has no sins, for she has not reached the age of liability, so was Sarah at a hundred without sin. And at the age of twenty, she was like a seven-year-old in terms of beauty.”

✦ What Is Noteworthy about Beauty?

WHY IS SARAH’S beauty praised, when in the thirty-first chapter of the book of *Mishlei* — the chapter which, according to Chazal in the *Midrash Tanchuma*, was said by Avraham as a eulogy for Sarah — it is written, “Charm is false and beauty is vanity; a woman who fears G-d, she shall be praised” (*Mishlei* 31:30)?

This question can be asked in many places in *Tanach*, where Scripture apparently finds it appropriate to note a particular individual's beauty. For example, we are told about Rachel, "Rachel's face was beautifully formed and she was of beautiful appearance" (*Bereishis* 29:17). About Yosef it is written, "Yosef was well formed and of fine appearance" (*ibid.* 39:6). Regarding Esther it says, "The girl's face was beautifully formed and of fine appearance" (*Esther* 2:7). And of David it is written, "He was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and of fine appearance" (*Shmuel I*, 16:12).

The *pesukim* point out beauty, and from Chazal it is clear that it is a positive attribute: in *maseches Bava Metzia* (84a), we find, "Rabbi Yochanan said, 'I am the last remnant of the fine-looking inhabitants of Yerushalayim.'" The Gemara mentions that anyone who is interested in apprehending Rabbi Yochanan's beauty should take a silver goblet that has just been finished by the silversmith, when it is gleaming from the flames' reflection, fill it with pomegranate seeds, place the petals of a red rose around its edge, and leave the goblet in the dimly lit area between light and shade. The radiance that emanates from this goblet is something like the beauty and radiance of Rabbi Yochanan's countenance. The Gemara continues by noting that Rav Kahana's beauty was akin to that of Rabbi Abahu, whose beauty was something like that of Yaakov Avinu, whose beauty reflected that of Adam Harishon.

The Gemara (*ibid.*) notes that Rabbi Yochanan would sit near the entrance of the *mikva'os* where the women immersed so that on their way home to their husbands, they would see his countenance, and this would result in their having children as beautiful as he was.

What distinction does beauty confer?

☛ Beauty as a Factor in Moral Failing

THIS QUESTION BECOMES more acute when we find other teachings of Chazal that not only portray beauty as an external, superficial quality without any true value, but even as a stumbling block on the

path of virtue. We find in *maseches Yoma* (35b) that after a person's death, when his soul arrives in the World of Truth and he is asked "Why didn't you occupy yourself with Torah study?" if he attempts to answer, "I was good-looking and was preoccupied with the urgings of my *yetzer hara*," the rejoinder will be, "Were you better-looking than Yosef [who successfully withstood temptation]?"

Similarly, in *maseches Nedarim* (9b), we find Shimon Hatzaddik relating, "Once, a person came [to the Beis Hamikdash, bringing sacrifices to be offered], a *nazir*, from the South, with beautiful eyes, of comely appearance, and with the locks of his hair arranged in curls. [As well as offering sacrifices at the conclusion of his *nezirus*, the *nazir* must also shave his hair.] 'My son,' I addressed him, 'what has led you to ruin this beautiful hair of yours?' He told me, 'I was working as a shepherd for my father in my town. I went to the well to replenish our water, and as I was looking at my reflection, my evil inclination sprung on me and tried to drive me from the world [with sinful thoughts]. I told my inclination: "Wicked one! Why are you taking pride in a world that doesn't belong to you, in someone who will eventually decompose, becoming dust, worm, and maggot?"'"

Moreover, we find in *maseches Ta'anis* (24a) that Rabbi Yosi had a daughter who was exceptionally beautiful. One day, Rabbi Yosi noticed that someone was moving apart the sticks of a fence in order to look at her. He thereupon told her, "My daughter, you are causing people distress; return to your [original state of] dust so that people should not stumble because of you."

If beauty is a stumbling block, why do the aforementioned *pesukim* extol the beauty of some of our nation's greatest figures?

☛ Physical and Spiritual Perfection

THIS QUESTION IS asked by the Maharal in *Gur Aryeh*: "Why does Scripture praise Sarah's beauty when it is written 'Charm is false and beauty is vanity?'" His answer is that these *pesukim* are not speaking about external, physical beauty, but rather of the beauty resulting

from the body and soul operating together in perfect harmony.

The Maharal explains: “For man is comprised of two parts, body and soul. The *pasuk* tells us that Sarah was complete and perfect in both respects, lacking nothing in either her physical perfection or her spiritual perfection. As to physical perfection, when she was twenty, her beauty was like that of a seven-year-old, and such beauty, which is unnatural and uncommon, indicates that she was physically clear and unsullied, without any impurity, as we find [the Torah telling us] about Moshe Rabbeinu, ‘His eyes did not weaken nor did his freshness disappear’ (*Devarim* 34:8), which also indicates his physical clarity. As to her having been like a twenty-year-old at the age of a hundred, this indicates her spiritual virtue; she was complete in every respect.”

How are we to understand this? If beauty indeed lacks any intrinsic value, what virtue is there in a person enjoying physical beauty alongside spiritual perfection? And how is a person’s physical beauty related to his spiritual excellence?

☞ Beauty Reflects Divine Radiance Perceived through the Soul’s Physical Sheath

THE KEY TO understanding this topic appears to lie in seeing the Maharal’s comments on the subject of beauty in general. The Maharal views beauty as an aesthetic quality that is pleasing to the eye, a pleasant and harmonious blend of color and shape. However, in his *Derech Chaim*, in reference to the Mishnah in *Avos* 6:10, the Maharal delves deeper, explaining that beauty is derived “from a Divine quality that creatures possess, for beauty is altogether unrelated to [a creature’s] material substance.”

Beauty, in other words, derives from some Divine illumination that can be perceived through the barrier of the physical.

The beauty we perceive in a sunset or sunrise lies not so much in the shape or position of the sun, but in the Divine power that we glimpse in the grandeur and majesty of these events. Similarly,

we find a certain comeliness in a happy, beaming countenance, in an inspired and inspiring person, and in a self-effacing individual's charm. We are able to perceive the radiance of these people's soul and the Divine illumination resting upon it, breaking through and shining forth from behind its physical sheath.

☛ Beauty Is the Radiance of Divine Light

THE MAHARAL POINTS to the beauty of Yerushalayim as the perfect example of beauty that does not originate in physical aesthetics but in Divine light that is visible through a material covering.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 49b) tells us: “Ten *kav* (measures) of beauty descended into the world. Nine of them were taken by Yerushalayim, and the tenth by the rest of the world.” What is the source of Yerushalayim's beauty — its physical structure? Is it structurally any more impressive than all the other cities in the world? In *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Kiddushin* *ibid.*), the Maharal explains that “beauty is particularly identified with the Land that is suffused with abstract holiness, for beauty is the radiance of the [Divine] light.” In other words, the Divine illumination resting upon an object and the holiness suffusing it are the source of the beauty we perceive in it.

☛ A Person's Wisdom Illuminates His Features

WE SEE CLEARLY that it is Divine light that is visible upon a person illuminating his features from the following comments of the Maharal.

In *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Nedarim* 50b), the Maharal cites the *pasuk*, “A person's wisdom illuminates his face” (*Koheles* 8:1), noting that “This phenomenon is similar to what happened to Moshe Rabbeinu, of whom it is said, ‘The skin of his face was beaming’ (*Shemos* 34:29) — such beauty is not physical. Rather, it is sublime illumination befitting a person of intellect, for wisdom is certainly illumination.”

The Maharal (*Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Ahavas Rei'a*, Chap. 1) employs this very idea to explain Chazal's teaching, "A person who causes his colleague to blanch (i.e., the color drains from his face, from embarrassment) is akin to having murdered him" (*Bava Metzia* 58b). He writes, "This is a profound matter, for a person who causes his colleague's face to pale in embarrassment extinguishes the illumination of his face — which represents the person — as though he was putting out a light. This is referred to as shedding the person's blood, for a person's Divine semblance is [perceived in] his appearance. Therefore, causing him to blanch and canceling his features' image, making him grow pale and extinguishing his light, is called spilling his blood."

It is the radiance of his soul that illuminates a person's face.

☛ Matter Is Murky, So It Cannot Be the Source of Beauty

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 7), the Maharal explains the Gemara's statement (*Gittin* 58a) that the good looks of the inhabitants of the ancient city of Beitar outshone the beauty of gold. He writes that this is because "They were divorced from the body's murkiness, and they [therefore] possessed clarity and beauty, for everything that is material is murky. The inhabitants of Beitar attained the level whereat they were removed from coarse matter, so they possessed beauty and magnificence."

☛ Beauty Is a Sublime, Concealed Matter

THE MAHARAL (IBID.) continues by explaining the Gemara's mention (*Gittin* *ibid.*) of "a certain woman by the name of Tzafnas bas Peniel; [she was known as] Tzafnas because *hakol tzofin b'yafyah*, everyone would gaze at her beauty; [and as] bas Peniel [because she was the] daughter of the *Kohen Gadol*, who served *lifnai v'lifnim*, in the innermost chamber [of the Beis Hamikdash]." What is the relevance of this woman's beauty to her having been a daughter of the

Kohen Gadol? And why does the Gemara specifically note the *Kohen Gadol*'s entry into the *Kodesh Hakodashim* on Yom Kippur?

By way of explanation, the Maharal points out that the words “*tzafun*,” which means hidden, and “*bas Peniel*,” which denote her father's entry *lifnai v'lifnim*, “all indicate that her beauty came from some profound, sublime, and concealed place. This demonstrates the purpose of luster and beauty, for the more a thing is inclined towards the material, the greater its murkiness, while the more removed it is from the material, the greater its radiance and light.”

The source of the beauty of this daughter of the *Kohen Gadol* was not the physical realm. Rather, it was rooted in her father's service inside that chamber that was hidden from all eyes, *lifnai v'lifnim*. This was a woman upon whom Divine illumination could be perceived, whose source was her sublime, elevated spiritual level.

☛ The *Kohen Gadol*'s Appearance

INDEED, WHEN WE look at the poem “*Mareh Kohen*,” which is said in Musaf on Yom Kippur towards the end of the account of the *Kohen Gadol*'s special service in the Beis Hamikdash, we find that the focus of the spectacle of witnessing the *Kohen Gadol* upon his exit from the *Kodesh Hakodashim* was on the extraordinary beauty of his countenance in those moments.

It is clear from the poem's portrayal of this beauty that its source was a profound inner light shining and radiating Divine holiness:

Truly, how glorious was [the appearance of] the *Kohen Gadol* when he emerged from the chamber of the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whole and unscathed:

Like the lightning emanating from the radiance of the holy creatures;

Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud;

Like the luster in which the Rock clothes His creatures;

Like a garland placed upon a king's forehead;

Like the kindness imprinted upon a bridegroom's face.

None of these comparisons depict physical beauty. They all portray the spiritual splendor of the Divinely inspired human soul that radiates such beautiful, sublime light.

☛ Distinguishing between Transient Beauty That Is Solely Physical and the Enduring Beauty Rooted in the Divine Spark

FOLLOWING THE MAHARAL'S approach, it appears that the *pasuk's* assertion in *Mishlei* that “Charm is false and beauty is vanity” speaks of the superficial physical beauty of the material sheath clothing a person. Such beauty indeed amounts to vanity, for it has no substance and fades over the years. By contrast, a person's spirit grows stronger and more resilient over time. The deeper G-d's teachings penetrate a person throughout his life, molding his essence, the more intense his inner beauty grows, and he develops “a glowing countenance.” Divine light shines from within him, conferring a different kind of beauty — beauty that is eternal.

Such was Sarah Imeinu's beauty. When she was twenty, a stage of life at which purely physical charms are at their height, her beauty was like that of a seven-year-old who is oblivious to sin. Children's innocence is the source of their charm — G-d's word strongly resounds within them, not yet having been muted by the coarseness of physicality and the urgings of the *yetzer hara*.

Such was the beauty that the above *pesukim* praise in Rachel, Esther, Yosef, and David. Such is the beauty that Chazal extol in Rabbi Yochanan — beauty compared by Chazal to a silver goblet gleaming in the twilight from which sparks of light emanate.

Physical matter is murky, and any beauty it boasts is merely that of the person's outer sheath, eventually evaporating without leaving any trace.

Genuine beauty emanates from a person's inner Divine spark, shining through the barrier of his physicality and radiating light that glows ever brighter during the twilight of his physical existence.

Toldos

The Struggle over the Birthright

☛ What Were Yaakov and Esav Fighting Over?

RIVKA IMEINU'S PREGNANCY with her twin sons Yaakov and Esav is the opening topic of *parshas Toldos*. The Torah tells us, "The children struggled (*vayisrotzetzu*) inside her, and she said, 'If this is how it is, why was I longing to become pregnant?' So she went to seek advice from Hashem" (*Bereishis* 25:22). Rashi offers two possible explanations of the verb *vayisrotzetzu* (lit. running about):

(1) From *ritzah*, running — when she passed the entrance to the Torah academies of Shem and Ever, Yaakov ran and struggled to leave [the womb], and when she passed the entrances to places of idolatry, Esav ran and struggled to leave. (2) [From *retzitzah*, pressing or crushing] — they were struggling with one another and quarreling over the inheritance of two worlds.

The Maharal has difficulty with both explanations.

The first one is difficult because a fetus has no will or mind of its own, so how are we to understand one fetus's eagerness for access to *batei midrash* and the other's attempts to enter temples of idolatry?

Rashi's second explanation, that they were quarreling in the womb over the possession of two worlds — this world and the World to Come — seems even stranger. As the Maharal puts it, "Were one brother to win, would he take the world from the other while in the womb?!"

While this world is divided into territories that can change ownership through force, the World to Come is apportioned by

Hakadosh Baruch Hu in accordance with a person's deeds in this world. As the Maharal expresses it: "Whomever Hashem desires and chooses is holy, and He will bring close to Him." How can there ever be any quarrel over the World to Come? Moreover, one person's portion does not come at the expense of another's; the righteous receive a share in the World to Come, while the wicked inherit Gehinnom, and both places have sufficient capacity to accommodate all comers.

☛ What's in a Name?

THE TORAH TELLS us the origins of Yaakov and Esav's names. Of their birth it is written, "The first one emerged ruddy, completely full of hair like a fur coat, and they named him Esav. Afterwards, his brother came out with his hand holding onto Esav's heel, and He named him Yaakov" (ibid. *pesukim* 25–6). The name Esav is related to *asuy*, meaning ready made and fully formed, like a much older person, while Yaakov's name is derived from *eikev*, heel — both names perpetuating some striking circumstance of their birth. How are we to understand this when we know that a name represents an individual's essence (*Berachos* 7b)? What insight into Esav's nature is yielded by the fact that he was fully formed? And what is there to learn about Yaakov's essence from the fact that he was born holding onto Esav's heel?

☛ How Can a Birthright Be Transferred?

THE TORAH THEN describes the incident in which Yaakov acquired the birthright from Esav: "Yaakov was cooking stew when Esav came from the field, exhausted. Esav said to Yaakov, 'Pour into my throat now some of this red stuff, for I am exhausted'...Yaakov said, 'As sure as day is day, sell me your birthright.' Esav said, 'I am going to die because of it, so of what use is the birthright to me?'...and he sold his birthright to Yaakov" (ibid. *pesukim* 29–33).

This account is difficult to understand for several reasons:

1. How is it possible for a person who is not a firstborn to “acquire” the birthright? Can one purchase the priesthood? These distinctions are a function of physical fact — either a person was born first or he was not; either a person is the son of a *kohen* or not — that cannot be altered through any transaction.
2. Is there any deeper connection between Esav’s desperation to receive the stew and his surrender of the birthright?
3. What did Esav mean when he said, “I’m going to die because of it?” Was he deathly ill and about to expire? Esav and Yaakov were the same age, and at the time they were very young, healthy, and strong.
4. Rashi (on *pasuk* 26) quotes a Midrash that interprets Yaakov’s grip on Esav’s heel on a deeper level than the physical: “He was rightfully holding onto him to stop him from being born first, for Yaakov was formed from the first drop of semen and Esav from the second. Take for example a tube with a narrow opening and put two stones inside, one after the other. The stone that went in first will come out second, and the one that went in second will come out first. Thus, Esav who was formed second came out first, and Yaakov who was formed first came out second. Yaakov [now] came to hold Esav back so that he would be the firstborn (just as he was the first formed) and take the birthright deservedly.”

Yaakov thus tried unsuccessfully to receive the birthright by right. His grasp of Esav’s heel did not stop Esav from bursting forth and being born first. How did Yaakov now suddenly manage to attain this goal through his lentil stew?

☛ Yaakov and Esav Represent Two Extremes of a Single Person

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 67), the Maharal explains the purpose of Esav’s existence and the reason he was born as Yaakov’s twin. In

his view, Adam Harishon's sin led to him "knowing [both] good and evil." This means that good and evil became mixed together, joined, within him. Man's task now became to refine the good within him, separating it from every admixture of evil. The presence of this admixture of opposing urges led in Avraham Avinu's case to siring one son who was good (Yitzchak) and another who was evil (Yishmael), each of whom later went his separate way.

This ongoing process of refinement reached its climax with the birth of Yaakov, who contained no trace of evil, and his brother Esav, who contained no trace of holiness. Yaakov and Esav were born as twins because they actually represented a single individual that had been split into two, whose material aspect Esav took in its entirety. In describing Esav as "completely full of hair like a fur coat," the Torah conveys that Esav was fully formed on the physical plane and that he was wholly material. With his twin having taken every last shred of physicality, Yaakov's spirituality was able to flourish and blossom, attaining its full purity. As the Maharal writes, "Had Yaakov been born on his own, he could not have been as clear of impurity as he was having had Esav born together with him. Thus, the seed [from which they would be born] was refined... this refinement was [in order] to be imbued with affinity for the Divine, Yaakov being assigned to holiness, with Yaakov's sin being placed *'al rosh hasa'ir*, on the head of the goat' (*Vayikra* 16:21)." (*Sa'ir* refers to Esav, see *Bereishis* 33:16 and 36:8–9.)

Yaakov thus took the spiritual aspect of this "composite individual" in its entirety, pristine and untainted. Yaakov's essence is thus intimately related to the concept of *eikev*, heel, from which his name derives, in the sense that he is positioned at Esav's farthest extreme, maintaining only the most marginal grip on physicality. Yaakov was therefore "a straightforward [i.e., honest] man" (*Bereishis* 25:28), meaning that he was spiritually complete. Chazal note that in his spiritual perfection, Yaakov resembled Adam Harishon as he was prior to sinning.

☞ The Voice Is Yaakov's, but the Hands Are Esav's

THIS ESSENTIAL DISTINCTION between Yaakov and Esav finds expression in the words of the *pasuk*, “The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esav” (ibid. 27:22). The individual who operates in the physical world needs hands with which to grip and shape the material world, whereas the individual who operates on the plane of the spiritual and the abstract employs thought and ideas, using his voice to convey them. This contrast is reflected in the realm of acquisition where halachah allows an item to be transferred to *hekdesb*, the ownership of the Temple treasury (i.e., to the spiritual realm), with a simple verbal declaration, whereas transfer of ownership from one person to another (i.e., in the material realm) cannot take effect without the performance of a physical act. The Mishnah expresses this in the rule, “An object's being spoken of for Heaven is equivalent to its being handed over to another person” (*Kiddushin* 28b).

In *Gur Aryeh* (*Bamidbar* 21:35), the Maharal explains further that the hands represent the body's farthest reach in its attempt to grasp at the surrounding space. “The hands are the hands of Esav,” writes the Maharal, “because no other part of the body extends as far as the hands into the open space. This is characteristic of a physical entity that spreads out, in the same way that the hands extend, and this is Esav's forte.” This is in contrast to a spiritual entity, which is infinite and unbound by time and space to begin with. “The Torah [therefore] writes, ‘The voice is the voice of Yaakov’ because Yaakov's special power lies in his voice, which is spiritual, lacking any physical component; this is his forte. For Yaakov's strength lies in his attachment to Hashem, Who is incorporeal.”

☞ Like Attracts Like

IN HIS *DISCOURSE ON THE MITZVOS*, the Maharal explains Chazal's teaching that Yaakov would struggle to leave the womb whenever

Rivkah passed a *beis midrash*. Since Yaakov was wholly spiritual, he was attached to G-d even while in the womb. Spirituality is attracted to holiness not as a matter of choice, but rather owing to their natural affinity, for “each and every thing is drawn to its root.” This is a natural force of attraction that operates independently of intellect and free will.

David Hamelech said, “I considered my paths, and I redirected my feet to Your testaments” (*Tehillim* 119:59). Chazal explain this as follows (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:1): “David said to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, ‘Every day I considered my paths’ — [thinking and planning,] ‘I shall go here, I shall go there — yet my feet brought me to *batei keneisios* and *batei midrashos*.” David haMelch’s feet carried him “by themselves” to the houses of Torah study.

Esav was naturally drawn to places of idol worship, whereas Yaakov was attracted to *batei keneisios* and *batei midrashos*, in accordance with the halachic principle that “like attracts like and strengthens its identity” (*Eruvin* 9a).

☞ The Battle between the Spiritual and the Physical

IN LINE WITH this approach that characterizes Yaakov as wholly spiritual and Esav as wholly physical, the Maharal (in *Gur Aryeh*) explains Yaakov and Esav’s struggle *in utero* over the inheritance of two worlds. This was not a battle between two opposing interests, but rather stemmed from their two naturally antagonistic spheres of existence. Fire and water are not in competition because they want to be; each one’s essence simply contradicts and opposes that of the other. “Therefore,” writes the Maharal, “they opposed one another even while they were in their mother’s womb. Since they were opponents by virtue of what they were, they had nothing in common, like fire and water which, even though they have no mind or desire, oppose one another by their very nature.”

☛ Yaakov Was the Firstborn by Virtue of Being Closer to His Source

THE MAHARAL'S ELUCIDATION (in *Gevuros Hashem*, Chap. 29) of the episode of Yaakov's acquisition of the birthright from Esav is based upon his understanding that they represented a single entity that was split into two twins, one wholly spiritual and the other wholly physical. He asserts that Yaakov actually didn't need to acquire the birthright in order to be considered the firstborn.

A firstborn son is closest to his father, being his father's first issue. The first product of anything encapsulates the heart and essence of the entity producing it. While Yaakov and Esav indeed represented a single entity, we have seen that they were not equally split quantitatively ("50-50"), but qualitatively, into two parts representing utterly different worlds. Yet even these parts were not different-yet-equally worthy. Yaakov represented the inner fruit — the heart and inner essence — whereas Esav represented the external peel or covering. Since the main part of anything is its inner spirit and content, Yaakov deserved to have been born first, for he, not Esav, possessed the qualities that typify a firstborn.

However, a person's first glimpse of a fruit he holds in his hand is always of its external peel, while the inner fruit becomes visible only later. This explains why Esav was the first to enter this material world, where a person's initial perception of his surroundings is always its physical, outer covering.

The heart of the matter, however, is the fruit, not the peel. The fruit is closest in essence to that which produced it, the "three partners in a person" (*Niddah* 31a), which in Yaakov's case were Yitzchak, Rivkah, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

☛ Birthright and Lentil Stew — Two Opposites

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 15), the Maharal explains that this is why Yaakov gave Esav bread and lentil stew, which represent the

simplest physical fare. Esav even referred to this food by its color (“this red stuff”), because all he saw was an item’s outer appearance. Following this incident, Esav became known by the nickname Edom (red), as the Torah tells us (*Bereishis* 25:30), because he perceived external coverings. Such a name denotes the shallowness and superficiality of the material world. Esav’s choice of the red stew and of a superficial manner of viewing physical existence demonstrated his incompatibility with the birthright, which represents Creation’s profound inner content, which is a reflection of its Creator. Esav therefore swapped “the physical gratification that he took for the birthright, which represents non-physical holiness, exchanging it for the non-physical World to Come.”

☛ “I’m Going to Die Because of It” vs. “Yaakov Is Not Dead”

THIS AFFORDS US insight into Esav’s declaration, “I’m going to die because of it, so of what use is the birthright to me?” A person who considers the visible, superficial, material existence of this world supreme will deny the possibility of the revival of the dead and of the soul’s continued existence after the body’s death. Such a viewpoint sees this world as the be all and end all, as the ultimate purpose of existence and its sole theater.

Along with scorning the birthright, Esav scorned the idea that man’s essence is spiritual. Chazal note (*Bava Basra* 16b) that Esav also denied the future revival of the dead “because,” writes the Maharal, “he maintained that this world — the material world — is all-important and that there is no revival [of the dead] at all. Therefore, [he said,] ‘Of what use is the birthright to me?’ referring to [its] holiness, [which is wholly] divorced from the material, for [Esav maintained that] man has nothing [to hope for] beyond this material world.”

Such a person is indeed “going to die,” for decay and death are the ultimate fate of every physical object, and he is headed down the

same path. Yaakov, on the other hand, chose the “everlasting life” that was implanted within him due to his spirituality, and Chazal indeed note (*Ta’anis* 5b) that “Yaakov Avinu did not die.”

Yaakov and Esav were a single entity that was split into two parts. Esav took all the physicality and from birth was wholly formed materially. By contrast, Yaakov maintained the flimsiest of connections with physicality, holding onto Esav’s heel, while the rest of him was spiritually perfect, completely devoted to spirituality. Yaakov therefore took the birthright, whose bearer reflects the qualities and inner essence that attest to his similarity to his forebears, while Esav chose physical lentil stew, showing that he aligned himself with a superficial perception of reality by referring to it as “this red stuff.” Esav is said to be dead even in his lifetime, because everything material withers as it moves towards its demise, whereas Yaakov is called alive even after his death and possesses both this world and the next.

Uyeyitzei

Slumber at the Gateway to Heaven

☛ The Beis Hamikdash as a Sleepover

WHILE ON HIS way to Charan, Yaakov Avinu arrives at Har Hamoriyah and sleeps there overnight. The Torah tells us, “He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took some of the place’s stones, arranged them around his head, and lay down in that place” (*Bereishis* 28:10–11).

The *pasuk* mentions that Yaakov slept because the sun had set. The Gemara (*Chullin* 91b) wonders what is so noteworthy about this sequence of events, and it answers that the Torah’s intention here is to tell us that the sun actually set early on Yaakov’s account.

The Gemara describes how this came about: Yaakov left his parents’ home in Be’er Sheva and actually arrived at his destination, Charan. Once he was there, though, he thought, “How is it possible that on my way I passed a place where my fathers prayed, and yet I neglected to pray there?” He decided to return to Har Hamoriyah, and the distance miraculously contracted, bringing him there in a short time. After having prayed, he wanted to return to Charan. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, “If this tzaddik has come to My lodging, shall he be released without staying overnight?” and immediately, the sun set.

Now, Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash are known by many names, but nowhere do we find the Beis Hamikdash serving as a lodging place. True, we find in *Melachim II* (11:2) that Yo’ash was hidden in “the bedroom,” which, as Rashi explains, refers to “the

upper story above the *Kodesh Hakodashim*...it is called ‘the bedroom’ on account of the *pasuk*, ‘He would reside between my breasts’ (*Shir Hashirim* 1:13) [a reference to the *Shechinah* resting upon the *aron*, whose poles protruded in such a manner from the curtain separating the outer and inner chambers]. However, this term is used solely to convey the fact that the *Kodesh Hakodashim* is where *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* resides, as it were. How can the Beis Hamikdash be referred to as a lodging place for people?

Is there any significance to a person sleeping in the Beis Hamikdash? Is such practice even permitted? When Yaakov awoke, he said, “Indeed, Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know (*Bereishis* 28:16). Rashi explains that his intention in mentioning this was, “For had I known, I would not have slept in such a holy place.” If this was indeed the case, why did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* say, “If this tzaddik has come to My lodging, shall he be released without staying overnight?”

☞ “This Is the Gateway to Heaven”

YAAKOV AVINU’S SLUMBER had far-reaching consequences. The Torah tells us, “He dreamt and behold, a ladder was standing on the ground, its top reaching to Heaven, and behold, Heavenly *malachim* were ascending and descending it” (*Bereishis* 28:12). In the course of his dream, Hashem revealed Himself to Yaakov and made three promises: to protect him on his way and return him home, to give Eretz Yisrael to his progeny as a possession, and to bless them, telling him, “Your descendents will be as numerous as the dust of the earth; you shall burst forth to the west, east, north, and south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you and your progeny” (*ibid. pasuk* 14). Next to these sublime promises, the ladder’s role in the dream hardly seems significant, yet the latter apparently left the greatest impression on Yaakov, who called the place “the gateway to Heaven” on its account. When he woke up, he said, “Indeed, Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know.’ He was afraid

and said, ‘How awe-inspiring is this place; this is none other than the House of G-d, and this is the gateway to Heaven’ (ibid. *pasuk* 16–17). Rashi explains: “the gateway to Heaven” means, “a place of prayer, where their prayers ascend Heavenward; and according to the Midrash, [the site of] the Heavenly Beis Hamikdash corresponds to [the site of] the earthly *Beis Hamikdash*.”

Why did Yaakov accept these Divine promises with such equanimity, instead focusing on the spot’s identity as “a place of prayer?”

☛ One Point on a Continuum

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal cites Chazal’s comment that the foot of the ladder was in Be’er Sheva, and its top that reached Heaven was above Beis El, so that the middle of the ladder was over Har Hamoriyah, the site of the future Beis Hamikdash. The Maharal asks, “This is difficult to understand — what was holy about the ladder’s middle that the Beis Hamikdash was positioned exactly beneath it? It is understood that the top of the ladder or its feet are holy, but what was special about the middle of the ladder?”

Since the ladder represented the gateway through which people’s prayers ascend to Heaven, it would be logical to ascribe holiness to the portal in this world where prayers are offered, i.e., the ladder’s base. Similarly, it would be logical to ascribe holiness to the prayers’ Heavenly destination, the top of the ladder. But Har Hamoriyah was not beneath either of these points. Where is the logic in taking an arbitrary point in the middle of the continuum leading from the human offering prayer to the prayer’s Divine destination and referring to that point as “the gateway to Heaven?”

☛ The Beis Hamikdash as the Point Where Heaven and Earth Meet

THE REASON THAT the Beis Hamikdash stood opposite the ladder’s middle, explains the Maharal, is because this was the point at which

Heaven and earth meet. Heaven is indeed as far from this world as spiritual existence is from material existence, and a ladder with a great many rungs is needed to pass from one to the other. Yet the Beis Hamikdash was a place where these two realms of existence coincided — where a person could stand with his feet on the ground and his head in Heaven. It was a “piece of Heaven” situated in this world, belonging solely neither to one realm nor the other. It represented a middle point between them, containing something of both poles at once.

As the Maharal writes, “The ladder stood on the ground with its top in Heaven to demonstrate that the lower world is connected with the upper worlds, and the ascent to Heaven is like climbing a ladder that has rungs. In the same way, there are levels of ascent from this world to Heaven. However, since the Beis Hamikdash served as a place for encountering the *Shechinah*, where a person would come to serve Hashem (as the Torah states in *Devarim* 12:11), it had a dual aspect and as such belonged to both the lower and upper worlds. Both exercised equal influence there, so that the upper worlds could not say ‘It is [solely] ours,’ for humans were authorized to be there, and neither could humans say ‘It is [solely] ours,’ for it was Hashem’s sanctuary. It was therefore appropriate that the Beis Hamikdash should stand beneath the midpoint of the ladder’s incline.”

☛ The Beis Hamikdash Is Likened to the Neck, Connecting the Head to the Body

IN *GUR ARYEH* (*Bereishis* 45:14), the Maharal explains the Torah’s account of Yosef and Binyamin’s first encounter in Egypt, where it is written, “He fell upon the neck of his brother Binyamin and wept, and Binyamin wept upon his neck.” For “neck,” the Torah uses the plural form *tzavarei* rather than the singular *tzavar*, prompting Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:12) to wonder, “How many necks did Binyamin have?” Chazal answer that Yosef’s tears were on account of the two future *Batei Mikdash* that would stand in Binyamin’s portion in Eretz Yisrael that would ultimately be destroyed, while

Binyamin “wept on his neck” because he foresaw that the Mishkan that would be erected in Shiloh, in Yosef’s portion, would ultimately be destroyed.

As to why the term “neck” should be used as a way of referring to the Beis Hamikdash, the Maharal points out that the neck is the point of connection between the physical part of the body and the head, which is the seat of a person’s spirituality and his soul. The Beis Hamikdash is therefore likened to a neck, since it connects Heaven and earth.

☛ The Beis Hamikdash Was the Source of Material Abundance

THE MISHNAH (*SOTAH* 48A) tells us, “Since the day the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, no day is without curse; dew stopped descending as a blessing, and fruits lost their taste.” Now, the Beis Hamikdash was a spiritual place through which the *Shechinah* resided upon the Jewish nation. While its destruction certainly caused spiritual and moral deterioration, how are we to understand that material resources spoiled as a result? It cannot be argued that this was part of the Jewish nation’s general punishment at this time, because these phenomena occurred worldwide, affecting every nation.

In *Netzach Yisrael* (Chap. 22), the Maharal explains that as the point of connection between Heaven and earth, where the material and spiritual realms met and interacted, the Beis Hamikdash elevated all matter, imbuing it with spirituality and drawing Heavenly blessing into it, bringing blessed abundance to the world. With the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, these channels of material abundance were severed.

In the Maharal’s words, “This Mishnah means to explain that with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the lower world became separated from the upper worlds, for its presence in the lower world facilitated the lower world’s attachment and connection with the upper worlds, due to which there was blessing.”

☛ Mentioning the Beis Hamikdash in *Birkas Hamazon*

IN LINE WITH this approach, the Maharal explains (*Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Ha'avodah*, Chap. 18) why we mention the Beis Hamikdash in *Birkas Hamazon*: “For blessing descends from above, and there must be some medium that belongs to both the upper and the lower worlds through which blessing can flow to the lower world. This is the Beis Hamikdash, for it connects the upper and lower worlds, and via it, blessings come from upper worlds to the lower world.”

☛ The Crux of the Vision of the Ladder

WE NOW UNDERSTAND the deep impression that the vision of a ladder on earth whose top reached Heaven made upon Yaakov Avinu. This was no incidental detail of his dream, but rather an essential message regarding the rest of his life and mission. He now understood that he could fill a bridging role between sublime spirituality and worldly physicality. In his struggle with his brother Esav hitherto, he had seen only stark contradiction between his role as the “man of the tent” and his brother’s role as the “man of the field.” Now, having left his father’s house and gone into exile, he saw that it was possible to imbue the physical realm with spirituality. Deeply moved by this lesson that the ladder conveyed regarding his subsequent path in life, he exclaimed, “This is none other than the House of G-d, and this is the gateway to Heaven!” He recognized that there is an uninterrupted continuum between Heaven and earth with a midpoint where they coincide. This therefore was “a place of prayer, where their prayers ascend heavenward.”

☛ While the Body Slumbers, the Soul’s Faculties Are Aroused

THE MAHARAL ADDRESSES a further question regarding this incident: why did a realization of such fundamental importance to

serving Hashem come to Yaakov during sleep, rather than while he was awake and alert?

In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Hatzedakah*, Chap. 3), the Maharal explains that in a spiritual person, sleep affords a wondrous opportunity for perceiving that which lies beyond the limits of wakeful perception. While a person is awake, his physical urges are constantly at work, striving for gratification of his lust and desires and dimming the illumination of his soul with its very different set of goals. During sleep, though, the body is at rest and is not pursuing anything, enabling the activation of the soul's faculties.

As the Maharal puts it, “[During sleep,] the physical faculties are quiet and calm, and because they are quiet, the power of imagination, which is one of the soul's faculties, is more keenly active, and a person can perceive a dream that is a true dream.” (See Rambam, *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 7:2.)

☛ Sleep and the Fetus *In Utero*

THE GEMARA TELLS us (*Niddah* 30b) that while a fetus resides in its mother's womb, “A light burns above its head, and it gazes and looks from one end of the world to the other.” The Gemara assures us that we should not wonder at how a fetus confined to the womb is able to see the other side of the world, “for a person sleeps here and sees a dream that occurs in Spain (i.e., a distant land).”

In *Chiddushei Aggados* (ibid.), the Maharal explains that the light burning above the fetus's head is the soul, of which it is written, “Hashem's light is man's soul” (*Mishlei* 20:27). This light burns above the fetus's head because the soul doesn't enter the body until the latter's emergence from the womb. Until then, although it already has an association with the fetus, it merely hovers about the fetus, remaining “above” it. Since the soul has not yet entered the body, its illumination remains undiminished by the body's physical urges “and a sublime spark and glow cling to the head where the soul is attached, affording vision to the ends of the earth by virtue of this sublime glow and spark.”

The Gemara likens the fetal state to that of a sleeper who dreams, for while he is awake, a person's senses subdue and negate his soul's faculties. Only while he sleeps and his physical urges are inactive is he susceptible to the influence of dreams, which are a minor level of prophecy.

☛ Yaakov's Slumber Was Preparation for Prophecy

WE NOW UNDERSTAND why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* called the site of the Beis Hamikdash "My lodging place" and caused Yaakov to fall asleep there. Sleep affords a person of stature the opportunity to ascend the ladder to the point where grounded reality and sublime spirituality coincide. While he slept, Yaakov Avinu experienced insight into the nature of this "gateway to Heaven" as a place of prayer for the entire land, and he understood the essence of the Beis Hamikdash.

He was aghast at having slept in such a holy place, because for most people, sleep is a purely physical and wasteful pastime during which they experience loss of their mental faculties and self control. On the *pasuk's* words "He lay down in that place," Rashi comments, "In *that* place he lay down, but throughout the [preceding] fourteen years that he studied in Ever's academy, he did not lie down at night, for he was occupied in Torah study." For fourteen years, Yaakov Avinu had shunned the wasted hours of sleep in order to maximize his time and concentrate all his faculties on learning Torah.

On the sublime level that Yaakov Avinu had attained, though, sleep was a means of ushering in prophetic vision, for with his body at rest, his soul was able to perceive the ladder, its continuum between Heaven and earth, and their point of contact at the site of the future Beis Hamikdash.

Three important principles emerge from the Maharal's elucidation of this episode:

1. Though Heaven and earth are disparate realms, they are not entirely separate; there is a point at which they coincide. There exists a "place of prayer" where a person can go while

grounded in his physical existence, and his head will reach Heaven.

2. Although the Beis Hamikdash is a spiritual place, it elevates the material world, acting as a channel for Heaven's blessing to enter the physical world and bestow material abundance. The Beis Hamikdash is thus also a source of material abundance, bringing blessing to the world's food supply.
3. The sleep of a spiritually elevated person ushers in spiritual arousal, for while the physical urges are quiet, the soul's faculties are awakened and more active.

Vayishlach

All the Sins of a Bridegroom Are Forgiven

☞ Forgiveness of Sin upon Marriage

IN LISTING ESAV'S descendents at the end of *parshas Vayishlach*, the Torah mentions that one of Esav's wives was named "Bosmas, daughter of Yishmael, sister of Nevayos" (*Bereishis* 36:3). In *parshas Toldos*, though, we are told that Esav "married Mochalas, daughter of Yishmael son of Avraham, sister of Nevayos" (*ibid.* 28:9). Why is the same woman called Bosmas in one place and Mochalas elsewhere?

Rashi writes (in *parshas Vayishlach*), "Bosmas, daughter of Yishmael' — yet elsewhere, she is called Mochalas. We find in the *aggadah* of the Midrash on *sefer Shmuel*: Three people have their sins pardoned — a convert who becomes Jewish, a person who ascends to greatness, and a man who marries. This is learned from here. This is why she was called Mochalas (from *mechilah*, pardon) — because all his sins were pardoned."

Yishmael's daughter whom Esav married was really called Bosmas, but the Torah refers to her as Mochalas when mentioning Esav's marriage to her to allude to the forgiveness that the bride and groom attain upon marriage.

Why should sins be forgiven upon marriage? Are we actually saying that all the heinous sins that Esav committed were simply pardoned when he married?

☛ Why Do These Three Merit Forgiveness?

WE MUST TRY to understand why the three categories listed by the Midrash merit forgiveness.

It is straightforward why a convert's sins are pardoned: with his conversion, he is renouncing his prior conduct as a gentile. But what about people who ascend to greatness and who marry? In what merit are their sins forgiven? The former has already received a new, raised status; why should forgiveness be bestowed upon him as well? A person who marries has taken a relatively minor step that is generally taken at a certain time of life. Marriage is not usually entered into with the goal of repenting; why should a new couple merit expiation of their sins?

There is an additional, much more basic point here that must be considered. If the person ascending to his new rank in life repents, then his sincere repentance alone assures him forgiveness irrespective of any change in status. And if he does not repent, our question becomes even more pressing — how is it possible for sins to be pardoned without repentance?

☛ How Is It possible to Alter the Past?

PERHAPS EXAMINING HOW repentance leads to forgiveness for sins a person has already committed will afford us insight into the pardon granted to the three groups mentioned by the Midrash.

How can repentance change a sinner's previous record? While one can undertake to mend one's ways in the future, once an act has been performed, it cannot be erased, and past events cannot be altered. Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto addresses this fundamental question (*Mesilas Yesharim*, Chap. 4). He explains repentance as being a kindness bestowed by Heaven whereby "uprooting the desire is tantamount to uprooting the deed." In other words, when a person sincerely and deeply regrets his misdemeanor, he removes the sin from existence.

“This means,” continues the Ramchal, “that since the penitent recognizes his wrongdoing, admits to it, repents, and sincerely regrets it — to the same degree that a person regretting a vow [and seeking its annulment] has had a complete change of heart — wishes and desires that that thing had never been done, is greatly distressed in his heart that it had been done, forsakes it in the future, and distances himself from it — [after all this,] uprooting the matter from his desire is considered the same as uprooting a vow, and he attains atonement for it.”

The source of this explanation is the Gemara (*Nedarim* 21b) that tells us that when a person would come to Rav Huna seeking the annulment of a vow, Rav Huna would ask him, “Was your mind composed at the time you made the vow?” If the person’s response was negative, Rav Huna released him from the vow on the basis of his complete change of heart.

However, this doesn’t seem sufficient to explain what repentance achieves. That Gemara is speaking about a vow, which takes effect through the spoken word. The spiritual consequence of that utterance, i.e., the item or action forbidden by the vow, is entirely an expression of the wish of the person who took the vow. Thus, if his desire has undergone a complete change, and he now wishes that he had never taken the vow, this change of mind is sufficient to annul it. But how can uprooting the desire to sin take away a deed that has already been done? How can a person repent when his act cannot be repealed? If a person murders a fellow Jew, he cannot bring the victim back to life, so how does his repentance help? As Ramchal puts it in his original question, “Can he remove the deed from reality?”

☛ Repentance Alters a Person

THE RAMCHAL HIMSELF raises this difficulty and clarifies that while the deed cannot be changed, the person who carried it out *can* undergo change. Repentance undoes the connection between the “I” of today and the deed that was carried out by the “I” of yesterday,

which are two totally different entities. The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:4) states this clearly: “Among the pathways of repentance are that the penitent constantly cries out before Hashem in tears and entreaty, is charitable to the fullest extent that his resources allow, greatly distances himself from the matter in which he sinned, *changes his name, as if to say, ‘I am different; I am not the same person who did those deeds,’* and entirely changes his behavior for the better, taking the straight path.”

☛ How Can a Person Change?

FURTHER EXPLANATION IS still required. Shifting our attention away from the sinful act and onto the person who committed it doesn’t change the fact that either way, post-repentance we are apparently confronting an altered reality. Inasmuch as it is impossible to change the reality of an act a person committed, it is similarly impossible to change the reality of the perpetrator being the one who committed the act. How do we explain repentance enabling a person to leave himself behind, as it were, dodging blame by casting off his identity and becoming someone else? After all, his identity remains a physical fact, not some intangible, vow-like spiritual reality. Sure, I can change my name from Avraham to Yossi, but will doing so actually turn me into Yossi? Won’t I always remain the very same Avraham who has committed sins and lived a less-than-blameless life? How can a person change the reality of who he is and what he has done?

☛ Rather than What Deeds a Person Has Done, the Question Is What Change His Deeds Have Wrought in Him

THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION is that it is not over the physical reality resulting from his transgression that a sinner is taken to task, but over his own spiritual state and the pollution he wreaks within himself by sinning. A person who committed incest is liable not on

account of the *mamzer* born from his illicit union, but because he has so profoundly debased his soul.

This idea is the basis of the principle that “One sin leads to another” (*Avos* 4:2). By sinning, a person defines himself as being on a low moral level. Since he adjusts his self-image accordingly, he is liable to repeat his earlier mistake. We therefore find Rav Huna teaching: “Once a person has transgressed a sin and repeated it, it is permitted to him” (*Yoma* 86b). The Gemara wonders how a sin can possibly become permitted by having been transgressed, and it explains Rav Huna’s intention as, “*He feels* it has become permitted.” After succumbing to temptation twice, the sinner no longer feels conflicted about future violations. This holds true to the point where Chazal tell us that if, after repeating the same sin, a person planned on transgressing again but was prevented from doing so, “his thought is reckoned as an action.”

Clearly, the point is not what deed the sinner has committed, but the effect of his misdeed upon him. By repenting and uprooting the desire that led him to sin, the penitent restores his former spiritual standing. By deeply regretting his past deeds, he rectifies the spiritual damage he inflicted upon himself with his sin. Indeed, an action once committed cannot be fixed — neither can a person change the reality of who he is — but he can recover his spiritual equilibrium. He is not expected to change the facts, but he is expected to change himself. As Chazal point out, “*Rachmana liba ba’i* (the Merciful One wants a person’s heart).”

Thus, the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Mikva’os* (11:12): “In the same way that a person who directs his heart towards purity becomes pure upon immersing [in the *mikveh*], a person who directs his heart towards purifying his soul from the soul’s impurities — sinful thoughts and detrimental ideas — as soon as he resolves in his heart to detach himself from these counsels and brings his soul into the waters of understanding, he [too] becomes purified.”

The process of repentance thus involves cutting oneself off from the past and turning over a new leaf in the book of one’s character development.

☛ Three Steps That Elevate the Personality

ARMED WITH THIS insight into the workings of repentance, we can return to our earlier discussion.

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal explains the Midrash about the three categories of people whose sins are pardoned: a convert, a person who attains prominence, and one who marries. The Maharal points out that each of these three is beginning a new chapter in life that opens a new, hitherto unexplored dimension of his personality.

A convert changes his religious and national affiliation and assumes a new identity as a Jew. This change is so profound that its governing halachic principle states, “A convert is like a newborn baby” (*Yevamos* 22a).

Attaining prominence entails the transformation from a private individual into public persona, from a sub-section into an entire chapter. “Formerly,” writes the Maharal, “he was seen as a mere individual, but after attaining prominence, he is representative of the entire community.” Until now, he was occupied with his own private affairs, and his personality encompassed the radius of his limited involvement. With his assumption of authority over public affairs, his personality expands to encompass a broader purview, and his experiences now impact many others.

Moreover, his utter identification with the broader community in his new role as their representative actually eclipses his private identity. This idea is expressed by the Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim* (3:6), where he explains why a Jewish king must not overindulge in physical gratification: “He must not take numerous wives so that his heart not be led astray’ (*Devarim* 17:17) — the Torah is particular that his heart should not be led astray, *because his heart is the heart of the entire community of Yisrael.*”

Concerning marriage, the Maharal writes, “Formerly, he was a half person, and having married, he is a complete person, as Chazal said in *maseches Yevamos* (63a), ‘Anyone who lives without a wife is incomplete, as it says, “Male and female He created them... and

named them ‘man’” (*Bereishis* 5:2).” Whereas prior to marriage, a person’s life centers upon himself, upon marrying, his self-love doubles to encompass his spouse. His sense of self grows fuller, becomes enriched, and expands to encompass the new family unit. This is the reason that the blessing “...Who created man” is made only on the occasion of a wedding, not at a *bris*.

☛ A Change in Circumstances Heralds a New Chapter in Life

AS WE HAVE seen, the possibility of repenting affords a person the opportunity of cleansing himself from the spiritual corruption enmeshed in his personality and turning over a new leaf.

This is no easy task. Not at every stage of life is it simple for a person to rise above himself. However, life holds auspicious moments of personal change and growth when a new chapter is anyway opening for him. Rising to prominence and becoming charged with communal responsibility — with the necessary changes in day-to-day life that attend living in the public eye — can be utilized as a means of ushering in more comprehensive change. Similarly, marriage changes a person from a loner who need consider no one but himself into a family man who must now consider the needs of others. Certainly, a person must actively seize the opportunity afforded by these occasions in order to change for the better; a rise to prominence can (*chalilah*) result in a person changing for the worse if his new position corrupts his character. But all in all, such changes in personal status constitute opportunities for turning over a new leaf and bringing about positive change, and there is therefore no justification for judging a person according to the degree of corruption of his former personality, and his sins are pardoned even if he does not repent.

☛ Esav’s Missed Opportunity

CONVERSION, ATTAINING PROMINENCE, and marriage are golden opportunities for changing oneself for the better. But if an opportunity

is not grasped, it dissipates. Esav failed to utilize the opportunity that his marriage afforded him and continued his evil ways, filling the new page in his life with the same content as he had filled all the previous ones. Had he wanted to seize the moment, though, he could have attained forgiveness for all his sins, and like his new wife, he would have been transformed from Bosmas, redolent with sin, to Mochalas, forgiven.

When taken to task for his sins, a person is primarily judged? not on the deeds he has done, but on their effect upon him. He is judged on what he has become, for misdeeds contaminate their perpetrator. Repentance offers the opportunity to change oneself and break away from the moral filth that has become ingrained in one's personality. There are three situations that offer a person escape from his previous persona, providing by their very nature opportunity for bringing about profound personal change. Marriage is one of them, whereby a person is transformed from a loner to part of a family unit. This expansion of his role changes his outlook and affords him a golden opportunity for casting off ingrained, unwholesome habits and rising to a better and purer place.

Uayeishev

The Root of the Brothers' Hatred of Yosef

☛ Why Did Yosef's Brothers Hate Him?

YOSEF WAS THE apple of Yaakov Avinu's eye, resulting in his persecution by his brothers, who hated him.

The Torah tells us, "Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his other sons, for he was his *ben zekunim* (son of his old age), and he made him a striped robe. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him and were unable to speak to him in a friendly manner" (*Bereishis* 37:3–4).

How are we to understand this hatred? Although *pasuk* 2 (*ibid.*) states, "Yosef brought evil reports of them to their father," that cannot be the reason they hated him, because the following *pasuk* attributes their hatred to the fact that "their father loved him more than all his brothers."

What did the brothers find so unbearable about the special love that Yaakov bore towards Yosef? Was this ordinary jealousy? Why did they hate their own brother, who was orphaned from his mother and whose father indulged him with a few stripes on the robe he wore?

☛ What Slander Did Yosef Bear about His Brothers?

RASHI EXPLAINS THE content of the slanderous reports about his brothers' conduct that Yosef brought to his father: "Every bad thing that he saw in his brothers, the sons of Leah, he told his father —

that they would eat a limb torn from a living animal, that they treated the sons of the maidservants [Bilhah and Zilpah] with scorn, and that they were suspect of immorality.” This requires further elucidation, for we cannot simply assume that the progenitors of the twelve tribes, who were all sublimely righteous individuals, committed the sins of immorality and of eating limbs torn from living creatures. How could Yosef accuse them of these crimes?

☛ Was Yosef Really Yaakov’s Sole Descendant?

THE TORAH PRESENTS Yosef alone as representing Yaakov’s descendants, writing, “These are Yaakov’s descendants — Yosef” (ibid. *pasuk* 2). Since Yaakov had twelve sons, in what sense can his descendants be said to be Yosef alone? Addressing this point, Rashi cites a Midrash: “Scripture associates Yaakov’s descendants with Yosef on account of several things:

1. Yaakov in order entered Lavan’s employ in order to marry Rachel [Yosef’s mother];
2. Yosef’s facial features resembled Yaakov’s;
3. Whatever happened to Yaakov also happened to Yosef: this one was hated, and that one was hated; this one’s brother wanted to kill him, and that one’s brothers wanted to kill him, etc.”

How do these similarities explain “Yaakov’s descendants” being summed up as Yosef alone? Are children who do not resemble their father any less his descendants? Does a father love those of his children who don’t look like him any less?

☛ What Do We Learn from the Common Experiences of Yaakov and Yosef?

EXAMINING THE MIDRASH (*Bereishis Rabbah* 84:6) shows that Rashi picked just three examples of similarities between Yaakov and Yosef from a very long and comprehensive list:

- 1) This one was born circumcised, and that one was born circumcised.
- 2) This one's mother was barren, and that one's mother was barren.
- 3) This one's mother bore two sons, and that one's mother bore two sons.
- 4) This one was a firstborn, and that one was a firstborn.
- 5) This one's mother had difficulty in giving birth, and that one's mother had difficulty in giving birth.
- 6) This one's brother hated him, and that one's brothers also hated him.
- 7) This one's brother wanted to kill him, and that one's brothers also wanted to kill him.
- 8) This one was a shepherd, and that one was a shepherd.
- 9) This one was hated, and that one was hated.
- 10) This one was stolen twice, and that one was stolen twice.
- 11) This one was blessed with wealth, and that one was blessed with wealth.
- 12) This one went out of the Land, and that one went out of the Land.
- 13) This one married a woman from outside the Land, and that one married a woman from outside the Land.

What do all these similarities teach us? Do they reflect any deeper, essential likeness? Can Esav's hatred of Yaakov be compared to the brothers' hatred of Yosef?

☛ Love and Hatred — Connection and Disconnection

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that the fact that whatever happened to Yaakov happened to Yosef “demonstrates that he was his father's continuation (lit. his ‘leg,’ in the sense that the leg is a continuation of the torso).” Yosef had the same experiences as Yaakov because he represented a direct continuation of his father's path.

Yosef's brothers thus hated him for the same reason that Esav hated Yaakov. As the Maharal explains, "For Yaakov's brother wanted to kill him on account of his virtue, meaning that due to his stature, Yaakov was different from everyone else. Because both Yaakov and Yosef possessed a Divine quality different from everyone else, because of this they (i.e., Yosef's brothers) wanted to kill him, for every person who is separate, because he is separate in his virtue, others want to kill him. This is a matter that contains great wisdom."

Love arises from closeness and connection. The numerical value of *ahavah* (love) is thirteen, which is also the numerical value of *echad* (one). Hatred, on the other hand, results from emotional and spiritual disconnection. This is why when a person is angry he raises his voice, as though he is speaking to somebody far away. When people are disconnected from one another, hatred develops between them. Thus, if a person possesses great and sublime virtue, and because of this, others are cut off from him, their hatred of him grows. We thus find in *maseches Pesachim* (49b) that "The hatred that ignoramuses bear towards Torah scholars is greater than the hatred the gentiles bear toward Jews." This is because ignoramuses and gentiles have plenty in common. They are alike in all worldly realms of life — they are all ordinary human beings. Between the ignoramus and the Torah scholar of spiritual stature, though, lies a gaping chasm separating physicality from spirituality. This divide creates disconnection that leads to feelings of estrangement and hatred.

☞ Of Love and Hatred

THE *PASUK* WRITES, "When a man has two wives, one beloved and the other hated" (*Devarim* 21:15).

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 23a) asks, "Is it relevant to speak of being 'beloved' before G-d and 'hated' before G-d? (The question assumes that these are objective terms applied by the Torah as opposed to

the subjective feelings of the husband.) Rather, this means ‘beloved’ (i.e., permitted) in her marriage and ‘hated’ (i.e., forbidden) in her marriage.” In other words, marriage between two people who are forbidden to each other and thus are supposed to remain separate and distant from one another is referred to here as a hated marriage. This appellation conveys the essential disconnect that exists between them.

Moreover, even when hatred is justified, care should be taken that it not get out of hand. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 113b) cites the *pasuk*, “When you see your enemy’s donkey crouching beneath its burden...” (*Shemos* 23:5) and asks, “Is one allowed to hate a fellow Jew? Is it not written, ‘Do not hate your brother in your heart’ (*Vayikra* 19:17)?”

The Gemara answers that the “enemy” referred to is an individual who was seen engaging in some immoral act on account of which it is permitted to hate him. Tosafos (ibid. s.v. *shera’u bo*) point out that elsewhere (*Bava Metzia* 32b), the Gemara states explicitly that if one is faced with the choice of helping either his enemy or his friend, it is preferable that he help his enemy in order to subdue his natural inclination. If the enemy under discussion has committed a sin, though, and is justifiably an enemy, what is the purpose of subduing one’s inclination so as not to hate him? Tosafos explain: “Since this person hates the sinner, the sinner automatically hates him, as it says, ‘Like a reflection in water, so is one person’s heart in relation to another’s’ (*Mishlei* 27:19), and consequently, they will genuinely hate each other, so it is indeed relevant to speak of subduing his inclination.”

In other words, while there is place for hatred of a sin and of those who commit it, the rupture this causes between the parties eventually leads to genuine hatred on the personal level. It is therefore a mitzvah for a person to subdue his inclination in order to prevent this process from happening and to learn to love his wayward brethren even if they have moved far from the path of virtue and their behavior is reprehensible.

☛ The Brothers Hated Yosef on Account of His Immense Virtue

PRECISELY BECAUSE Yaakov Avinu was a spiritual giant, Esav felt detached from and unable to identify with him. This disconnection between the brothers developed into hatred. Yosef's brothers' hatred also arose from feelings of detachment and alienation on account of Yosef's difference from them, which was due to his sublime spiritual stature. Yosef inhabited a world of his own, as did Yaakov Avinu. When blessing his sons before his death, Yaakov referred to Yosef as *nezir echav*, which according to Onkelos means, "the one who was set apart from his brothers" (*Bereishis* 49:26). It is to this similarity that the Torah refers when it states, "These are Yaakov's descendants — Yosef." Yaakov and Yosef shared identical characteristics and virtues that were the source of their separateness from their brothers and of the hatred to which it led.

☛ Facial Likeness Indicates Spiritual Affinity

THE MAHARAL TIES Yaakov and Yosef's facial similarity into the above idea. The similarity between the two extended beyond their life experiences — they were also similar in appearance. A person's countenance reflects his inner world. Yaakov was wholly spiritual and thus had a radiant countenance. Yosef's appearance was identical: "The radiance of his visage, in similarity to Yaakov, indicates that just as Yaakov possessed some Divine quality, for these matters all transcend the physical, so did Yosef, for his level [too] was Divine in nature, far removed from the body."

☛ Where Did Yosef's Sublime Virtue Lie?

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Bava Metzia* 84a), the Maharal explains the Gemara's statement that the evil eye (a malevolent look that arouses Divine judgment against the object or individual gazed

upon) wields no power over Yosef's descendants. He writes that the eye apprehends only something external and visible but cannot perceive something whose virtue is contained in its sublime, inner content. He explains further that Yaakov Avinu was akin to a root from which sprouted a trunk, from which in turn twelve branches emerged. Yosef, however, was the trunk itself, sprouting directly from the root. The branches radiating in all directions are visible, and the evil eye can therefore affect them, whereas Yosef was the tree's inner core and as such was immune to the evil eye.

In what difference between Yosef and his brothers, though, was his being likened to the trunk and their comparison to the branches apparent?

Yaakov Avinu encompassed an array of strengths, traits, and qualities. Whereas each of his sons took one prominent trait from him, Yosef was a perfect continuation of Yaakov, containing within himself the same array of qualities. The Gemara (*Sotah* 36b) indeed tells us that Yosef was worthy of siring twelve tribes just as Yaakov did, because he contained the same configuration of strengths, conferring on him the same inner mettle as his father.

The Torah therefore tells us “These are Yaakov's descendants — Yosef” for, in the Maharal's words, “Yosef was his principal descendant, in the same way that a tree trunk emerges from the core, whereas all the branches are peripheral.”

☞ “For He Was His *Ben Zekunim*”

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS further (*Chiddushei Aggados, Bava Basra* 123a) that the qualities of a spiritual person lie beneath the surface and are accessible only from within, whereas a materialistic individual directs his energies outward, displaying his strengths to others. He writes that Yaakov was therefore the firstborn in terms of inner content and essence, while Esav, whose strengths were all focused outward, left the womb first, wresting prominence from Yaakov for himself.

Similarly, Yosef was the firstborn in terms of his essence and the similarity of his qualities to those of his father. This is the very reason why Yosef was born after almost all his brothers and the reason that Yaakov loved him for being a *ben zekunim*, because something with inner content makes its appearance last. In this way, Yosef expressed his essential quality of inner superiority side by side with introversion vis-à-vis the outside environment that makes its appearance only at the last opportunity.

☛ A Flaming Fire

USING THIS IDEA, the Maharal explains the *pasuk*, “It was when Rachel bore Yosef [that] Yaakov said to Lavan, ‘Send me off, and I will go to my place and to my land’” (*Bereishis* 30:25). Why juxtapose Yosef’s birth and Yaakov’s request to return to Eretz Yisrael? Were the two related?

Rashi (*ibid.*) writes that with Yosef’s birth, Yaakov regained his confidence and no longer feared Esav, and therefore, he wanted to return to his homeland.

“When Rachel gave birth to Yosef,” writes Rashi, “Esav’s adversary was born, as it says, ‘The House of Yaakov will be fire, the House of Yosef flame, and the House of Esav straw’ (*Ovadiab* 1:18). Fire without flames cannot reach far. [Therefore,] once Yosef was born, Yaakov trusted in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and wanted to return.”

Yaakov was thus like a glowing coal that retains its heat inside it, while Yosef, too, was fire, but a more powerful and intense version, such that the fire burst into flames.

☛ Yosef’s Slander about His Brothers

WHEN PEOPLE ARE disconnected from one another, one person doesn’t understand the other or comprehend what he means. In the very same way that the brothers hated Yosef on account of his sublime stature and his detachment from them, he too didn’t understand

them or their behavior. Because he judged them according to his own yardstick, he viewed every minor deviation of theirs from his standards as heinous crimes.

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal explains that an individual who is completely righteous sees every slight infraction as the beginning of a slippery downward slope and therefore keeps much farther away from it than halachah demands. He therefore views anyone who doesn't maintain the same distance from sin as he does as having already plunged down the slope into the abyss below. In the Maharal's words: "Any person who is not as careful [to avoid sin] as he is himself appears to him to be suspect of violating the actual sin."

Yosef's brothers were thus not (*chalilah*) guilty of immorality or of eating a limb torn from a living creature. However, due to his detachment from them and his sublime level, Yosef worried that they might eventually stumble in these very areas, since they did not maintain the extreme caution that he imposed upon himself. It was this concern about his brothers that Yosef conveyed to their father.

Love thus arises from closeness and firm connection, whereas emotional and spiritual disconnection between people leads to hatred. Due to his sublime level, Yaakov was detached from Esav, and Esav therefore hated him. Yosef's inner essence was like Yaakov's, and this was reflected in their similar appearance. This quality kept him apart from his brothers, and he therefore became the object of their hatred. Because of this disconnection, Yosef didn't understand his brothers, and he therefore judged them by his own high standards.

Parshas Vayeishev demonstrates the results of disconnection even between people who have much in common and the importance of drawing our wayward brethren closer, even if they have moved far away and their deeds are hateful.

Mikeitz

Bris Milah as a Source of Life and Abundance

☛ Yosef Instructs the Egyptian People to Undergo Circumcision

WITH YOSEF'S APPOINTMENT as viceroy of Egypt, he set about implementing his proposal to gather the surplus produce during the seven years of plenty as a source of sustenance during the subsequent years of famine. The Torah tells us that when the famine struck, "All the [inhabitants of the] land of Egypt were hungry, and the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh told all of Egypt, 'Go to Yosef; whatever he tells you, you shall do'" (*Bereishis* 41:55). To what was Pharaoh referring when he told his people, "Whatever he tells you, you shall do?" Surely, Yosef was expected to distribute produce to everyone who requested it.

Rashi explains: "...because Yosef was telling them to undergo circumcision. When they came to Pharaoh and told him, 'This is what he's telling us,' he asked them, 'Why didn't you store produce when he announced that years of famine were approaching?' They said, 'We gathered a lot, but it rotted.' He told them, 'In that case, whatever he tells you to do, you shall do.'"

Yosef made the food distribution contingent on their undergoing circumcision.

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal asks, “Why did he tell them to undergo circumcision when [the halachah is that] we do not force a *ger* to convert?”

☛ What Does Circumcision Achieve for a Non-Jew?

THERE IS MORE to the mitzvah of *milah* than simply removing the foreskin. This act represents the perpetuation of the covenant between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Jewish People. Because of this, the mitzvah is known as *bris milah* (the covenant of circumcision).

Although Chazal tell us that Avraham Avinu fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given, he nevertheless did not circumcise himself until he was ninety-nine years old, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commanded him to do so. Rav Yitchak Ze’ev Soloveitchik explained that this was because *milah* goes beyond the physical act of severing the foreskin and constitutes the establishment of a covenant, for which the two participating sides are needed. Before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* became a party by commanding Avraham to circumcise himself, no covenant was possible.

The circumcision of a non-Jew who is not converting to Judaism can never constitute a covenant, as the Maharal explains in *Chidushei Agados* (*Nedarim* 33b), where he notes: “A genuine covenant is made with an individual friend; a genuine covenant cannot be made with two friends.”

Accordingly, the Mishnah (*Nedarim* 31b) states that a person who vows not to derive any benefit from *areilim* (uncircumcised individuals) is allowed to benefit from uncircumcised Jews and is forbidden to benefit from circumcised (as well as uncircumcised) non-Jews. Similarly, if he vowed not to benefit from *nimolim* (circumcised individuals), he may nevertheless not benefit from uncircumcised Jews, but he is allowed to benefit from circumcised non-Jews. The Gemara explains that this is because “The *orlah* (foreskin) is identified only with non-Jews,” meaning that a circumcised non-Jew is still referred

to as an *areil*, while an uncircumcised Jew is referred to as a *nimol*. Their difference lies not in the presence or absence of a foreskin, but in whether they are party to the defining covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

It is thus obvious that the circumcision undergone by the Egyptians did not represent their entry into the covenant between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Jewish People, but rather was merely the technical removal of their foreskins. The question now becomes even more pressing: if a non-Jew is not converting, what significance can this act have for him? What did Yosef gain by having the Egyptians circumcise themselves when all they were doing was removing a piece of skin in an act that had no deeper implications? What did he achieve with this?

☞ *Milah* as the Source of Abundance

THE MAHARAL (*GUR ARYEH* *ibid.*) explains: “The Egyptians only became worthy of being sustained by Yosef Hatzaddik through *milah*, because he had maintained the covenant and avoided having relations with a non-Jewess (i.e., Potiphar’s wife, who tried to entice him). Understand this matter well — for in the merit of *milah*, Yosef became a provider.”

Yosef was a “*tzaddik yesod olam* (who supports the world)” who upheld the integrity of the covenant of *milah* by withstanding the temptation to sin with Potiphar’s wife. In this merit, he was able to become a source of material abundance and bestow sustenance on others. He stockpiled wealth and supported the entire world during the famine in the merit of that worthy deed. Accordingly, it is clear from the Gemara (*Sotah* 36b) that Yosef earned the appellation “Shepherd (i.e., provider) for the family of Yisrael” (*Bereishis* 49:24) by dint of maintaining the integrity of the *bris*.

The Maharal (*ibid.*) explains: “They were therefore only worthy of being supported by Yosef after they underwent circumcision. This [matter] is known to those who comprehend.” Rav Dessler

explains this as meaning, “It is possible to benefit from the merit of a tzaddik only if the recipient in some way (even superficially) resembles the traits of the tzaddik” (*Michtav Me’Eliyahu* Vol. 2 pp. 232–33). The Egyptians were thus able to derive benefit from the merit of Yosef’s righteousness only once they underwent circumcision, thereby attaining some resemblance to him in the realm of his merit.

Although we now understand why the Egyptians had to resemble Yosef, the connection between Yosef’s righteousness in the realm of the *bris* and his ability to bestow material sustenance and bounty — which the Maharal writes was dependant on that merit — still requires explanation.

☛ He Who Bestows Life Bestows Sustenance

ALTHOUGH LIVELIHOOD AND economic success are primarily material blessings, they can be channeled into serving as the means for instilling life and fostering spiritual growth. In *maseches Ta’anis* (8b) and *maseches Niddah* (31b), we find that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who bestows life itself, bestows sustenance along with it and that life and sustenance are interdependent. The question is: how does a person handle his material and physical resources? If he holds his physical desires in check and lives a life of self-control, he merits both life and abundant livelihood. If, however, he indulges his desires, he impedes the flow of his own wellspring of life, and along with it, he limits the flow of his livelihood. Thus, the Gemara (*Sotah* 4b) tells us, “Whoever has relations with a harlot will ultimately seek a loaf of bread and not find one.” Accordingly, in the merit of overcoming the urging of his inclination and refraining from sinning with Potiphar’s wife, Yosef merited becoming “Yosef...the Provider” (*Bereishis* 42:6). When the Egyptians sought to receive their sustenance through Yosef, they had to bridle their desires and inclinations and align themselves with Yosef as the source of the flow of abundance.

☛ Holiness Is the Source of Spirituality, Life, and Abundant Material Blessing

SINCE YOSEF'S ABILITY to act as a channel for the flow of sustenance arose from his holiness in the realm of the *bris*, in order to obtain sustenance from this source, the Egyptians had to divest themselves of their foreskins, even though doing so lacked any dimension of the Divine covenant of the *bris*. They had to resemble Yosef, or else their indulgence in physicality would hamper their sustenance. It emerges that holiness is the bedrock not only of spirituality, but also of life and material abundance.

Although we have shown that life and sustenance are interdependent, we still need to explore further how indulgence of physical desire affects the flow of sustenance. Why did the Egyptians have to practice circumcision and self restraint in order to merit life and keep produce that did not decay?

☛ The Bris Is the Root of Eternal Existence

THE MAHARAL (IBID.) elucidates this point as follows: “This matter contains a wonderful lesson, for when Yosef saw that their produce had rotted while Yosef’s had not rotted, he realized that it was because they were uncircumcised, for *milah* is the *bris*, and Onkelos translates the word *bris* as *kayama* (enduring, i.e., an enduring covenant or promise). Whoever lacks this endurance through lacking *milah* — his produce decays.” In other words, since *bris* is synonymous with *kiyum*, enduring, eternal existence, circumcision was a necessity for anyone who did not want his produce to rot. Therefore, upon seeing that all the stores that the Egyptians had gathered throughout the years of plenty had rotted, Yosef instructed them to undergo circumcision.

The covenant of *milah* is apparently referred to as something enduring because it is an eternal agreement between the Jewish nation and G-d that will exist forever, in all times and under all

circumstances. How does this affect whether or not produce rots? And how does it affect non-Jewish nations? The Maharal's general approach to understanding these and related questions provides explanation.

☛ Time Exhausts Everything Physical

EVERYTHING PHYSICAL IS fated to eventually decay, whereas anything spiritual endures eternally.

Whereas a person's spirit, the soul, is eternal, his physical component is subject to the vicissitudes of time, whose effect is always detrimental. The human body, like any other physical item, has a limited lifespan. The only physical substance that improves with time is wine; this is why it is used for Kiddush and other holy purposes.

☛ Man Can Convert His Matter into Spirit

THE MAHARAL NOTES that man comprises two components that are direct opposites: his material, physical part — the body — and his spiritual, intellectual part — the soul. These two opposing parts are engaged in a constant struggle, not only over which of them will define the person overall, but even over their own essence. In *Derech Hashem*, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto portrays this struggle as follows: “Man is composed of two opposites, namely, the intellectual, pure soul and the coarse, earthly body, each of which pulls [him] in its direction — the body towards physicality and the soul towards intellectuality. You find that they are at war such that if the soul is victorious, it is elevated and it elevates the body with it, while if a person allows his physicality to get the better of him, he degrades his body, and his soul is degraded with it.”

The struggle between body and soul goes beyond the question of whether physicality or spirituality will win the battle to define the person; it is a struggle over which of them will transform the other. If his physical urgings gain the upper hand, the person will become

coarse and worldly, and his soul will also be coarsened, whereas if his spiritual urgings prevail, his body, which serves his spirit, will also become refined and spiritual.

It is thus within man's power to refine his physical component and transform substance into spirit.

☛ Refining Physical Matter Helps Resist the Decay Wrought by the Passage of Time

SINCE MAN'S PHYSICAL component decays over time, the greater the extent to which he refines it and imbues it with spirituality, the more he preserves it and renders it resistant to the harm wrought by passing time and advancing age.

Everything is drawn to reunite with its source. Physical matter is attracted to its source, the earth. Though man tries to fight this natural attraction of his physical component to its earthly source, his struggle is doomed to failure. Eventually, it grows exhausted and ultimately wears out, wasting away on its return journey to its source, the earth from whence it came. Man's only hope for overcoming this tendency toward wearing out is to imbue his matter with spirit and minimize its physicality.

☛ Torah Scholars Remain Productive in Their Old Age

MOSHE RABBEINU TOLD the Jewish People: "And you, who are attached to Hashem, your G-d, all of you remain alive today" (*Devarim* 4:4). The Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 1:12) explains this as meaning that anyone who clings to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* becomes like Him, as it were — eternal and infinite.

Though man is doomed to die, and nobody escapes this fate, there is a way to postpone one's demise. In *maseches Shabbos* (152a), the Gemara tells us, "The older Torah scholars grow, the more wisdom they accrue, whereas the older ignoramuses grow, the more foolish they become." Old age, like any extreme circumstance (e.g.,

drunkenness, calamity, etc.) causes a person's inner essence to burst forth. As Chazal tell us (*Eruvin* 65a), "With wine's entry [into a person], secrets emerge." As a person who was good to others grows old, he mellows and is a source of blessing, whereas a person who tended to display anger becomes hardened and full of complaints.

As he grows older, a person whose essence is defined by his physicality experiences decline and decay, and his spiritual aspect also withers and fades. On the other hand, a spiritual person prospers and grows more productive with the waning of his physical urges and the emergence of his essence. His spiritual powers take flight and soar. As the *pasuk* says, "They shall continue to yield in hoary old age; they shall be fertile and fresh" (*Tehillim* 92:15).

This is how the Maharal expresses this idea in *Chiddushei Aggados*: "Physical matter weakens with advancing age, as the physical powers decline. With their increasing weakness, a person's intellect grows stronger, for 'when this one falls, the other one rises.' The opposite happens to elderly ignoramuses, whose interests and minds center upon the physical and who lack 'a detached intellect' (i.e., a spiritual part, detached from worldly existence). The older they become and weaker their physical faculties, the weaker their intellects grow, for their minds are also physical."

☛ By Diminishing Physical Strength, the *Bris* Increases Longevity

BRIS MILAH PLACES an imprint upon man's physical aspect that serves as a reminder to him to restrain his material urges and strive for spirituality. The purpose of the foreskin's removal is to curb that organ that pulls man towards physicality. The Ramban, too, writes that the reason for *milah* is "that He places a sign upon the organ of desire, which is responsible for great tumult and sin, so that it should be used only for that which is commanded and that which is permitted."

Cutting off the foreskin thus diminishes man's physical drives,

placing an imprint of holiness and spirituality even upon his most physical and impulsive organ. This imbues him with life, distancing him from the decay that the passage of time inflicts upon his physical being, as we find in the Mishnah (*Pesachim* 92a): “Whoever separates from the foreskin is akin to one who separates from the grave.”

✦ Removing Worthless Matter from the Body Removes the Cause of Decay from Produce

YOSEF SAW THAT the produce he had stored remained preserved while that of the Egyptians rotted. This phenomenon showed him that the Egyptians harbored the coarsest physicality, without a drop of spirituality. In order to prevent this in the future, it was vital that they divest themselves of their foreskins and implant some spirituality into their physical being. Although such a *milah* indeed lacked any dimension of the covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, it contained the element of imposing self-restraint upon the organ of desire, rendering the person more spiritual and controlled. Yosef thus asked the Egyptians to undergo *milah* so that they would gain endurance (as we have seen, *bris* translates as *kayama*) and be better able to weather the vicissitudes of time, and their produce upon which they depended would not decay.*

* In his *Kli Yakar*, Rav Shlomo Efrayim of Lentshitz, a disciple of the Maharal who succeeded him as Rav of Prague, takes a similar approach to his teacher in explaining this episode. He writes that Yosef asked the Egyptians to undergo circumcision “Because *milah* rectifies the organ so that a person should not overindulge in having relations, for Egyptians were steeped in immorality.” He writes that Yosef intended “that with the foreskin’s removal, they would no longer suffer from famine, for removing the foreskin represents the removal of superfluous blood that leads to decay. Rotting produce is also caused by unnecessary and waste materials in the grain that cause decay and rotting. Thus, measure for measure, when a person removes (material) waste from within himself, Hashem bestows benefit and removes the waste within the produce.”

Three principles emerge from the above:

1. A human being's physicality leads to his eventual demise, decay, and disappearance. With the passage of time, his inner wellspring of life dries up and along with it his sources of livelihood. His spirit, though, is eternal, and when it attains dominance over his physicality, it exerts a refining effect that breathes life even into the body. A person who restrains his physical desires fights the pull of physicality and empowers his spirit, enabling his inner wellspring to continue flowing powerfully.
2. Life itself and the means of sustaining life are interdependent. Excessive physicality thus not only diminishes a person's life force, but also his sources of sustenance. When the claim on life dwindles, the result is decaying produce. Safeguarding one's purity in the realm of the *bris* is a life-giving merit and confers abundant sustenance.
3. To derive benefit from a tzaddik and his merits, merely receiving his blessing is insufficient; the beneficiary must emulate the tzaddik's spiritual path to some degree.

Uayigash

How Does a Person Turn over a New Leaf in Life?

☛ Shimon Marries Dinah

OUR *PARSHAH* LISTS the descendants of Yaakov Avinu who went down to Egypt. Among them we find, “Shimon’s sons were Yemuel, Yamin, Ohad, Yachin, Tzochar, and Shaul, son of the Canaanitess” (*Bereishis* 46:10). The implication that Shimon married a Canaanite woman is difficult to reconcile with Avraham Avinu’s explicit instruction to his servant Eliezer not to take a wife for Yitzchak from the daughters of the Canaanites (*ibid.* 24:3). Rashi therefore explains that “the Canaanitess” is not to be understood literally and refers instead to Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov Avinu.

Dinah receives this appellation because before marrying Shimon she was raped by a Canaanite, Shechem, the son of Chamor. Shimon and Levi subsequently killed all the inhabitants of the city of Shechem, but when they came to take Dinah back, Rashi (*ibid.* 46:10) tells us, “She didn’t want to leave Shechem’s house before Shimon had sworn that he would marry her.”

Thus, Rashi tells us that Shimon didn’t sire Shaul from an actual Canaanite woman, because the Avos were particular about avoiding such marriages; rather, he married his sister, Dinah.

☛ How Could Shimon Marry His Sister?

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal asks how it is possible that “the Avos kept the entire Torah, which they comprehended through their Divine

inspiration and were [even] particular about avoiding intermarriage with Canaanites, yet [they] were not particular about marriage with a close relative, which is forbidden by the Torah?” How could Shimon marry his sister when this is one of the incestuous unions the Torah forbids? Avraham Avinu explained to Avimelech that Sarah, his wife, was “the daughter of my father, but not of my mother” (ibid. 20:12), implying that a maternal sister was forbidden to marry her brother even before the Torah was given (*Sanhedrin* 58b). How then could Shimon marry Dinah, who was his sister from both parents?

☛ The Avos Started from Scratch

THE MAHARAL’S ANSWER to this problem is that “Although all the Avos observed the Torah in its entirety, they had to accept it as *gerim* (converts) who became Jewish.”

In other words, whereas ever since the Torah was given, a Jew’s obligation to keep Torah and mitzvos stems from his forebears’ obligation — stretching all the way back to the Jewish People’s acceptance of the Torah when it was given on Har Sinai — the Avos kept the Torah voluntarily, as it were, without having been obligated to do so. The Ramban (in his commentary to *Bereishis* 26:5) thus explains that each generation had to undertake anew to fulfill the Torah, for there was no prior obligation passed on from the previous generation. Each individual had to start from scratch.

☛ A Ger Who Joins the Jewish Faith Is Like a Newborn Child

WHEN A *GER* sets out upon the life of Torah obligation that he has accepted upon himself, he is subject to the rule, “A *ger* who joins the Jewish faith is like a newborn child” (*Yevamos* 22a). He has been reborn and experienced renewal — he has become a wholly new entity, leaving behind any past shackles and obligations, including family ties. One of this principle’s farthest-reaching implications is

the halachah that *gerim* are not subject to the restrictions preventing close relatives from testifying about one another in *beis din*. The Rambam writes (*Hilchos Issurei Biah* 13:2), “Even two twin brothers who have converted can testify about one another, for a *ger* who converts is considered like a newborn.”

Despite their biological relationship, these converts can testify about each other, for halachah no longer views them as relatives. They are like newborns — their conversion disconnects them from both their spiritual past and their physical origins.

☛ Biological Relatives, Halachic Strangers

THE *GER'S* NEW start is absolute, even in regard to marrying ordinarily forbidden relatives.

Accordingly, the Rambam rules (*ibid.* 14:11) that a non-Jew who converts “is like a newborn infant, and all his relatives as a non-Jew *are no longer related to him*; if both he and they converted, he is not liable if he has relations with any of them.”

The *ger's* detachment from his previous existence includes detachment from family ties; his sister is no longer his relative. He does not inherit her when she dies, does not sit *shivah* for her, and is not forbidden by the Torah from having relations with her. With his conversion, Torah law allows her close relative to marry her.

☛ The Avos' Acceptance of Torah Was Akin to Conversion

IN LIGHT OF this principle, the question of how Shimon could marry Dinah disappears, because at that time, before the Torah was given, each individual accepted a life of Torah and mitzvos on his own. This meant assuming the mantle of Torah observance as a personal undertaking, similar to conversion. Both Shimon and Dinah were thus akin to “converts who are like newborns” and were allowed to marry each other.

This explanation also enables us to understand how Yaakov Avinu married sisters (Rachel and Leah) and how Amram the son of Kehas married his aunt Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, who was his father's sister (*Shemos* 6:20). Despite their biological relationship, they were not considered halachic relatives, for they were all “converts who are like newborns.”

☛ Why Did the People Cry over Their Families?

HOWEVER, THE MAHARAL'S explanation leaves us with a major difficulty. In *Bamidbar* 11:10, the Torah tells us, “Moshe heard the people crying over their families.” Rashi explains that they were crying over the fact that marriage between close relatives had now become forbidden. When the Torah was given, the stringent prohibition of marrying close relatives led them to weep, because spouses who were closely related would now have to separate.

But why would they have to part when the Jews' acceptance of the Torah is considered to have involved a regular process of conversion to the Jewish faith? This is evident from the fact that the basic laws of conversion are derived from the stages of the process that the Jews underwent when the Torah was given.

The Torah tells us that at Har Sinai, “He [Moshe] then took the Book of the Covenant and read it out clearly to the people, and they responded, ‘We will carry out and heed everything Hashem has spoken.’ Moshe then took the blood, splashed it on the people, and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that Hashem has formed with you regarding all these matters’” (*Shemos* 24:7–8). Rashi explains that this episode serves as the source for all the stages necessary for conversion: *milah*, immersion in a *mikveh*, and the sprinkling of blood (i.e., when the Beis Hamikdash stood, a *ger* would bring a sacrifice whose blood was sprinkled on the altar, as was done at Har Sinai), and, of course, acceptance of the yoke of mitzvah observance. Since the events at Har Sinai serve as the prototype for the conversion process, we would expect that the entire generation that had just left Egypt would have

been subject to the principle, “A *ger* who converts is like a newborn” and that marriage between close relatives would be permitted. Their blood relations were presumably no longer considered as such as far as halachah was concerned, so what occasion was there for their weeping?

☛ Rebirth Takes Place Only upon Voluntary Conversion

THE MAHARAL RESOLVES this problem by laying down the principle that a *ger* resembles a newborn only when his conversion results from his voluntary acceptance of Judaism, whereas the generation that received the Torah accepted it under duress. The Torah tells us, “They stood at the foot (lit. *in* the base) of the mountain” (ibid. 19:17).

Instead of writing that the people stood *l’sachtis habar* (at the foot of the mountain) or *l’yad habar* (by the mountain), the Torah writes *b’sachtis habar*, whose prefix *b’* (in) indicates that they stood “*in* the base of the mountain” i.e., they were literally beneath the mountain. In *maseches Shabbos* (88a), Chazal expound this *pasuk* as follows: “This teaches us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* suspended the mountain over them like a barrel and told them, ‘If you accept the Torah, well and good, but if not, your graves will be right here.’” *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* thus compelled the Jews to accept the Torah.

The Maharal concludes that since the Jews’ acceptance of the Torah was the result of compulsion, not choice, the principle, “A *ger* who joins the Jewish faith is like a newborn” did not apply.

☛ *Giyur* under Compulsion Is Not Rebirth

THERE SEEMS TO be a major problem with this answer, for as we have noted, the Jews’ conversion at Har Sinai serves as the prototype from which the halachos of conversion are derived, implying that despite the element of compulsion, the nation’s conversion was typical in every sense, including the converts being like newborns. The Maharal, on the other hand, writes that a coerced conversion doesn’t render the

ger a new person. Since the conversion that took place at Sinai was a valid process that imposed new obligations that had not existed hitherto, surely the principle of a *ger* being like a newborn should apply to it as well, even if it came about through coercion. Why should a *giyur* that involves compulsion — though valid and binding in every other sense — not represent a new beginning in life?

☛ Why the Conversion at Har Sinai Did Not Render Yisrael Like Newborns

WE SHALL NOW present three different explanations of why the Jews' conversion at Har Sinai differed from all subsequent *gerus* in regard to the rule that “a convert is akin to newborn.” Each one reveals a different facet of the way compulsion impacts upon the new beginning that conversion represents.

☛ The Giving of the Torah Was Not a Rupture with the Past and a New Beginning

IN HIS WORK *Kli Chemdah*, Rav Meir Dan Plotzky (one of Polish Jewry's foremost twentieth-century rabbinic leaders) explains: “A *ger* from another nation who comes to convert detaches himself from the nations of the world and attaches himself to Hashem and is therefore akin to a newborn. By contrast, the Jewish People were always destined to receive the Torah; this was the purpose of their departure from Egypt — to undertake to observe the Torah. With this, the purpose of their creation — for which they were ready since becoming the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov — came to fruition. How is it possible, then, to say that they were like newborns?”

In other words, *gerus* encompasses two elements: the technical aspect of undertaking to live a Jewish life of Torah and mitzvos, and the less regulated but more fundamental matter of severing one's connection to his nation of birth and previous existence.

Becoming akin to a newborn is not a function of the technical side of *gerus*; it is a consequence of the essential detachment from the *ger*'s previous life. Disowning his past and his people also cuts off the *ger* from his family and relatives, creating a person who has been born anew — he indeed abandons his previous existence. When the Jewish People received the Torah, however, they were not dissociating themselves from their heritage as the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Quite the reverse, as descendants of the Avos, they were reaffirming their connection to their spiritual root and source! Without appreciating this unique aspect of their conversion, it is actually totally incomprehensible, because a new relationship cannot be forged through coercion.

A person or a group of people can be compelled to maintain an existing relationship and conduct themselves in accordance with the expectations it has created, but they cannot be forced to become party to a new relationship against their will. A person can be forced to settle an existing debt, but he cannot be forced to take out a new loan or make a new purchase if he doesn't want to. The Hebrew noun *av*, meaning father or progenitor, one who represents the beginning of a family or dynasty, is related to the verb *avah*, to desire, because the start of any new venture must be accompanied by willing consent.

The sole reason that the mountain's suspension above the people and their compulsion to agree to accept the Torah in no way detracts from the validity of their conversion, is that this was not the beginning of a new relationship, but rather the continuation of one that had been firmly in place since the time of the Avos. It thus did not mark the cornerstone-laying of a new edifice, a brand-new relationship between G-d and the Jewish People, but rather the dedication of an existing one, an established relationship stretching back to the time of the Avos of which the Jewish People were now becoming a part.

They were converting only in the technical sense, not in essence, for their acceptance of Torah served to strengthen their attachment to their source rather than sever it. Without detachment from his past and a new beginning, a convert cannot be considered akin to a newborn baby.

☛ Understanding the Coercion That Took Place at Har Sinai

DESPITE LACKING THE element of a new beginning, the Jews' conversion at Har Sinai still serves as the prototype for the halachos of *gerus* because it squarely placed the obligation to fulfill Torah and mitzvos upon them, raising them to new spiritual summits. At the same time, though, they did not become akin to newborns, because they were not breaking with the past but reconnecting to it. If this was all their conversion amounted to, though, what role did the coercion of holding the mountain over them play in it?

In *Pachad Yitzchak* (Shavuos 20), Rav Yitzchak Hutner explains that the compulsion in accepting the Torah was a function of the reality that there is no natural way for the Jewish People to survive without Torah and mitzvos. In other words, there was no positive, externally imposed act of coercion. The coercion was circumstantial and “built in,” arising from the alignment of our nation's innermost essence with Torah and mitzvos to begin with. “He held the mountain over them like a barrel” actually expresses the inseparable character of the Torah's bond with the Jewish nation's soul, which is such that its severance sounds a death knell for those abandoning Torah and mitzvos. This conversion was about reconnecting to the past, not making a new beginning. Rather than create them anew, it revealed their true essence and uncovered their deepest, profoundest aspirations.

☛ Distinguishing between Prior Willingness and Post-facto Acquiescence

THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE throws this idea into sharp focus. The Rambam (*Hilchos Gerushin* 2:20) cites several scenarios in which a man is forced to divorce his wife despite the halachah that a divorce is valid only if the husband gives it willingly. In such cases, his consent is obtained by *beis din* “beating him until he says, ‘I am willing.’”

How can this be deemed sufficient evidence of his willingness when his consent is being extracted through physical coercion?

Addressing this point, the Rambam explains: “We only say that someone is acting under compulsion when he is being pressured and forced into doing something that he is not obligated to do by Torah law, for example, if a person was beaten until he sold or gifted something he owned. However, a person who is assailed by his evil inclination to neglect a mitzvah or to transgress a sin and is beaten until he does that which he is obligated to do or until he desists from that which is forbidden to him, is not considered to have acted solely under compulsion. Rather, he was hitherto compelling himself through his evil intention. Therefore, this person who does not want to give a divorce — since he *does* want to be a member of the nation of Yisrael and to observe all the mitzvos and desist from all the *aveiros*, and it is [just] his evil inclination that is interfering — after having been beaten to the point where his inclination weakens [its hold on him] and he says, ‘I am willing,’ he has granted the divorce willingly.”

In other words, a Jew wants to remain faithful to his spiritual promptings and fulfill his Creator’s will, and if he behaves otherwise, it is due to the incitement of his extrinsic evil inclination. His degree of willingness is not defined in those moments when his inclination surges within him and pushes him to refuse, but rather once its effects have receded. At that stage, he is satisfied with his actions and is truly happy to have done the right thing.

☛ At Har Sinai, the People’s Innermost Desire Became Apparent

THUS, WHEN *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* suspended the mountain over Yisrael and compelled them to accept the Torah, their acceptance was binding because the compulsion only served to remove the momentary fear that was holding them back, thus bringing to the forefront their genuine, innermost desire. However, since the desire they were expressing was deeply rooted and had always existed, they were clearly not

breaking with their past, but rather strengthening their connection with it. Accordingly, they could not be considered like newborns.

☛ Consent Obtained by Force Represents the Will of the Compelling Party

AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION of the Maharal's assertion of the inapplicability of the principle, "A *ger* who converts is akin to a newborn baby" to *gerus* brought about through compulsion was advanced by Rav Moshe Shapiro along the following lines:

Gerus creates a new person by reflecting his new aspirations.

Any act a person does as a result of his own wishes comes solely from him, whereas an act that he is forced to do comes from the wish of the party forcing him. Thus, *gerus* resulting from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* compulsion doesn't reflect the wish of the convert but of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who compelled him to take this step. It doesn't demonstrate any new aspiration on the part of the convert, who remains as he was. Thus, in no sense does he resemble a newborn.

From the Maharal's novel approach, we learn that in order to break away from his past and begin life altogether anew, an individual must:

1. Connect with his inner source of vitality and with spirituality, without which he cannot survive, [whereas at Sinai, the people were not beginning a new connection but reaffirming their existing one — *Kli Chemdab*];
2. Create a new desire for a life of serving G-d, [whereas at Sinai, the people connected with their inner essence, which became apparent only after the clamor of their physical desires had been quieted — *Pachad Yitzchak*];
3. Arrive at his own independent decision, without the intervention of any external force, [whereas at Sinai, there was compulsion — Rav Moshe Shapiro].

Uyechi

The Ideal Reality of Unity and the Present Reality of Duality

☛ Rachel Cries over Her Children as They Are Led Away to Exile

YAAKOV AVINU INSTRUCTS Yosef to swear that he will not bury him in Egypt. He later tells Yosef, “As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan, on the road, still at a certain distance from Efras, and I buried her there on the way to Efras — that is Beis Lechem” (*Bereishis* 48:7).

Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu’s mention of the circumstances of the death and burial of Yosef’s mother was meant as an apology of sorts. Rashi writes, “Although I am putting you through the trouble of taking me to the land of Canaan for burial, and I did not do the same for your mother — for she died close to Beis Lechem, and I didn’t even take her into Beis Lechem so as to bring her into the Land — and I know that in your heart you harbor complaints against me [about this], You should know that I buried her there according to Heaven’s instructions so that she should be of help to her children when Nevuzaradan exiles them and they pass that place. Rachel will go out next to her grave, weep over them, and seek Heaven’s mercy for them, as it says, ‘A voice can be heard in Ramah... [it is] Rachel crying over her children’ (*Yirmeyahu* 31:14). And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* answers her, ‘There is reward for your

deeds says Hashem... and the children will return to their borders' (ibid. 15–16).”

☛ Why Is It Specifically Rachel Who Weeps?

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal asks, “Why did Rachel weep [over Yisrael’s exile] more than the other Imahos?”

The exiles were also the children of Sarah and Rivkah; Leah’s descendants, too, were uprooted from their land. Why did Divine providence arrange that Rachel in particular would be buried “on the road” and not in the Cave of Machpelah so that she would pray on behalf of her children? Rachel must have had some specific merit that the other Imahos did not possess that lent her prayers a special quality, enabling her to intervene on behalf of the exiles. What was this merit?

☛ Because of Rachel’s Concession to Leah, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Will Make a Concession to Her Children and Forgive Them

TO ANSWER THIS question, the Maharal cites a Midrash: “When He exiled her children, Rachel said to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, ‘What sin have my children done to have You inflict such punishment on them? Perhaps they committed idolatry, which is called *tzarah* (a second woman whom a man marries, who becomes a *tzarah* to his first wife — idolatry is also referred to as *tzarah*, because an idolater is not faithful to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* alone)? Why, I too loved Yaakov my husband, and he worked for seven years in order to marry me, and in the end, Lavan, my father, gave him my sister Leah as a wife. Yet despite my love for Yaakov, I handed the signs [that he gave me] to my sister. I am flesh and blood, while You are a Merciful King. How much more so is it fitting that You should have mercy on them!’ And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* replies, ‘There is reward for your deeds ... and the children will return from their enemy’s land’” (*Eichah Rabbah, Pesichta 24*).

The signs that Yaakov had given Rachel were a means of identifying her, to make sure that Lavan would not switch her with a different bride. Rachel can pray on behalf of her children because she possesses the singular merit of having revealed those signs to her sister Leah. Rachel sacrificed having Yaakov to herself as a husband for the sake of her sister Leah, agreeing that Leah would also be his wife, and in that merit, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is asked to forgive the Jewish People for failing to uphold G-d's unity and worshipping idols.

☛ A Mitzvah Does Not Atone for a Sin

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 34), the Maharal asks on this Midrash: "Is Rachel's loving acceptance of her fate and refraining from embarrassing her sister a reason that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should pardon Yisrael, who worshiped idols?"

The rationale behind this question seems to be the principle that performing a mitzvah cannot wipe out a sin. Although there is great reward for every mitzvah a person fulfills, the mitzvah cannot prevent him from being punished for sins from which he has not yet repented.

The Torah tells us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "will not show favor and will not accept a bribe" (*Devarim* 10:17). The Rambam (in his commentary on *Avos* 4:22) explains this as meaning that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "will not accept a bribe of mitzvos." In *Tomer Devorah* (Chap. 1), Rav Moshe Kordovero explains, "Even a wholly righteous individual who sinned [but] once is considered by Him to have burnt the Torah until he atones for his guilt, and [only] then he receives the reward for all his mitzvos... This is a great kindness that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does with the righteous, not deducting anything from their mitzvos, because the mitzvos are extremely valuable and ascend to the Throne of Glory, so how would He detract from them because of a person's sins? Instead, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* exacts the debt of the *aveiros* and awards the reward for all the mitzvos."

How is it possible, then, for Rachel's act of kindness to prevent

the imposition of punishment for her descendants' sin of idol worship?

☛ Rachel Provides Defense for Her Children

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that Rachel was not appealing to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to save her children as reward for her good deeds. Rather, she was advocating in their defense. She based her argument in their defense on an essential similarity between her consent to Yaakov having a second wife and her descendants' sin of idolatry, showing that her deed could cast their sin in a less serious light. In order to grasp the nature of this similarity, the Maharal first explains the concepts of unity and duality, which we shall now examine.

☛ The Similarity between Yaakov's Singularity and the Creator's Unity

WE FIND IN the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 77:1): "Everything that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is going to do in the future He has done first through [the lives of] the tzaddikim in this world." One of these parallels is the prophecy that "Hashem will be sublime on His own on that day" (*Yeshayah* 2:11) and the *pasuk* that tells us "Yaakov remained on his own" (*Bereishis* 32:25). This comparison between the Creator's unity and Yaakov's solitude presents a major difficulty. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is abstract and intangible; He is more elevated and sublime than any level or form of existence. When we say that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "was, is, and will be," we are not merely saying that He existed yesterday and that He will still exist tomorrow, but rather something well beyond that: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not bound or limited by any constraints of time or space. If Yaakov Avinu is likened to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, he in some sense apparently also exists above the limits of time and space.

How are we to understand this?

☛ An Abstract and Holy Entity Is Not Divisible

IN *GUR ARYEH* (*Bereishis* 28:11), the Maharal cites Rashi's comments on the *pasuk* that when he lay down to sleep on Har Hamoriyah, Yaakov placed stones around his head to protect him from wild animals. Rashi writes, "The stones began quarreling among themselves, with this one saying, 'The tzaddik shall rest his head upon me' and that one saying, 'Upon me he shall rest...' *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* immediately made them all into a single stone."

The Maharal asks, "What quarrel could there possibly have been between stones that lack intellect?"

His answer is that Yaakov was a holy individual who was detached from all worldly affairs, "and something that is holy is something that is one, indivisible... for there is no division or multiplicity associated with a [wholly] intellectual entity."

In other words, any physical entity is by definition confined to certain limitations of time and space; it occupies a quantifiable space — it has height, length, and width — and consequently exists for a certain time span. Physical items are therefore distinct and separate from one another. An abstract, spiritual entity, by contrast, has no limits of time or space. It cannot be divided into parts. Since Yaakov was wholly spiritual and abstract, he represents unity.

"Therefore," writes the Maharal, "the stones beneath his head became subsumed into one, single stone, demonstrating Yaakov's sublime virtue." Chazal (*Shabbos* 118b) tell us accordingly that Yaakov Avinu received unlimited possessions, neither bounded by borders nor divided into parts, as he was promised, "You shall burst forth to the west, east, north, and south" (*ibid. pasuk* 14).

☛ Unity Demanded That Yaakov Marry Just One Wife

YAAKOV MARRIED TWO wives, and two kingdoms eventually issued from him: the Kingdom of Yehudah, whose rulers were Leah's descendants, and the Kingdom of Yisrael, which came from Efrayim,

a descendant of Rachel. How does this split reconcile with Yaakov's essentially spiritual, unified nature? The stones that Yaakov placed beneath his head united to become a single stone, because Yaakov's holiness demanded unity. By the same token, Yaakov should have married just one wife, who would have born him all twelve tribes. Yehudah and Efrayim would then not have been born to two different mothers, and the entire nation would have remained united under one ruler.

☛ Yaakov's Unity Will Be Apparent Only in the Future

APPARENTLY, THE REALITY of Yaakov's unity does not exist at present, and its emergence must await the future. In the time of Mashiach, the Jewish nation will no longer be split, and unity will prevail. Yechezkel prophesied, "And you, son of man! Take for yourself one piece of wood, and write on it 'For Yehudah...' and take another piece of wood, and write on it, 'For Yosef...' And bring them next to each other to be for you like one piece of wood, and they will then become one solid piece of wood in your hand..." This is what the L-rd Hashem has said: 'I am going to take the Children of Yisrael from among the nations where they went, gather them from all around, and bring them to their land. I will make them one nation in the land in the mountains of Yisrael, and one king will be recognized by all of them as king, and they will never again be as two nations nor ever again be divided into two kingdoms'" (*Yechezkel 37:16–17, 21–22*).

This prophecy awaits its fulfillment, but until then, the reality of unity is non-existent, and a deep chasm divides Yehudah from Efrayim.

☛ Until Mashiach's Time, Divine Revelation Is Also Subject to Separateness

YAAKOV MARRIED TWO wives, and the Jewish nation split into two parts, because the reality of unity will prevail only in the future. As we have seen, Yaakov's essentially unified being parallels that of the

Creator. Just as Yaakov's present reality is split, it is similarly written, "Hashem shall be strong alone *on that day*" (*Yeshayah* 2:11).

The Creator's unity will become apparent to all only in the future. Until then, the world suffers from the credence given to idols and idolatry. Thus writes Rashi on the *pasuk*, "Hashem our G-d, Hashem is One" (*Devarim* 6:4): "[This means,] 'Hashem, who is at present our G-d' but not the G-d of the nations, will *in the future be* 'Hashem [who is] One,' as it says, 'For I will *then* have the nations speak a refined language, [that will lead them] all to call Hashem's Name [and to serve Him as one group]' (*Tzefaniah* 3:9) and it says, '*On that day* Hashem will be One and His Name will be one' (*Zechariah* 14:9)."

In our present reality, Hashem's unity as the sole power existing in the world seems to be less than apparent, and forces of impurity seem to operate as though they are independent.

☛ Why Duality Will Persist until Mashiach's Time

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION for the present concealment of the Creator's unity might be the free will that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gives every individual to believe in His existence or to deny it. Freedom of choice necessitates two options from which to choose, and therefore, our present reality appears to be one of duality, not unity.

☛ Idolatry Identifies with a Dual Reality

IN *BE'ER HAGOLAH* (*Be'er* 2), the Maharal explains that a reality in which idolatry flourishes is termed duality and stands in contradiction to the reality of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* unity. This is also known as the *sitra achara*, the "other side," a counterbalance to the unified reality of the Creator.

This is the reason for the Gemara's warning to avoid *zugos* (pairs), i.e., duality. In *maseches Pesachim* (109b), the Gemara warns that "A person should avoid eating two [items] and avoid drinking two [cups]." The forces of impurity are identified with doubling and

splitting and hold sway wherever there is separation and division. The Gemara thus asks how we can drink four cups of wine at the Seder without concern for the inherent danger of doubles. The answer is that, “A cup upon which a blessing is made combines for good but not for evil.” In other words, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s holiness that is invoked by reciting the blessings on each cup altogether repels any impure forces associated with the even number of cups. The Maharal explains accordingly that “When a person is attached to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s unity, His unity annuls all the impure forces of the “damagers” that consist of (i.e., whose power is based upon) nothing but duality (i.e., the need for an apparent — though actually non-existent — counterbalance to the Creator’s power].”

☛ Rachel Afforded Entry to a *Tzarah* Because There Is No Unity in the World’s Present Reality

IN KEEPING WITH this approach, the Maharal explains that “Rachel knew that Yaakov ought to marry two wives because this world — the world of separation and division — is unworthy of everything being unified. Had Yaakov married only one wife, Yisrael would have remained together as one. Since Rachel realized this (i.e., that the world’s present state is one of disunity), she lovingly accepted [the situation].”

In other words, Rachel’s acquiescence to her sister becoming her *tzarah* was not merely a huge personal sacrifice of her special bond with Yaakov. Its consequences went much farther and deeper, for it amounted to acquiescence to the Jewish nation’s division and a reality of duality, with the realization that unity would prevail only in the future.

☛ Given the Present Reality, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Will Pardon the Sin of Idolatry

RACHEL’S PRAYER TO *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to pardon her descendants’ sin of idolatry can now be understood in a new light, for until

the future revelation of the Creator's unity, disunity prevails in the world, and Rachel made a difficult personal sacrifice based on her realization of this unfortunate reality.

“It is therefore fitting that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should pardon Yisrael,” continues the Maharal, “for since there is no unity in the world and idolatry still persists in the world, this causes Yisrael to sin.” Rachel is the only one of the Imahos who is able to pray on her children's behalf as they go into exile because her own life embodied the most acute expression of the reality in which there is no unity but rather painful, inescapable division. As the person who had made a painful sacrifice in acknowledgment of and in acquiescence to this reality of duality, Rachel was in a unique position of being able to advocate in her children's defense regarding their sin of idolatry that was a consequence of the reality of duality and division.

☞ Rachel Symbolizes the Jewish People's Unity

TAKING THIS A step further, the Maharal points out that when Rachel was “crying over her children,” her prayers were not limited to her direct offspring, but rather were for all of Klal Yisrael. As such, she deserved to receive the promise that “The children will return to their borders.” Since Rachel gave up her own unique role in building Yaakov's family, she is welcomed by Leah's descendants too and symbolizes the Jewish nation's future unity. Rachel is thus also known as *Beis Yaakov* (the House of Yaakov) and *Kenesses Yisrael*, and even during the present era of disunity when Yisrael are separated from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and scattered among all the nations, they still possess a bond that connects and collects them — for Rachel joins them all together.

“And in Rachel's merit,” writes the Maharal, “they will undergo a full ingathering and return to their borders. Therefore, when Yisrael were exiled, Rachel sought mercy, for it is not fitting that there should be separation among Yisrael, for she brings together the House of Yaakov. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* responded to her that even

though they were temporarily going into exile, in her merit — for she joins and unites everything — they would return to their borders.”

We have thus learned that at that future time when we merit rectifying the world under the Almighty’s rule, the reality of His unity will be universally acknowledged. Until then, however, we inhabit a fragmented world where duality prevails and the reality that we apprehend bears more than one interpretation. We pointed out that the Creator’s unity is not apparent, thus allowing man to choose which interpretation of reality he wishes to follow. The world’s fragmentation is also the reason for the sin and disunity that exist within the Jewish nation. It is Rachel who weeps over her children’s suffering, because in handing her signs to Leah, she acquiesced to the future Jewish nation’s split into two kingdoms and a reality of duality. It is therefore she who has the power to advocate in defense of her children’s sins, which are attributable to the world of duality that they inhabit. It was Rachel’s very acknowledgment of the reality of duality that led her to unite the Jewish People by accommodating her sister. This unity, which was achieved at great personal sacrifice, is the light at the end of the tunnel even as we inhabit our world of duality. In its merit, we will ultimately be saved and merit arriving at those days when it will be clearly visible that “Hashem is One and His Name is one.”

Shemos

The Spiritual Hazards of Revealing Secrets

☞ The Cause of the Exile Was the Practice of Revealing Secrets

WHEN MOSHE WENT out to survey the suffering of his Jewish brethren, he encountered a Jew who was about to strike another Jew and asked him, “Why should you strike your colleague?” The offender responded, “Who appointed you as a prince and judge over us? Do you propose killing me like you killed the Egyptian?” Moshe’s reaction to this was, “Moshe was afraid and said, ‘Indeed, the matter has become known’” (*Shemos* 2:13–14).

On the plainest level, Moshe meant that his murder of the Egyptian the previous day had now become known despite having “turned this way and that” (*ibid. pasuk* 12) beforehand to ensure that there were no witnesses. Rashi, however, does not leave it at that, but cites the comment of the Midrash explaining the words, “Indeed, the matter has become known” as meaning: “I have discovered the matter that I wondered about — what sin have Yisrael, out of all the seventy nations, committed that they deserve being forced to perform crushing labor? But now, I see that they deserve it.”

What sin was it that brought the suffering of this exile upon the Jewish People? Moshe learned that his own secret had been revealed. But why should revealing this or any secret bring such a severe punishment upon an entire nation?

☛ Rectification and Redemption Come About as a Result of Guarding Secrets

FROM ANOTHER STATEMENT of Chazal, we learn that not only was Yisrael's enslavement caused by the disclosure of secrets, but that the rectification they needed was through guarding secrets. The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:22) tells us, "Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of four things: they did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not reveal their secrets, and they were not promiscuous."

The thrust of the message conveyed by this Midrash is that a people that is careful not to become assimilated within another nation merits redemption. While it is obvious how maintaining distinct names, a separate language, and purity of lineage all contribute to preserving national identity, thus leading to the people's redemption, the role of guarding secrets in this process is less clear.

While being discreet and respecting privacy are certainly worthy traits, are they so meritorious that they can bring about redemption?

The example provided by the Midrash of how the people guarded secrets only serves to compound this difficulty. The Midrash explains that after Moshe told the people, "A woman shall borrow from her neighbor ... vessels of silver and vessels of gold" (*ibid.* 3:22), they kept this knowledge to themselves for the next twelve months, "and not one of them revealed it to the Egyptians." What is so praiseworthy about not leaking a secret to the enemy?

☛ Success in Battle Depends upon Keeping Secrets

CHAZAL TELL US further that the redemption from Egypt was by no means the only occasion when guarding secrets brought deliverance. Throughout the generations, the nation's success in battle against gentile nations was dependent upon their ability to guard secrets.

We find in the Midrash that in the time of David Hamelech, there were youngsters untainted by sin who were able to expound the Torah, yet they would go out to battle and fall because "There were informers

among them” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 26:2), whereas in Achav’s time, “They all worshipped idols, but because there were no informers among them, they would go out to battle and win” (*ibid.*). The Midrash notes a secret that was kept from Achav: Ovadiah had concealed a hundred righteous prophets in a cave and was sustaining them.

How can guarding secrets alone lead to deliverance that was not experienced in David Hamelech’s day, when in regard to the merits of individuals, David Hamelech’s generation was one of widespread Torah excellence, while in Achav’s generation they were idolaters?

We similarly find in the Gemara (*Kesubos* 111a) that one of the six oaths that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* made the Jewish nation swear — and the arrival of the future Redemption depends upon them — is that “They shouldn’t reveal the secret to the gentile nations.” Rashi explains that this “secret” refers to either “the secret [calculations] of when to declare a leap year” or “the secret of the Torah’s reasons.”

Here again, we need to understand what connection there is between guarding secrets and redemption from exile among the nations or attaining victory over them in battle.

☛ Personal Redemption Is Dependent on Maintaining the Integrity of One’s Inner Being

WHILE DISCLOSING A secret may or may not involve breaching the trust of another party, the very act of revealing information that ought to remain private always involves a degree of extroversion, of moving out of one’s spiritual, inner space into the coarse, mundane outside world. As we shall see, revealing what should be kept secret opens the door to enslavement even when no breach of trust is involved (e.g., the secret a person divulges is his own).

☛ The Profound Significance of Guarding Secrets

A PERSON’S MATERIAL aspect can be enslaved, whereas his inner, spiritual essence is always free. By bringing secrets into his outer environment, a person thus lays himself open to manipulation, whereas by

guarding them within himself, he can remain true to himself. Keeping secrets is thus the cornerstone of redemption, while releasing them shows coarseness and ultimately leads to suffering and enslavement.

In Achav's time, secrets were kept, even if only from fear of the king's regime. In Egypt, too, there were compelling practical reasons for withholding information from the Egyptians. Yet guarding secrets brings deliverance even when it is not being done with sublime, noble motives. Keeping sensitive information to oneself leads a person to focus on his inner world, which is the key to redemption.

Although we have shown that broadcasting that which should be kept private leads to enslavement, whereas keeping it in brings redemption, the Maharal's approach to this concept provides a much more profound insight.

☛ A Rich Inner World Remains Concealed

A PERSON'S PHYSICAL environment exists outside himself, whereas his spiritual world remains inside him, where it is not apparent to others. The richer a person's inner, spiritual world, the more he is focused inward upon his spiritual core.

In contrast, a coarse, materially oriented individual is drawn outward, to that which is around him. He derives no satisfaction from his empty spiritual world, and he seeks experiences in which he can participate with those around him. His "private domain" is laid open and on display to all.

☛ Speech Externalizes the Inner Essence, Therefore a Wise Person Maintains Silence

RABBI AKIVA (*AVOS* 3:13) teaches us that "Silence is a fence for wisdom." Speech involves putting one's inner world on display to the outside because it calls for translating abstract, inner thoughts into words with definite meaning. A wise person who lives in his inner world therefore maintains silence. In *Derech Chaim* (*Avos* 1:17), the Maharal explains

this idea further: “While a person remains silent, his intellect is at work, because it is impossible for two contradictory forces to be operating within him. Thus, if his physical force, which is his faculty of speech, is operating, his intellectual discernment is not at work, and he is liable to err. It is therefore advisable that he remain silent, and then his mind will do its job. This is why a fool has much to say, for the mind and the body are two opposites, and with a wise person’s mind constantly at work, he doesn’t use his physical faculty of speech.”

☛ Moshe Was a Man of Spirit, Not of Words

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 28) the Maharal asks how it is possible that Moshe, who possessed every virtue, including physical perfection, was not a man of words, when the ability to deliver an oration is one aspect of human perfection. His answer is that as a spiritual individual, Moshe was far-removed from anything material, and nothing is more material and external than speech. The Maharal adds that while sight and hearing are passive faculties, speech requires active effort, because “that which is material requires activity; therefore, Moshe lacked the faculty of oration, which is material.”

☛ A Coarse Person Is Verbose

CHAZAL TELL US (*Pesachim* 99a), “With much talk there is much nonsense.” The Maharal explains that this is “because speech is a physical activity, for by talking a lot, a person moves away from his intellect.” When a person chatters and jabbbers, he is acting coarsely and will speak nonsense.

In *Mishlei*, the wisest of men writes, “The fool does not desire understanding; he only wants to reveal what is in his heart” (18:2). Rabbeinu Yonah explains that rather than seek wisdom, the fool “only wants to brag and display his feelings and profound ideas; therefore, he doesn’t listen to what anyone else is saying.”

This reaches the point where a spiritually oriented person prays silently. The Gemara (*Berachos* 31a) learns many of the halachos of

prayer from the prayer that Chana offered in the Mishkan, beseeching Heaven for a child. The *pasuk* tells us, “Only her lips were moving, and her voice was not audible” (*Shmuel I*, 1), on which Chazal comment, “From here we learn that when praying, a person should not allow his voice to be heard.”

In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha'avodah*, Chap. 2), the Maharal explains: “For when raising one’s voice, a person is audible and revealed, and whatever is revealed is not attached to the highest level, for the sublime is concealed.”

☛ A Coarse Person Doesn’t Keep a Secret

IT THEREFORE FOLLOWS that a talkative person doesn’t know how to keep a secret. In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv HaTorah*, Chap. 15), the Maharal cites the Gemara in *Pesachim* (49a) that says, “Six things are said about an ignoramus,” one of which is “No secrets should be revealed to him.” The Maharal explains: “That which is material is revealed and possesses no concealed level.” The ignoramus’s spiritual world is restricted and confined, and therefore, he is outwardly focused and talkative. His private domain is on display, so he doesn’t keep secrets.

☛ The Nations Are Outwardly Oriented, While Yisrael Guard Secrets

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal notes that extroversion is typical of the gentile nations, whereas Yisrael are characterized by their tendency to keep their inner world secret. Chazal allude to this with their statement (*Chullin* 133b), “A regular non-Jew is talkative.” The Maharal explains: “A non-Jew’s level is external, and therefore, he always talks, and he has no inner spirit.”

☛ The Inner Spirit Is Immune to Enslavement

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 19), the Maharal explains that only a person’s physical component can be enslaved, but his spirit always

remains free: “for it is immune to enslavement and is not subject to external manipulation — only the material aspect [of man is vulnerable to this].” A physical entity can be altered, reshaped, and even shackled, but a spiritual entity remains unfettered.

☛ Revealing Secrets Transforms the Spiritual into the Material

A PERSON WHO discloses secrets coarsens and degrades his spiritual, inner world, making himself subservient. The Maharal accordingly explains that Yisrael, who are “detached from all that is material, are suited to the innermost virtue whereat there is no revelation or any feeling relevant to materialism. When they abandon this inner virtue and reveal concealed matters, they thereby fall from their virtue, allowing materialism to take hold within them, and with it comes subservience.”

☛ Material Display Brings Enslavement and Defeat

THE MORE INTERNAL a person’s world is and the more it lies within the spiritual realm, the freer he is. A person whose living space is on display is rooted in materialism and is therefore vulnerable to enslavement. The Maharal explains accordingly in *Gur Aryeh* that “Redemption emanates from a sublime, inner level that is not revealed, and a person who reveals things becomes coarsened and attached to the base level, which is revealed and external. Therefore, when Moshe saw that there were informers among Yisrael who had revealed his secret that he had killed the Egyptian, he declared them worthy of being enslaved, for they were coarse and revealers of secrets.”

Since Yisrael were “drawn towards revealing matters, Moshe said: Now I understand why they are subject to worse enslavement than all other nations, because there are revealers of secrets among them, which is (i.e., brings them to) a low, coarse level that leaves [its adherents] open to enslavement.”

☞ Although the Nations Are Material, They Are Not Enslaved

THE MAHARAL WONDERS why, since subservience is characteristic of a coarse, materialistic entity, the gentile nations do not suffer from exile to a greater extent than Yisrael, for they are certainly coarser than Yisrael. Why are Yisrael exiled among the nations and subservient to them instead of the other way around? The Maharal's answer is that revealing a secret means divulging something that was formerly concealed, whereas something that was never worthy of being kept inside is no secret, and its launch into the public eye does not represent the externalizing of what ought to be kept within. An entity whose entire being is coarse and public to begin with is not deserving of exile. Exile is incurred by degrading a concealed, inner spiritual entity and coarsening it by bringing it outside into the public domain rather than preserving it in its proper, private setting.

We have learned that:

1. The richer and deeper a person's spiritual world, the more inwardly focused he is upon his inner, spiritual environment. By contrast, a person who is material is externally oriented and experiences life in the company of others. Even his private domain is public and open.
2. A person's spirit is free, whereas attachment to material substance allows a person to be shackled and enslaved.
3. The more private a person's inner world and the deeper its roots in the spiritual realm, the freer he is.
4. A person whose living space is open and public, is coarse and vulnerable to being enslaved.
5. Anyone seeking personal redemption should become familiar with the concept of modesty and concealment — and should train themselves in remaining silent and guarding inside that which should remain private.

Ua'eira

Rabbi Yehudah (Loewy, the Maharal,) Arranged Them in Groups

☛ Smiting the Firstborns Was Equivalent to All the Plagues

REGARDING THE WARNING that Moshe Rabbeinu was to deliver to Pharaoh about the approaching plague of hail, the Torah tells us, “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and you shall say to him, “This is what Hashem, G-d of the Hebrews has said, ‘Release My people so that they may serve Me. For this time, I am sending all My plagues to your heart and among your servants and your people so that you will realize that there is none like Me in the whole world’””” (*Shemos* 9:13–14).

Why mention the phrase “all My plagues” here, in connection with the plague of hail?

Rashi explains, “We learn from here that smiting the firstborns was equivalent to all the other plagues.”

In other words, the warning about the plague of hail included an advance warning to Pharaoh about the smiting of the firstborns, which the Torah refers to as “all My plagues” due to its severity, which equaled that of all the other plagues together.

☛ Why Warn about Smiting the Firstborns before the Plague of Hail?

MOSHE RABBEINU DELIVERED an explicit warning prior to the plague of smiting the firstborns. Why did Hashem warn Pharaoh about it

before the plague of hail? And what connection is there between these two plagues? Why include a warning about one in the warning about the other?

☛ The Meaning of the Plagues and the Need to Group Them

IN ORDER TO understand the significance of the warnings that preceded the plagues, we need to understand the purpose of the plagues themselves. The Maharal discusses this topic in *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 57) in his explanation of a Midrash that is quoted in the Haggadah:

Rabbi Yehudah arranged the plagues in mnemonic groups:
D'TZa"Ch [*Dam* (Blood), *Tzefardei'a* (Frogs), *Kinim* (Lice)];
ADa"Sh [*Arov* (Wild animals), *Dever* (Pestilence), *Shechin* (Boils)];
B'ACha"b [*Barad* (Hail), *Arbeh* (Locusts), *Choshech* (Darkness),
Bechoros (Smiting the Firstborns)].

“What novel idea does Rabbi Yehudah introduce with these groups, and why do we need them?” asks the Maharal

☛ *D'TZa"Ch, ADa"Sh, B'ACha"b* Demonstrate the Methodology of the Plagues

THE MAHARAL POINTS out that Rabbi Yehudah perceives the plagues as an orderly and organized series, with each of the three groups sharing a common factor and conveying a common lesson. Studying the Torah's account of the plagues reveals a cyclical pattern. Warnings were given before the first two plagues (blood and frogs), which were followed by the third plague (lice), which arrived without any warning. Similarly, the fourth and fifth plagues (wild animals and pestilence) were preceded by warnings, while the sixth plague (boils) was not. The same pattern is repeated with the seventh and eighth plagues (hail and locusts), for which warnings were given,

while for the ninth plague (darkness), there was no warning. A warning was then given before the tenth and final plague (smiting the firstborns).

“Why was it like this?” asks the Maharal. “If you say that it is because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* warns twice and no more, then He shouldn’t have given warnings before the fourth and fifth plagues or before any of the subsequent plagues after having warned them twice before the first two plagues.” The only explanation can be that each group of plagues possessed its own distinct character and conveyed a message that was not conveyed by the prior groups.

Each group of plagues must therefore be viewed as an independent unit for which Hashem gave just two warnings and no more. Each group was followed by another, requiring two further warnings for the new group of plagues.

Rabbi Yehudah gave these distinct groups of plagues each with its common lesson the mnemonic: *D'TZa"Ch, ADa"Sh, B'ACHa"B*.

But what renders each group unique?

☛ The Plagues Were Intended to Root Out Three Levels of Denial

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that the three groups of plagues were directed at three levels of denial.

The first level of denial claims that there is no G-d and that everything happens by chance as a result of natural processes and is not orchestrated by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The second level of denial posits that while G-d exists, there is no individualized supervision — no direct Providence (*hasgachah pratit*). According to this view, while *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world and runs it, that which befalls each individual is of no concern to the world’s sublime and exalted Creator, for after having created the world, He left it to its own devices, placing it under control of the forces of nature that He created.

The third level of denial claims that while there is a Divine Being

who supervises each and every individual, He is not the sole ruler of the world, and He cannot alter the natural order, for He no longer controls the forces of nature that He created.

The plagues came to uproot these three levels of denial.

The first series of plagues came to demonstrate G-d's existence, as it says, "With this you shall know that I am G-d" (*Shemos* 7:17).

The second series demonstrated the existence of individualized Providence, as it says, "So that you shall know that I am G-d in the midst of the land" (*ibid.* 8:18).

The third series of plagues was intended to show that there is no other power besides G-d, as it says, "So that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the land" (*ibid.* 9:14).

☛ The First Three Plagues (*D'TZa"Ch*) Demonstrated G-d's Existence

PHARAOH DIDN'T BELIEVE that the first three plagues (blood, frogs, and lice) were the work of G-d, and he therefore summoned his sorcerers to replicate them through sorcery — until Hashem brought the plague of lice. When they were unable to produce lice with their magical powers, they were forced to admit, "This is the finger of G-d" (*ibid.* 8:15) and were convinced that the plague had come from Hashem.

At this point, Pharaoh realized that G-d created the world and that He runs it. A world containing such planning did not come into being by itself, and it must have had a Creator. If a visitor to an uninhabited island comes across a multi-feature watch, he knows it didn't appear spontaneously. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world and runs it. Pharaoh came to this realization during the first three plagues, which shattered the first level of denial.

The second level was still intact, for the Egyptians "saw that the plagues were generalized, affecting the whole country, and they didn't think that Hashem's supervision is individualized, distinguishing between one person and another on the basis of their deeds."

☛ The Difference between General and Individualized Providence

RABBENU BACHYE (in his commentary to *Bereishis* 18:19) explains the distinction between general and individual Providence as follows:

General Providence determines, for example, that in a given year, there will be such-and-such heads of cattle in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* world and no more. This means that any live cattle beyond this number must die. However, this does not determine the fate of any individual animal, i.e., which farmer's cattle will die, for it is a general, worldwide parameter. Individualized Providence, on the other hand, determines that *ploni* shall experience this or that event based on the principles of reward and punishment, subject to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* supervision of him as an individual. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is aware of each person's good and evil actions, judges him on them, determines his fate, and then orchestrates His world such as to direct preordained events to him, their purpose being to either reward or punish him for his deeds.

☛ The Second Group of Plagues (*ADa"Sh*) Demonstrated Individualized Providence

THE UNIFYING THEME of the second group of plagues (wild animals, pestilence and boils) is the distinction between the Egyptian and Israelite nations that was apparent in the effects of these general natural phenomena that afflicted Egypt.

Prior to the plague of wild animals, the Torah says, "I will set apart...the land of Goshen where My people are situated that there not be any wild beasts there, so that you will realize that I am Hashem right here on Earth" (*Shemos* 8:18).

Rabbenu Bachye points out that this distinction was truly wondrous because wild animals that attack humans do not remain within any borders or boundaries. "And in the natural way of things," he writes, "they should have entered the land of Goshen as

well, because it is part of Egypt; however, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* miraculously distinguished between them for Yisrael's sake."

Similarly, before the plague of pestilence it says, "Hashem will distinguish between Yisrael's livestock and the Egyptians' livestock, and nothing belonging to Bnei Yisrael will die" (ibid. 9:4). Here too, there was no apparent reason for the disease not to affect Goshen along with the rest of the country. The plague of boils would also have been expected to affect the country's entire population, yet it was only the Egyptians who suffered.

These differentiations between Yisrael and Egypt demonstrated to Pharaoh that in operating His world, Hashem distinguishes between one individual and another. Therefore, His supervision must be not general, but individualized. This did away with the second level of denial.

☛ The Third Group of Plagues (*B'ACHa"b*)

Demonstrated That No Power Exists Besides Him

THE PLAGUES OF hail, locusts, darkness, and smiting the firstborns came to teach Pharaoh that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rules the universe alone and that no forces of nature are independent of Him. These were all unique phenomena that the world had never before experienced and that clearly could not be ascribed to regular natural forces. No other being could have made these things happen, and therefore, the world must be under the sole control of G-d, who has no equal. The Torah therefore writes in connection with these plagues, "So that you know that there is none like Me in the entire land."

"For from the plagues of wild animals, pestilence, and boils (*ADa"Sh*), they knew only of His presence in the land," writes the Maharal, "but that He has no equal and that He is the only Power over everything, they didn't know. Therefore, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brought upon them *B'ACHa"b*, wondrous plagues that had never happened before. These attested that there is no other like Him. None of the last group of plagues had ever happened before, for it says about the plague of hail, 'There had been nothing like it' (ibid.

9:18), and about the plague of locusts it also says, “There had been nothing like it’ (ibid. 10:14). All this showed that the Being who was bringing the plague upon them had no equal. All the more is this true of darkness — there had been nothing like it ever before. And about the plague of smiting the firstborns it also says, ‘And there arose a great shout...that had never happened before’ (ibid. 11:6).”

☛ The Ten Plagues Correspond to the Three Levels of Existence

IN ADDITION TO his explanation that the plagues came to dispel the three levels of denial, the Maharal (*Gevuros Hashem*, Chap. 57) presents another splendid insight into the unique significance of each of the three groups of plagues. The three groups were intended to demonstrate *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s control of the three levels of existence that people apprehend:

The lowest level — the ground, including the oceans and rivers and all that inhabits them;

The intermediate level — all types of life that inhabit the world;

The upper level — the skies, heavens, and celestial bodies.

☛ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s Control of All Three Realms of Existence

THE PLAGUES SHOWED that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has complete control of all three realms of existence, from the lowest to the highest.

The first three plagues (*D’TZa”Ch*) manifested on the world’s lowest level, for “The river that runs through the ground turned into blood, and frogs swarmed from the river and lice from the ground.”

The second three plagues (*ADa”Sh*) manifested on the level above the ground. “The *arov* comprised wild animals that live in the world’s open space — unlike the frogs and lice that inhabit the ground — while the pestilence infected animals and the boils affected people and animals, who live above ground.”

The last group of plagues (*B'ACHa"b*) came from the heavens, and then came smiting the firstborns, for man's soul is sublime and comes from above.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu showed Pharaoh through these three groups of plagues that Pharaoh ought not to consider himself a deity, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rules over everything in existence, from the lowest level to the highest, without exception.

☛ Each Group of Plagues Was a Distinct Unit

EACH GROUP OF plagues had its own common thread and its own specific goal. Each group conveyed a distinct lesson in faith in order to dispel a particular erroneous notion and took place on a particular level of existence.

This is why Rabbi Yehudah divided the plagues into three groups, *D'TZa"Ch*, *ADa"Sh*, and *B'ACHa"b*, and explains his mnemonic. It also explains why separate warnings were delivered at the beginning of each group of plagues, for each one was a distinct, separate unit.

We now also understand why when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to bring the plague of hail, which was the first plague of the third group, He told Moshe to warn Pharaoh "For this time, I am sending all My plagues to your heart," which included a warning about smiting the firstborns. "All these four plagues of *B'ACHa"b* are considered a single unit," writes the Maharal. Thus, the opening warning of the group included a warning about what would happen at the climax of this unit of plagues.

The plagues that afflicted Egypt were thus not sent as haphazard natural phenomena in order to break Pharaoh's spirit and instill fear and dread into his hard heart. The plagues were indications of the existence of a Divine Power that controls every corner of existence and served to utterly refute every type of denial of this truth. Studying the plagues that were visited upon Egypt yields important lessons in belief in G-d, His individualized providence, and His unity, for "There is none other besides Him" (*Devarim* 4:35).

Bo

Rewarding Steps

☛ Reward for Going to Offer the Pesach Sacrifice

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU instructed Bnei Yisrael while they were still in Egypt to bring the Pesach sacrifice, specifying the manner in which it was to be offered and consumed. The Torah tells us, “Bnei Yisrael went and did [this], as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did” (*Shemos* 12:28). It would seemingly have sufficed to simply tell us that they did as instructed. Why does the Torah make a point of mentioning that “Bnei Yisrael went?”

Rashi explains, “Scripture specifies their having gone as well to give them reward for their walking as well as for their doing.”

Here we learn that specific reward was given for the steps the people took en route to fulfilling the mitzvah of offering the Pesach sacrifice, beyond the general reward given for any preparations necessary in advance of fulfilling any mitzvah. The reward for these paces is referred to as *sechar pesios* (reward for steps).

This idea needs to be better understood, for the general principle, “Reward is given according to effort” (*Avos* 5:23) — meaning that the toil and effort a person invests in fulfilling a mitzvah, not the quality of the result, determines the magnitude of his reward — operates in relation to every mitzvah. Why here regarding the Pesach sacrifice does the Torah introduce the idea of a special, separate reward for the effort of simply going to fulfill the mitzvah?

☛ Reward for Going toward Torah Study and Prayer

PRAYER IS AKIN to offering a sacrifice, for which it is considered a substitute, as it is written, “We shall offer [sacrificial] cows — with our lips” (*Hoshe’a* 14:3). The concept of *sechar pesios* is indeed mentioned regarding going to pray as well. We find similarly that going to learn Torah also earns *sechar pesios*. We shall explain the meaning of this concept and its underlying logic.

☛ Going to the *Beis Midrash* — Steps and Study

REGARDING TORAH STUDY, the Mishnah tells us, “Four types are encountered among those who frequent the *beis midrash*: there is the person who goes but doesn’t study; he is rewarded for going” (*Avos* 5:14).

In *maseches Berachos* (6b), we find Rabbi Zeira’s statement that when he first saw the scholars running to hear the Torah discourse on Shabbos, his reaction was that they were desecrating Shabbos, for the Gemara (*Shabbos* 113b) rules that it is forbidden to take long steps on Shabbos. However, he concludes, after hearing Chazal’s teaching, “A person should always run in order to hear a matter of halachah, even on Shabbos, as it says, ‘After Hashem they go, like a lion He roars’ (*Hoshe’a* 11:10),” he himself would also run.

The Gemara also says (*ibid.*), “Rabbi Zeira said, ‘The reward for attending the public halachic discourse is for the running that precedes it.’”

Rashi (*ibid.*) explains, “People receive their main reward for hurrying to hear the sage deliver his discourse, for most don’t earn reward for the actual study because they don’t understand it well enough to later review the topic as their teacher presented it.”

☛ Reward for Going to Pray

IN REGARD TO prayer, too, we find reward being given for simply going. In *maseches Berachos* (*ibid.*), the Gemara states, “When leaving a synagogue, a person should not take long strides (because this

makes it appear that he is keen to leave and is throwing off the yoke of Heaven).” However, Abayei says, this applies only upon leaving, for when making one’s way to the synagogue, it is a mitzvah to run, for it says, “We shall rush to know Hashem” (*Hoshe’a* 6:3).

Moreover, in *maseches Sotah* (22a), the Gemara relates that there was a widow who had a synagogue near her home but who nevertheless made her way every day to pray in Rabbi Yochanan’s *beis midrash*, which was further away. When he asked her, “My daughter, isn’t there a synagogue in your neighborhood?” her response was, “Rabbi, [this way] I receive *sechar pesios*.”

☛ Why Is Reward Given for These Steps?

WHAT IS THE significance of going to a distant synagogue rather than one close by merely in order to earn *sechar pesios* — isn’t the extra walking needless? Is there any value in walking in circles in order to spend more time “going” so as to earn more *sechar pesios*?

In his commentary *Derech Chaim* (*Avos* ad loc), the Maharal addresses this point. Why, wonders the Maharal, should a person who goes to the *beis midrash* but doesn’t learn anything there receive any reward at all — surely his going there under such conditions has no significance. And why should the effort expended in going to learn Torah be added to a scholar’s reward? In what way is a person who goes somewhere else to learn more deserving than another person who learns Torah without going anywhere?

☛ The Concept of *Sechar Pesios* Regarding Other Mitzvos

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Ha’avodah*, Chap. 5), the Maharal discusses the Gemara in *Sotah* about the widow who chose to pray in a more distant synagogue in order to earn *sechar pesios*. He writes, “Apparently, this halachah of *sechar pesios* doesn’t apply to the mitzvah of *sukkah*. If a person has two *sukkos* available to him, one nearby and

the other further away, there is no special mitzvah to go to the more distant one. Only in regard to a *beis haknesses* and *beis midrash* is it preferable to go to the further one.” The Maharal then wonders why *sechar pesios* is given for going to pray or to study Torah — whether or not any prayer or study actually resulted — when this concept doesn’t exist in regard to other mitzvos. If a person went somewhere to give *tzedakah* and didn’t give it, shouldn’t he also deserve some reward for going?

☛ Torah Study and Prayer Involve Being in Hashem’s Presence

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the difference between prayer and Torah study and all other mitzvos lies in the fact that a person praying is considered to be standing in Hashem’s presence. The Gemara (*Berachos* 28b) states, “When you pray, know before Whom you are standing.” The essence of prayer is attachment and closeness to Hashem.

So too in regard to Torah study. The Mishnah tells us (*Avos* 3:6), “Ten people sitting and studying Torah have the *Shechinah* present among them ... and [this is true] even [of] a single individual sitting and learning Torah, as it says, ‘In every place where I will allow My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you’ (*Shemos* 20:21).”

Even merely making one’s way to fulfill either of these mitzvos is thus also an act of drawing close to Hashem. “For Hashem is present in the *beis haknesses*,” writes the Maharal, “as Chazal say that a *beis haknesses* is a miniature Sanctuary (*Megillah* 29a). Therefore, when going to a *beis haknesses*, a person is being drawn to Hashem and experiencing attachment to Hashem.”

☛ The Yearning of a Person Arriving from Afar Creates Closeness

THE MAHARAL ADDS, “It is known that a person who is moving towards something is more attached to it than someone else who is already close,

for the one who is on the move is not there but is nevertheless going to it, and this constitutes attachment and complete bonding.”

When a person powerfully yearns for something, the very process of coming closer to it creates a stronger affinity with it than that of someone else who has already arrived.

☛ Making One's Way to Learn Torah or to Pray Is an Act of Coming Closer

THUS, IN REGARD to Torah study and prayer, whose essence is attachment to Hashem, making one's way to the *beis haknesses* or *beis midrash* is itself an act of drawing close to Hashem, because even while he on his way, a person is filled with longing for this attachment. Clearly, the further he has to go, the stronger is his yearning.

Citing the comment of the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei 900*) that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* counts the steps a person takes in order to reach the *beis haknesses* for prayer and rewards him accordingly, the Maharal notes that each step is significant, “For if he is going there from afar, this shows even more that his attachment is to Hashem.” Traversing a great distance in order to draw close to Hashem is evidence of powerful longing for this closeness, and this is the reason that there is *sechar pesios*.

☛ Explaining the Difference between Torah and Prayer and Other Mitzvos

IN *PACHAD YITZCHAK* (*Rosh Hashanah 5*), Rav Hutner cites these comments of the Maharal, noting their extreme brevity and pointing out that “For us, these few words are insufficient to clarify this matter.”

He therefore explains further that the Maharal's distinction is based upon a fundamental difference between the closeness to Hashem that is engendered by fulfilling mitzvos in general and the closeness associated with prayer. Whereas closeness to Hashem is a

consequence of having performed a mitzvah and thereby fulfilled His wishes, when it comes to prayer, closeness to Hashem must precede a person's prayer and is a precondition for offering it. In other words, before he can begin praying, a person must initiate a state of closeness to Hashem.

Moreover, the Maharal notes that even after a person has finished praying, "So long as he has not moved his feet away [from the spot where he prayed], it is as though he is still in the middle of his prayer, and he is still considered to be standing in the King's presence." Although a person has already concluded his mitzvah, he is still standing before the King. This is not the case with other mitzvos, where closeness to Hashem is a function of their fulfillment, and once completed, the moment of engagement concludes and the closeness passes. Prayer, though, is *defined* as a state of being close to G-d, and thus there needs to be an act of uprooting one's feet away from the spot where he prayed in order to bring the state of closeness into which he entered to an end.

☛ The Synagogue Is a Place of Prayer and Closeness to Hashem

DRAWING UPON THIS understanding of prayer as a consequence of standing in the King's presence, Rav Hutner characterizes a *beis haknesses* as not being simply a place for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of prayer, but as a special place for standing before the King and entering a state of closeness to Him. A person on his way to a *beis haknesses* is not simply on his way to fulfill a mitzvah; he is on his way to enter the King's presence.

This highlights the fundamental difference between going to a *sukkah* and going to a *beis haknesses*. In the first case, a person is on his way to fulfill a mitzvah, while in the second case, he is drawing close to Hashem, coming closer with every step he takes. Since the *beis haknesses* is a place for closeness to Hashem, merely making one's way there is an act of drawing close to Him.

☛ Torah Study Is the Epitome of Closeness to Hashem

RAV HUTNER EXPLAINS further that a similar distinction can be drawn between the closeness to Hashem engendered by fulfilling mitzvos in general and the closeness associated with Torah study: “To be involved with mitzvos is to align oneself with [the conduct] that Hashem desires, whereas to be occupied with Torah is to align oneself with the Divine wisdom contained within His expressed desire.” In other words, when a person performs a mitzvah, he is fulfilling the wish of the One Who commanded him, thereby forging a connection to Him. When he learns Torah, though, he forges a direct connection through fathoming the wishes of the One Who commands him. Torah study in and of itself — without any intermediary step — forges the ultimate connection with Hashem. Thus, a person going to study Torah is on his way to bask in the ultimate connection to Hashem and already draws closer with each step he takes, thus meriting *sechar pesios*. And this extends even going to the *beis midrash* and being there without actually studying, as is clear from the Mishnah in *Avos*.

The idea of *sechar pesios* is thus exclusive to Torah study and to prayer. Torah, offering sacrifices, and prayer all involve a person drawing close to the Creator and being in His presence. Obviously, making one’s way toward entering into this state is itself a part of drawing close to Hashem. In fact, the more steps a person takes to get there, the greater the longing for Hashem’s presence this conveys, and this is the significance of *sechar pesios*.

Why Must Mitzvos Be Done with Alacrity?

☛ Don't Dawdle over Fulfilling a Mitzvah — When a Mitzvah Comes Your Way, Do It Right Away

THE TORAH TELLS us, “You shall watch over the matzos [to ensure that they do not leaven]” (*Shemos* 12:17). By reading the word “matzos” as “mitzvos,” Chazal derive the lesson, “Just as one must watch over the matzos and not allow them to leaven, one must watch for the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah and not let it pass; if a mitzvah presents itself, do it right away.” This comparison shows that sluggishness in performing a mitzvah doesn't merely betray the lack of a virtuous trait, but is a fault that taints the actual mitzvah, to the point where a mitzvah done without alacrity is akin to a matzah that has been left to leaven.

☛ Why are Fervor and Alacrity Preconditions for Fulfilling Mitzvos?

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal discusses this comparison. Why is alacrity so crucial to mitzvos? And maybe a person deserves recognition for overcoming his natural fatigue and inertia in order to fulfill a mitzvah. Laziness and inertia are part of the natural human condition — in *Mesilas Yesbarim* (Chap. 6), the Ramchal writes that since man is composed of earth, it is normal for him to feel heaviness and to want to rest. If a person nevertheless fulfills a mitzvah despite feeling uninspired, why should we find fault with him to the point of classing his performance as defective?

☛ Hashem Acts without Delay — People's Mitzvos Should Emulate This

TO EXPLAIN, THE Maharal establishes a fascinating principle. “The Torah forbids *chametz*,” he explains, “because once *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* revealed Himself to Bnei Yisrael when they were about to leave Egypt, there was no delay, for His deeds are performed instantly, without any waiting. Hashem therefore instructed that there must be no delay in preparing matzah, and similarly, ‘When a mitzvah comes to hand, do not delay its fulfillment,’ because a mitzvah is Hashem’s word that man must fulfill immediately, without any waiting whatsoever.” This is in contrast to mundane, material pursuits that must be undertaken only at the right moment. Thus, if a person, “delays doing a mitzvah, he spoils it, [treating it] as though it was some [mundane,] time-bound pursuit.”

☛ Rav Hutner’s Explanation That Time Was the First Creation

IN *PACHAD YITZCHAK* (Pesach 1), Rav Hutner explains this idea. The very first thing Hashem created was time, as it says, “In the beginning, G-d created,” meaning that G-d first created a beginning. This implies the creation of a context within whose framework the human mind can grasp reality through its assignment to either past, present, or future. This conceptual framework of time was the very first step in the world’s creation.

☛ The Four Dimensions of All Matter

EVERYTHING MATERIAL IN existence occupies four dimensions: the three spatial dimensions (length, breadth, and height/depth) and a fourth — the dimension of time, at some point upon whose continuum it comes into being, enduring throughout its existence until the point at which it ceases to exist. These dimensions constitute the

boundaries delineating an item's existence within a specific place and time.

As material beings, not only our physical selves, but our intellectual horizons, too, are subject to these restrictions of time and space. We therefore attempt to assign whatever we apprehend of the spiritual realm to the four dimensions with which we are familiar, forcing it to fit within them. In reality, though, anything that is spiritual is unshackled by physical restraints and exists beyond the limitations of human comprehension.

☛ The Abstract, Unlimited Spiritual Dimension

WHATEVER OCCUPIES THE spiritual dimension, even if it exists in this world, is not bound by constraints of space or time. In regard to spatial limitations, the Mishnah (*Avos* 5:7) tells us that the multitudes of pilgrims to the Beis Hamikdash would “be crowded while standing, but when prostrating themselves had space between them.”

In *maseches Yoma* (21a), we find: “We possess a tradition from our ancestors that the space occupied by the *Aron Hakodesh* [in the Holy of Holies] did not reduce the [chamber's] measurements,” i.e., the sum of the space measured from one wall to the *Aron* and from the *Aron* to the other wall equaled the full width of the chamber. In other words, since the *Aron Hakodesh* — despite being constructed from physical materials — was wholly spiritual, it was an essentially abstract entity that didn't occupy any physical space.

☛ Performing a Mitzvah Is an Abstract, Spiritual Endeavor

ALTHOUGH PERFORMING A mitzvah is a physical act involving physical objects and actions, its purpose and goal are spiritual. Essentially, then, it ought to exist outside the dimension of time. However, since it is performed by man using his physical, bodily faculties, it must be

defined and delineated in a way that places it within the dimension of time.

☛ Swift Performance of a Mitzvah Constricts Its Time Quotient

WHEN PERFORMING a mitzvah, a person relates to its spiritual character and by definition aspires to rise above time constraints. Man's soul therefore urges him to rush to perform the mitzvah without any delay and to execute it with swiftness and alacrity. The purpose of the speed accompanying its performance is to reduce the time quotient to a minimum, for man's spiritual aspect longs to break out of the dimension of time altogether, which is incongruent with spiritual accomplishment that is essentially abstract and unlimited.

☛ The Crux of the Requirement to Perform Mitzvos with Alacrity

RUSHING TO PERFORM a mitzvah is not a function of physical haste, whose goal is to fit as much physical activity as possible into as little time as possible. The role of haste in mitzvah performance is to maximize the deed's spiritual character and rise above the constraints of time as befits the mitzvah's spiritual essence. A person who is sluggish in his mitzvah performance thus misses the point of its essence as a wholly spiritual act and damages it.

Spiritual fervor and physical alacrity in performing mitzvos thus spring from the soul's natural yearning to reattach to its Source. A person performing a mitzvah aspires to transcend the constraints of time that bind him in his physical existence. Exhibiting sluggishness in this realm thus betrays a lack of understanding of the mitzvah's essence.

Beshalach

The Significance of the Splitting of the *Yam Suf*

☛ In What Way Was the Miracle of the *Yam Suf* Splitting Unparalleled?

THE *OHR HACHAIM* (*Shemos* 14:27) wonders why we encounter such excitement over the splitting of the *Yam Suf* — to the point that Bnei Yisrael commemorated it with a special song that has become part of our daily prayers — when apparently similar miracles were performed both before and after it. We find that the Jordan River split for Yaakov Avinu, as Rashi (on *Bereishis* 32:11) tells us: “He placed his staff upon the Jordan and it split.” The Jordan split again for Yehoshua and Bnei Yisrael when they entered Eretz Yisrael (as described in *Yehoshua*, Chap. 3). The Gemara in *maseches Chullin* (7a) relates that when Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was traveling to redeem captives and needed to cross the River Ginai, he addressed the river and told it, “Split your waters so that I can cross you” and the river split. The splitting of the *Yam Suf* was thus not an extraordinary, one-time occurrence, so why is it the only such miracle to be commemorated in such a public and lasting way?

☛ When the *Yam Suf* Split, All the Waters in the World Split

THE TORAH TELLS us that when Moshe extended his arm over the *Yam Suf*, “Hashem drove the sea with a strong easterly wind all night and

rendered the sea[bed] dry land, and the waters split” (*Shemos* 14:21).

Pointing out that the *pasuk* says “the waters” rather than “the sea” split, Rashi (ibid.) comments that “the waters” refers to all the waters in the world. His source for this assertion is the Midrash (*Mechilta, masechta d’vayehi* 4), which says, “Even the water in pits, caves, jugs, cups, plates, and barrels split, as it says ‘And the waters split.’ Even the Upper and Lower waters split. And when the waters of the *Yam Suf* reverted to their place, so did all the waters in the world, as it says, ‘The waters returned’ (rather than ‘The sea returned’), teaching us that all the waters in the world returned to their place.”

☛ Why Did All the World’s Waters Split?

WHILE WE UNDERSTAND the purpose of the *Yam Suf* splitting — Bnei Yisrael had to pass through it to escape their Egyptian pursuers — the purpose of every other body of water in the world splitting is less than apparent.

☛ When the *Yam Suf* Split, the Element of Water Was Smitten Worldwide

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal elucidates this point as follows: “However, the basic explanation is that the sea is the foundation of [all] water, for ‘All the rivers flow into the sea, and from there they again flow [outward]’ (*Koheles* 1:7). The sea can be likened to a person’s heart, and when the heart — which is the basis of all the other organs’ function — is stricken, everything else is compromised along with it. Therefore, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* split the sea — the foundation of all water — every other body of water in the world was stricken along with it, and even water in a plate split. Also, because after *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* removed their foundation, all its subdivisions were stricken along with it, meaning the rest of the water, which is part of the whole, and they split along with it.”

In other words, not only the *Yam Suf* was affected but in order

that the sea would split; the entire element of water, which is one of the four elements comprising creation — fire, wind, water, and earth (which the Rambam in *Hilchos Yesodai HaTorah* 4:1 says are ‘the element[al substance]s of everything created beneath the heavens’) — was stricken.

☛ Only at the *Yam Suf* Was the Element of Water Stricken

THIS NOVEL IDEA resolves the question asked by the *Ohr Hachaim*. The splitting of the Jordan River or of the River Ginai was a temporary displacement of the water in a specific river, whereas something altogether unparalleled took place at the *Yam Suf* when the entire element of water worldwide split into two, affecting every body of water everywhere.

However, we still haven’t entirely solved the original problem, for the question now becomes why a miracle of such significance was required. Why did all the world’s waters need to split — what role did this play in Bnei Yisrael’s rescue from the Egyptians?

Appreciating the Maharal’s understanding of water’s nature and of what it represents will enable us to answer our question.

☛ Moshe Was Water’s Antithesis

“MOSHE” WAS NOT the name that Moshe Rabbeinu received from his parents; they gave him a different name. The Torah, though, refers to him by the name he received from Pharaoh’s daughter, as we are told, “She named him Moshe and said, ‘For I withdrew him from the water’” (*Shemos* 2:10). We know that a person’s name captures his essence. What does this seemingly trivial detail of Moshe’s early life convey about his character and the essence of his mission?

Another point to consider regarding his name is that the word “Moshe” is the third person singular of the active conjugation of the verb *mem-shin-hei* (to withdraw) and thus means “withdrawer,”

whereas according to Pharaoh's daughter's explanation of the name, a passive conjugation should have been used — she should have named him Mashui, meaning “withdrawn.”

In *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 18), the Maharal comments, “I maintain that Moshe's name indicates his main characteristic and virtue, namely, being detached and removed from water.”

Moshe was thus the antithesis of the element of water. What is this element's defining characteristic?

☛ Water Is Substance without Form

WE ARE FAMILIAR with the concepts of substance and form. Substance is amorphous matter; form imposes limits upon it and shapes it, thereby giving it identity and purpose. The one substance that lacks form in its most commonly encountered state is water. Water lacks shape, color, and taste. Water is substance in the truest sense, without the counterbalance of form.

“Water has no proper shape,” writes the Maharal, “and is therefore always referred to in the plural (*mayim* is a plural form), and you will not find any singular form of the word *mayim*, because unity is a function of the shape that confers unity upon the item (i.e., that renders it a lone, distinct unit), and water has no proper form. Therefore, water, which lacks form, is referred to in the plural.”

☛ *Mayim* and *Mah* — Water and What

IT IS FASCINATING to note that the question we ask upon encountering something that lacks a clear identity is *mah* (what), as in, “What is it?” “What does it do?” etc. Both the words *mayim* and *mah* (which is the first syllable of *mayim*) thus denote a lack of shape or form.

This phenomenon is found in additional languages: Hebrew — *mayim* and *mah*; English — water and what; German — wasser (water) and wass (what); French — aqua (water) and quoi (what).

☞ Moshe Embodied Form

THE MAHARAL NOTES that Moshe was water's polar opposite. He was a human being but was barely of this world; he was all spirit and form, as opposed to water that is substance but utterly lacks form. He was therefore named Moshe to denote that he was essentially divorced from the entire concept of water, which represents substance and materialism.

In the Maharal's words, "Moshe Rabbeinu's level was that of form, for on his level, he was separate from matter. Moshe Rabbeinu thus consisted of form alone without matter, and water is the opposite. As a separate form, Moshe was water's antithesis."

☞ Moshe's Mission Was to Be a Withdrawer, Training Others to Exhibit Form Rather than Substance

FOR THIS REASON, the Maharal continues, he was called Moshe (a withdrawer of others) rather than Mashui (one who is withdrawn), for he withdrew others from the water. Not only was he himself withdrawn from water; he also withdrew Klal Yisrael, separating them from the element of water. The name Moshe thus captures his essence as his nation's leader and teacher who showed his people how to leave the water and withdraw themselves from being mired in substance and matter.

☞ Egypt Epitomized Materialism

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 4), the Maharal explains how the Egyptians were able to enslave Yisrael:

"When Hashem decreed enslavement on Avraham's descendants, this nation (the Egyptians) — who was their antithesis — was the only one worthy of enforcing it. You will find that Egypt was the opposite of the holy nation, for the Egyptians are likened to substance, while Yisrael are likened to distinct form. Inasmuch as substance is

material and form is divorced from matter, the two are opposites, as was explained; therefore, they were their antithesis in every respect.”

Whereas Yisrael represents the spiritual realm (form), Egypt represents the material realm (substance). Therefore, when it was decreed that Yisrael suffer enslavement at the hands of another nation, the Egyptians, who, being just substance with no form whatsoever, were their polar opposites, were chosen.

☛ Our Departure from Egypt Represented Substance’s Regression and Form’s Predominance

YISRAEL’S DEPARTURE FROM Egypt represented form vanquishing substance, the victory of spirit over matter. Their departure thus became complete with the splitting of the *Yam Suf* when water, the aqueous element that represents the epitome of matter, retreated before Yisrael’s triumphant spirit that epitomizes form, as “The water formed a wall for them, to their right and to their left” (*Shemos* 14:22).

As the Maharal explains in *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 40), “Due to the Divine inspiration that Yisrael attained upon their departure from Egypt, the water was repulsed and [the sea bed] became dry land... Substance was repulsed in the face of the holy, Divine level... Yisrael are at the level of being detached form, and therefore, the Egyptians, their antithesis who are likened to substance, opposed Yisrael. Initially, the Egyptians controlled Yisrael when substance was dominant at its outset and beginning, but substance ultimately weakens, and detached form overcomes it. Yisrael thus attained dominance over the Egyptians, who represent substance, and departed from among them, just as form separates itself from substance.”

☛ The Splitting of the Sea Was as Great a Vanquish of Substance as Leaving Egypt

THE MAHARAL (IBID.) continues, “When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, the water also obstructed them, *for water and the Egyptians represent one*

and the same thing — just as the Egyptians are far from possessing detached form, water also lacks any shape and is close to matter and inclined towards it. The water therefore obstructed Yisrael. Just as Yisrael attained dominance over the Egyptians through the plagues, the water too was torn asunder and split before them; this represents departure and detachment from matter.”

☛ When the *Yam Suf* Split, the Material Element of Water Was Rent Asunder

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF the splitting of the *Yam Suf* thus goes beyond overcoming the physical barrier of the sea with the creation of a crossing for Yisrael when they left Egypt. The event represents the triumph of spirit over matter and of form over elemental substance as symbolized by water. No wonder, then, that besides the *Yam Suf*, every other body of water around the world — even in cups, plates, and the heavens — also split. The universal element of water was torn asunder, as matter was vanquished by spirit and substance assumed form.

☛ Bnei Yisrael Are Known as Hebrews Because They Crossed the Sea

THE JEWISH PEOPLE are the nation of spirit, representing the triumph of form over substance. The Maharal explains the comments of the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 3:8) in this vein. The Midrash says that Yisrael are referred to as *Ivrim* (Hebrews) on account of having crossed the sea. “In other words,” writes the Maharal, “*avar yam* (i.e., when the letters of the word *Ivrim* are split, they read *avar yam*, they crossed the sea), meaning that Yisrael should be referred to by a name that denotes crossing the sea.”

Yisrael traversing the *Yam Suf* was no mere dramatic, albeit miraculous, event; it captured the essence of their virtue of having left behind water — the epitome of matter and materialism — in favor of form and spirit.

Yisro

The Essential Difference between Yisrael and the Nations

☛ Yisro Advises Moshe to Delegate Authority

THE TORAH RECORDS Yisro's advice about increasing the efficiency of the system by which Moshe Rabbeinu resolved Bnei Yisrael's questions and disputes: "And you shall prophetically select from among the entire people men of wealth who are G-d fearing, men of integrity who despise monetary gain, and appoint them over the people as officers of thousands, officers of hundreds, officers of fifty, and officers of tens. They shall judge the people at all times, and it shall be that every major matter they shall bring to you, and every minor matter they shall judge by themselves. This will ease your burden, and they will bear it with you. If you implement this matter, and G-d so commands you, you will be able to manage, and all these people, too, will find their place peaceably" (*Shemos* 18:21–3).

☛ What Was the Novelty of Yisro's Proposal and Why Didn't Moshe Recognize Such a Need?

WE NEED TO understand what was new about Yisro's idea. After all, if Moshe was convinced of the importance of him personally judging every single case, why did he accept Yisro's suggestion? On the other hand, if nothing would be lost by delegating authority to other

judges, why did it have to wait for Yisro to come along when such a move would obviously render the system more efficient?

Moreover, when Yisro wanted to leave and return home, Moshe begged him to stay, telling him, “Please do not leave us, since you are aware of how we camped in the desert, and you have been ‘eyes’ for us” (*Bamidbar* 10:31). The Rashbam (*ibid.*) explains, “You recognized and took to heart our needs when we camped in the desert and you served as our ‘eyes,’ advising us well, as it says in *parshas Yisro* — in the same way one would say: ‘You served as eyes for the blind man.’” This implies that Yisro alone saw what no one else could see. How are we to understand this?

☛ Yisro’s Name Denotes the Advice He Gave

CHAZAL TELL US in connection with this section, “Yisro was known by seven names ... Yisro, because he was responsible for the addition of a section (Yisro is derived from *she’yiter*, he ‘added’) to the Torah, namely, the section, ‘You shall prophetically select from among the entire people...’” (*Shemos Rabbah* 27:8).

This is surprising, for a name, as we know, reveals a person’s essence. Does this one occasion when Yisro offered some solid advice reflect his inner essence and warrant being perpetuated in the name by which he is known to all future generations?

☛ Why Are Converts “as Problematic for Yisrael as a Sore”?

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to his Discourse on the Torah, the Maharal discusses the episode of Yisro in light of the general institution of *gerus*. He writes, “For Yisro is called the first *ger* who was an extra addition to Yisrael.” Here, the Maharal cites the Gemara’s statement (*Yevamos* 47b): “Rabbi Chalbo said, ‘*Gerim* are as problematic for Yisrael as *sapachas* (a sore).’” The word *sapachas* is usually understood as a skin lesion. The *Rishonim* offer several explanations of this harsh statement.

Rashi explains: “*Gerim* are problematic for Yisrael because they are not well-versed in the details of mitzvah observance, and Yisrael learn from them.”

Tosafos write: “Because the *Shechinah* rests only upon families of unblemished lineage.” Another view in Tosafos states: “Yisrael are excessively forewarned not to cause distress to converts;” the “problem” thus is that they may not live up to their obligations in this area.

The Maharal, however, takes a different approach, writing, “In my opinion, none of this is necessary.” The Maharal understands the word *sapachas* not as a lesion on the skin, but as an appendage (related to *nispach*, an appendix), such as to a document, that was not present originally and is not an integral part of the host body. What is problematic about the presence of later additions to the nation?

☛ An Appendage Distorts the Original Form

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that as he was created, man’s form is complete and perfect, “requiring that nothing whatsoever be added or subtracted.” Any alteration to this state of perfection, whether due to a limb going missing or an extra limb being attached, is considered a blemish. As Chazal say (*Chullin* 58b), “Anything extra is regarded as if it was missing.”

According to the Maharal’s understanding, the word *sapachas* denotes a blemish because any addition detracts from the perfection of the original form.

☛ “Converts Resemble *Sapachas*” Because Their Presence Distorts the Nation’s Configuration

“YISRAEL (I.E., THE nation as a whole) are referred to as *adam* (man),” explains the Maharal, “and the convert is an appendage to them.”

“The *ger* is therefore called *sapachas*, which is a secondary addition to a person that distorts the basic shape of his form such that he

is no longer considered a perfect person.” The existence of this addition that was not part of the original form thus distorts the latter no less than if part of it would be missing.

We still need to understand the inner dynamic of this phenomenon. What distortion does the national entity suffer by *gerim* joining its ranks?

☛ An Addition Alters Our Perception of the Main Body

“WHEN THERE ARE *gerim* among Yisrael,” explains the Maharal, “they are added to them, and consequently, it is as though Yisrael are deficient, for they (i.e., the *gerim*) obscure the nation’s form (i.e., their spiritual configuration), which conveys their worthiness due to their very form, on account of which Hashem chose them.” How is the nation’s spiritual configuration obscured? Because apparently, says the Maharal, “There is no doubt that all the good that Israel merit stems from being descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov or from being the nation that G-d chose, and [the presence of] *gerim* beclouds this matter.”

In other words, we might have assumed that Judaism is a matter of national identity, as with any other national affiliation, and the Jewish nation’s uniqueness lies in its members being the biological descendants of the Avos. Alternatively, we might have thought that Yisrael’s exalted standing is based on having received the Torah at Sinai. However, when a *ger* who is not a descendant of the Avos and whose forbears did not receive the Torah at Sinai joins the Jewish nation and is henceforth regarded as a Jew who is in no way different from a Jew of full Jewish ancestry, this indicates that Jewish identity is not a function of ethnic origin nor of national affiliation.

The fact that *gerim* can join the Jewish nation thus leaves the nature of Jewish nationhood undefined and demands that it be re-considered.

☛ Overall Similarity Highlights the Essential Difference

IN *PACHAD YITZCHAK* (Purim 6), Rav Hutner explains that in order to discern the essential difference between two items, the respect in which they differ must be isolated by the removal of any other irrelevant differences. For example, when teaching young children to distinguish between different colors, identical shapes should be used which differ only in their color. If we show a child a red tomato and green cucumber and tell him, “This is red and this is green,” he may understand that a tomato is called “red” and a cucumber is called “green.” Only if he is shown two identical objects whose only difference is their color will he grasp that their different names are solely a function of their color and nothing else.

Rav Hutner uses this example to explain the halachah that the two goats upon which lots are cast on Yom Kippur — one becoming a sacrifice to Hashem and the other being dispatched to *Azazel* — must be “of the same height, appearance, and price...” (Mishnah *Yoma* 6:1). “Here in particular,” he writes, “when the utter divergence of their fates is most starkly apparent, do we find the strictest insistence upon assuring their similarity. For the greater the number of external respects that are able to reflect their similarity, the more profound the distinction the lots create between them, extending to deeper, hidden depths.”

When we want to demonstrate the core difference between two contrasting entities, we must first show that in all other respects they are identical; only then will their truly different natures become apparent.

☛ The Difference between Yisrael and the Nations Is Not External

RAV HUTNER FURTHER clarifies that, “The *sa’ir* that preceded these two *se’irim* (goats) of Yom Kippur is the original *ish sa’ir* (hairy man),

'Esav... ish sa'ir (as Yaakov referred to him in *Bereishis* 27:11). The difference between this *sa'ir* and his brother Yaakov must penetrate to the very deepest level lying beneath every type of [external] similarity and equality predominating in the outer realms hovering above it. The *pasuk* shouts to us, 'Isn't Esav a brother to Yaakov?...Yet I loved Yaakov, and I hated Esav!' (*Malachi* 1:2–3). In other words, the full extent of the difference between Yaakov and Esav becomes clear only with the full realization of the extent of their fraternity and similarity.”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu indeed told Rivkah, “There are two nations inside your womb” (*Bereishis* 25:23), which, as Rashi explains, “... refers to [the Roman emperor] Antoninus [Pius] and Rabbi [Yehudah Hanasi — the two were contemporaries].”

This *pasuk* intends to highlight both the similarity and the difference between the twins that Rivkah was carrying, as Rashi writes, “From the womb they will diverge — this one to wickedness and that one to perfection.” Either Haman or Titus might seem a better choice from among Esav's progeny as an example of the counterpoint to Yisrael's perfection. In fact, Antoninus doesn't seem at all representative of Esav, for the Midrash says that he “didn't emulate Esav's ways; rather, he was righteous and is destined for life in the World to Come.”

In fact, though, this is the whole point — the true difference between Esav and Yaakov can be discerned only in an individual who in all other respects resembles Yaakov and appears to be his twin brother.

Rav Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak*, Chanukah 6:10) notes that the nations attempted to translate the Torah into Greek because “Obliterating the difference between Torah and other branches of wisdom would automatically result in the disappearance of the difference between Yisrael and the nations.”

☛ Our Nation Exists Only by Virtue of Its Torah

CONVERTS ARE CONSIDERED appendages that skew any standard view or definition of our nation as being based on descent from common ancestors and compel us to base the distinction between

ourselves and others upon the only real difference. What distinguishes Yaakov from Esav? What defines the Jewish nation if it cannot be considered a national group and it can be joined by converts who are not descended from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov and whose ancestors were not chosen by G-d at Har Sinai?

Based on Rav Hutner, we can say that the difference is the same as that which distinguished the *sa'ir la'Hashem* from the *sa'ir la'Azazel*, which were otherwise identical. There was no difference between the two goats — they differed only in their purpose. The difference between Yisrael and the nations is similarly in one respect only — the Jewish nation's acceptance of the yoke of Heaven's rule.

☛ Yisro's Proposal Conveyed That a Common Essence Is More Significant than a Common Source

THE MAHARAL USES this approach to explain the novelty of Yisro's proposal. Those who had received the Torah at Har Sinai believed that Torah's uniqueness was bound up with its recipient and that there was a special quality to Torah learned from Moshe, such that he and only he had to sit in judgment and teach the people how the Torah's laws were to be applied in different situations.

As a *ger*, Yisro perceived what the others could not see — Yisrael's special quality is shared by *gerim* who do not share their ancestry and whose forbears were not physically present at Har Sinai. When a *ger* undertakes to fulfill Torah and mitzvos, he becomes the equal of a "thoroughbred" Jew. Appending converts to the Jewish nation thus reveals the essence of its national character.

Thus, the original vessel does not shape its contents, and it is acceptable to delegate authority to disciples, for this does not compromise the integrity of Hashem's Torah. The saying (Rambam, Introduction to *Avos*), "Accept the truth from whoever delivers it," indicates that Torah retains its authenticity when transmitted by other teachers. In fact, *maseches Avos* opens with the words, "Moshe received Torah from Sinai and transmitted it..." Torah remains

Torah even when it is learned and applied by people who have not attained Moshe's level.

Yisro's name thus reflects his novel suggestion — and his essence is indeed reflected therein. Because he was the first convert to join the Jewish nation following *Matan Torah*, he was able to show that the existence of an appendage alongside the main body demonstrates that their shared essence is independent of their different sources and of any external feature.

Only when two items are almost identical does their difference become obvious. As the first *ger*, Yisro discerned the difference between Yisrael and the nations. Since Judaism is neither a national entity nor an ethnicity, a convert who joins the Jewish People is the equal of any other Jew. The sole distinction between Yisrael and the nations is, as Rav Sa'adia Gaon expresses it (*Emunos V'deios, ma'amar 3*), "Our nation defines itself solely on the basis of its Torah." The application of Hashem's Torah isn't dependent on being taught solely by Moshe Rabbeinu. Since Yisro realized that the shape of the vessel into which Torah is conveyed doesn't determine its content, he pointed out that it would be possible to learn from "officers of thousands ... of hundreds ... and ... of tens."

Mishpatim

Judgment as a Heavenly Mandate

☛ The Torah's Juxtaposition of Conducting Judgment to the Laws of the Altar

THE PORTION OF the Torah that deals with monetary law, *parshas Mishpatim*, opens with the words, “And these are the judgments that you shall set out before them” (*Shemos* 21:1). The previous portion, *parshas Yisro*, concludes with the command, “And should you make Me an altar of stones, you shall not build it from hewn stones for [this means that] you have waved your sword over it and profaned it; and you shall not go up upon My altar using steps, so that your privacy not be exposed over it” (*ibid.* 20:22–23).

☛ “Be Deliberate in Judgment”

THIS JUXTAPOSITION IS expounded by Chazal in *maseches Sanhedrin* (7a) as follows: “Bar Kapara expounded, ‘From where is the obligation, “Be deliberate in judgment” derived? It says, “Do not go up using steps” and this is immediately followed by “And these are the judgments.””

Rashi explains that just as steps should not be used for going up to the altar because they enable going “in force and in haste,” a similar obligation exists when judging to be “in the habit of pausing, in order to ponder [the matter] thoroughly before arriving at a verdict.”

Understanding this requirement is actually not straightforward. It is obvious that a judge may not issue a verdict before having scrutinized the case carefully — to do otherwise is to shirk his fundamental responsibility as a judge. It is also obvious that he must allow himself a certain amount of time in order to fully assimilate the various aspects of the case and for his thoughts to take shape. All this is self evident. The *pasuk* must therefore be adding that even after a judge feels confident that his deliberations have been thorough, he must continue to exercise caution and not rush to issue his ruling. Why should this be, and how are we to reconcile this requirement with his duty to avoid postponement of carrying out a sentence?

☛ A Judge Must Be Careful to Avoid Pride

A FURTHER LESSON that Chazal derive (*Sanhedrin* 7b) from the Torah's placement of monetary law directly following the laws of the altar is that "A *dayan* must not walk over the heads of the holy nation." As Rashi explains, this refers to a situation in which a crowd has gathered and is seated on the ground listening to a discourse. If the *dayan* then enters and makes his way among them to reach his place, he appears to be arrogantly walking over their heads. In other words, just as *kohanim* may not make their way up to the altar in a manner that bespeaks pride, i.e., widening their paces as they ascend steps, a *dayan* must also ensure that he feels no pride when judging people.

This lesson's relevance also needs to be understood. Whereas the requirement to be deliberate when judging relates to the essence of a *dayan's* work, the warning to avoid pride is apparently just as applicable to any Jew occupying any position of distinction that could lead him to feel pride. It doesn't seem especially relevant to a *dayan's* judicial activity. Why does the Torah mention avoiding this fault in particular connection with the *pasuk*, "These are the judgments that you shall set before them"? If a *dayan* feels pride, does this somehow interfere with his ability to judge?

☛ For One Man to Judge Another Requires Heaven's Mandate

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Hadin*, Chap. 1), the Maharal explains that the reason for the obligation to avoid arriving at hasty conclusions when judging is that “Judgment is Hashem’s [job], not man’s.” In explaining this remark, Rav Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak*, Shavuos 44) writes that by its very nature, judgment cannot be conducted by mortals, because “Only the Judge of the entire world who controls everything is capable of judging man. As the *pasuk* says, ‘For judgment is for G-d [alone]’ (*Devarim* 1:17). What business does one person have judging another?!”

A person lacks the moral standing to judge his fellow man, for the judge — being himself subject to the same weaknesses as the defendant appearing before him and having failings of his own — cannot claim moral superiority over him. Thus, when the Torah writes, “Listen to the claims that are between your [litigating] brethren and judge justly between every man and his fellow” (ibid. *pasuk* 16), the very next *pasuk* contains the reminder, “For judgment is for G-d [alone].”

In other words, as Rav Hutner writes, “A judge’s role only has relevance if the judge is understood to be acting as an emissary on behalf of the real Judge who judges the entire world and who has commanded us to establish *batei din* and conduct judgment.”

King Yehoshafat accordingly told the judges he had appointed, “Watch what you do, for you are not conducting judgment on behalf of another person but on behalf of Hashem, who is together with you in the judgment process” (*Divrei Hayamim II* 19:6).

Although the Torah commands us to follow *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s ways and emulate Him, this extends only to His traits of kindness, compassion, etc. Our obligation to emulate Him is not relevant to His role as Judge. Man is not equipped with any trait in common with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that would enable him to conduct true judgment. As Rav Hutner puts it, “[In this respect,] the emissary

isn't carrying out his mandate based upon his resemblance to his Dispatcher; rather, his authority is derived [solely] from the 'power of attorney' that he bears [enabling him to act on His behalf, i.e., the Torah's command to operate a judicial system]."

☛ Man Cannot Judge on His Own Because of His Limited Sight

ACCORDING TO THE Maharal, man's inability to judge his fellow man isn't attributable solely to his lack of moral superiority, but also because of his technical inability to arrive at a true grasp of the facts of a case that he did not experience personally. He points to the Gemara's statement in *Pesachim* (54b), "The Rabbis learned, 'Seven things are concealed from man: the day of his death, the day of his consolation, *the extent of judgment*, nor does a man know the thoughts within his colleague's heart...'"

In explaining why man cannot fathom the true extent of Heaven's judgment, the Maharal writes, "Man should not imagine that it lies within his power to grasp the full depth of judgment, for there is judgment that it is impossible for man to fathom. This is why it is fitting that judgment be left up to G-d, because judgment's depth is concealed from humans."

☛ A Judge Must Act with Deliberation Due to His Limited Perception

A MAN CAN act with conviction and determination in those affairs that he fully grasps, but where he is essentially groping in the dark, he must act with greater humility, deliberation, and hesitation. A *dayan* must show deliberation when judging because he cannot truly perceive a situation accurately and plumb the profound depth of true judgment.

Therefore, says the Maharal, "Anyone who rushes and jumps to issue a verdict is obstructing judgment, because judgment is not dependent upon man (i.e., human grasp)."

☛ The Essential Parallel between Service upon the Altar and Judging

THE JUXTAPOSITION OF the laws of the altar and those governing judgment can now be more deeply appreciated. Just as the altar is a place for serving *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, conducting judgment is also a realm in which the *dayan* is essentially serving *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* by carrying out his Divine mandate — judging in accordance with the Torah’s procedures and guidelines — rather than presuming to arrive at a true judgment on his own. Just as the service upon the altar must follow a set, predetermined order, judgment, too, must be carried out according to set, predetermined procedures.

In his private business affairs, man can act with alacrity and haste, but upon the altar and in *beis din*, he must conduct himself with deliberation, following a Divinely ordained, set procedure. When carrying out judgment, a *dayan* must certainly conduct the proceedings efficiently and attend to matters promptly so as to avoid delay in determining the verdict and in carrying it out. However, he must not be hasty in thinking matters through and must not regard the accuracy of his conclusions as being absolutely certain. A judge must display the humility and deliberation of a person who is aware of his limitations and realizes that he remains essentially ignorant of what really transpired between the parties who have come before him. He must remain aware that he lacks the ability to get to the genuine truth and that his authority to judge is derived entirely from his Divine mandate.

☛ Realizing That One Is Merely an Emissary Is an Antidote to Pride

THE MAHARAL EXTENDS this idea to explain the second lesson learned from these two sections’ juxtaposition: the warning to a *dayan* not to be proud. While pride is certainly an unworthy trait in anyone, it is particularly abhorrent in a judge, for it undermines

the foundation of his worthiness to sit in judgment. When this trait exists in a judge, it shows that he believes that he is invested with the power to determine people's fate and that discretion and authority rest firmly in his hands. This is a perversion, for "A judge can only act on the basis of what he sees in front of him," and he did not personally witness the incident that lies at the heart of the dispute upon which he is expected to rule. A true and thorough grasp of what took place lies beyond his capabilities, for true judgment is for G-d alone to determine. Although *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has entrusted the task of conducting judgment to man in order to maintain society's stability, He merely appointed man as His emissary. Why should an emissary, who lacks any independent authority, feel pride in carrying out the mission entrusted to him? A person who realizes that none of his qualities or possessions are inherently his own cannot feel any pride, just as a bank clerk takes no pride in the huge sums over which he has been entrusted, because they don't belong him.

☛ "Wide Steps" in Approaching the Altar and When Judging

A PACE TAKEN in haste is referred to by Chazal as a *pesiah gasab*, a wide step. The expression *gasus ha'ruach*, an expansive demeanor, is used by Chazal as a synonym for pride and arrogance. The word *gasus* is thus used to denote both a hasty, overconfident gait and a prideful attitude.

Haste is a symptom of pride, for it shows that one is immediately confident that he has a thorough grasp of the matter at hand and that his opinion should prevail. Caution and deliberation are evidenced by the person who realizes that it is appropriate that he show humility, for he isn't certain that he has reached the correct conclusion and cannot be sure of the accuracy of his perception. The Gemara in *Berachos* (43b) indeed says that, "[Taking] wide steps diminishes a person's sight by one five-hundredth." Haste and clear vision are antagonistic to one another — the individual who rushes and jumps to conclusions loses his clear-sightedness.

☛ Pride, like Haste, Is in Contradiction to Clear Thinking

FURTHERMORE, JUDGING PROPERLY requires that the *dayan* be humble, for pride obscures a person's vision. In the same way that haste in judging interferes with a *dayan's* clear-headedness, pride can obscure his vision. Therefore, explains the Maharal, besides the general injunction against pride, a *dayan* is specifically warned against harboring this trait, "For it is unbecoming for a *dayan* to bedeck himself in pride, for pride diverts a person from [the path of] intellect. I therefore maintain that just as it is forbidden to appoint an ignoramus as a *dayan*, it is similarly forbidden to appoint an arrogant individual [to serve in this capacity], for there is certainly no wisdom in him whatsoever, for everywhere we encounter this dearth of wisdom in the proud person."

Man lacks the moral standing to judge his fellow man and is unable to fully perceive what actually took place between the claimant and the defendant or between man and wife. True judgment can be determined only by G-d, upon whose behalf a *dayan* acts. He must therefore show deliberation when arriving at his verdict, and the most fundamental quality required of him is humility.

The Significance of Bnei Yisrael's Declaring “*Na'aseh!*” before “*Nishma!*”

☛ How Can a Person Undertake to Do What He Hasn't Yet Heard?

THE TORAH TELLS us that prior to the Revelation at Har Sinai when Hashem gave us the Torah, “He (Moshe) took the Book of the Covenant (Rashi: the text of the Torah up to that point) and read it to the people, and they said, ‘All that Hashem has spoken, we shall do and we shall hear!’” (*Shemos* 24:7).

The order in which Bnei Yisrael declared their readiness to fulfill G-d's word raises a major difficulty, for it is impossible to fulfill any mitzvah without prior knowledge of its nature and the detailed laws of its observance. How can a person who is not fully conversant in the myriad details of the laws of Shabbos avoid desecrating Shabbos? How can an individual who is unaware of the monetary laws avoid transgressing them? The Mishnah in *Avos* indeed says, “An unlearned person is unable to fear sin, and an ignoramus cannot be pious.” How then can one undertake to carry out commands that one has not yet heard? It is comparable to saying, “Allow me to play the piano, though admittedly, I've never learned how...”

☛ What Is “the Secret That the *Malachim* Use”?

DUE TO THIS difficulty, the *Rishonim* explain Bnei Yisrael's declaration in a way that avoids any implication that they were undertaking something of which they as yet had no knowledge.

The Rashbam explains that “*na'aseh* (We shall fulfill)” refers to all

that they had been told hitherto (Rashi *ibid.* 15:25 mentions that at Marah, prior to the Giving of the Torah, Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael some portions of the Torah to study), whereas “*nishma* (We shall listen)” refers to whatever Hashem would command them henceforth.

The Ibn Ezra explains that “*na’aseh*” refers to positive commandments, and “*nishma*” refers to negative ones. Alternatively, the Ibn Ezra explains that “*na’aseh*” refers to those mitzvos that are self-evident (such as honoring parents), whereas “*nishma*” refers to mitzvos that require a command in order to render them binding.

Chazal, however, understand the declaration of “*na’aseh v’nishma*” as an undertaking to fulfill even before hearing and heap praise upon Bnei Yisrael for it.

We thus find in *maseches Shabbos* (88a):

Rabbi Elazar said, When Yisrael declared “*na’aseh*” before “*nishma*,” a Heavenly voice issued forth and said to them, “Who has revealed this secret, which the ministering *malachim* use, as it says, ‘Bless Hashem [you,] His *malachim* of mighty strength who fulfill His word, to listen to the message of His word’ (*Tehillim* 103:20)? It first says that they ‘fulfill’ and only after that, that they ‘listen.’”

What is the significance of this secret, and how can a human being resemble a *malach* in respect to fulfilling a command before he hears what it is?

☛ The Crowns That Were Attached to the Heads of Bnei Yisrael

THIS DIFFICULTY IS compounded upon further study of the Gemara (*Shabbos* *ibid.*), which says, “Rabbi Simai expounded, ‘When Yisrael declared “*na’aseh*” before “*nishma*,” six hundred thousand ministering *malachim* came to each and every Israelite and attached two crowns to him, one corresponding to *na’aseh* and the other to *nishma*. When Yisrael sinned [with the Golden Calf], a million two hundred thousand destructive *malachim* descended and dismantled them,

as it says, “Bnei Yisrael were divested of their adornment from Har Chorev” (*Shemos* 33:6).’

Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘Moshe merited taking all of them (i.e., the crowns), for adjacent to this is the *pasuk* “And Moshe took the tent” (ibid. *pasuk* 7).’

Reish Lakish said, ‘In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will return them to us, as it says, “And those redeemed by Hashem shall return and shall come to Tziyon in joy, with *simchas olam* (everlasting joy)” (*Yeshayah* 35:10) — [this can be understood as meaning] with *simchah shemei’olam*, [with their] former joy upon their heads.”’

This account raises several difficulties. What was the meaning of these crowns and of their removal? Why did Moshe merit taking them all? What is the relevance of their future restoration upon the Jewish People’s return to Tziyon — how are these crowns connected to this return?

☛ One *Malach* Attached Two Crowns, but It Took Two *Malachim* to Remove Them

TOSAFOS (*SHABBOS* IBID.) ask why twice the number of *malachim* were involved in removing the crowns as were involved in their attachment. After all, the general principle is that Heaven’s beneficence is more abundant than its retribution. Tosafos answer that here too, a single ministering *malach* was able to attach two crowns, whereas the destructive *malachim* did not have that power, so two of them were needed to remove each person’s crowns. How are we to understand the idea of a *malach* lacking power, and how is the abundance of Heaven’s beneficence over retribution reflected in the relative strength of the *malachim*?

☛ How Did the Nations’ Traditions Preclude Them from Accepting the Torah?

ANOTHER DIFFICULTY IS raised by the Midrash (*Sifrei, Devarim* 343) that says that when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to give the Torah,

He first asked the various nations whether they would accept it, and each one asked, “What is written in it?” Each nation, upon hearing one or another of the most fundamental commandments — such as “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” or “Do not commit adultery” — responded that its national tradition from its forbears was to engage in just that type of behavior, and it would therefore be impossible for them to accept the Torah.

Such a response is baffling. What kind of logic is there in a murderer arguing that this is how his ancestors behaved? Doesn’t the ethical imperative not to murder override such a “tradition” and compel acceptance of the Torah?

☛ *Nishma* Denotes Worldview; *Na’aseh* Denotes Conduct

IN HIS INSIGHTS on *Shas* (*Shabbos* *ibid.*), the Maharal presents the following spectacular explanation of this topic.

Most people live with both a “*nishma*,” which is the worldview they espouse, and a “*na’aseh*,” which is the way they behave. It often happens that a person’s ideology and behavior are poles apart, with one seemingly bearing no relation to the other. Such people live with an inner contradiction between their “*na’aseh*” and their “*nishma*,” between the ideal and the practical. They constantly vacillate between one and the other until finally arriving at some compromise that eventually leaves them dissatisfied with their lives and lacking self-fulfillment. In day-to-day life, man is often beset by drives and urges that do not necessarily reflect his moral stature. His genuine desires become apparent immediately after he has acted. An inner voice will congratulate him after he has succeeded in delaying gratification of his desires and will berate him after indulgence of his appetites. Happy is the person who experiences no dissonance between his “*na’aseh*” and the “*nishma*” that follows on its heels.

☛ A *Malach's Na'aseh* and *Nishma* Are Identical

BECAUSE A MINISTERING *malach* has no personal agenda whatsoever, his *na'aseh* and his *nishma* are completely in sync. Whatever his Creator bids him do is what he does. This is “the secret that the *malachim* use” mentioned by the Gemara. It is a secret that humans can emulate too, though only a person who lives to fulfill his ethical calling can echo the declaration of “*Na'aseh v'nishma*.”

☛ The Nations' Response to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*

THE NATIONS CONVEYED to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that an inherent feature of their lives is a disconnect between what ought to happen and what actually happens, and therefore, they saw no logic in undertaking to live according to certain ideals that run counter to the habits that have become ingrained in them over the course of generations. Their ancestral traditions and historical experience demonstrate that no ethical undertaking of theirs will last for very long and that they will sooner or later regress and resume behaving in accordance with their natural inclinations.

Only Yisrael were able to declare “*Na'aseh v'nishma*” because their inbred tendency from having been raised according to their ancestral traditions was entirely aligned with the mitzvos of the Torah. They would therefore not be subject to constant inner conflict between the ideals they were supposed to be living up to and their behavior in practice.

Those who are on this spiritual level are able to receive the Torah and deserve the crowns of self-fulfillment.

☛ One *Malach* Cannot Carry Out Two Missions

A SINGLE *MALACH* can perform only a single mission. Thus, when Yisrael accepted the Torah, a single *malach* was able to attach two crowns to each of them, because their *na'aseh* and their *nishma* comprised a single, coordinated unit and a single mission. When they sinned with

the Golden Calf, however, a single *malach* was unable to handle the removal of two crowns, because their *na'aseh* and *nishma* were no longer aligned, and each crown now belonged to a separate entity.

☛ The Future Rectification of This Sin

WITH THE SIN of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisrael were no longer utterly in sync with the Torah's dictates as they had been when they accepted them. They were now also subject to the urgings of their *yetzer hara* vying with their spiritual promptings for their allegiance, in a state similar to the one in which Adam Harishon found himself after eating from the *eitz hada'as*. The rays of splendor, which were an outgrowth of complete inner synchronization between *na'aseh* and *nishma* — between spiritual stature and conduct in practice — adorned the countenance of Moshe Rabbeinu, who alone had no share in the sin. In Eretz Yisrael in the future, however, the prophecy, “Those redeemed by Hashem shall return, and they shall come to Tziyon crowned in everlasting joy” will be fulfilled, for the Land's nature is to foster life of spiritual fulfillment with no dissonance between *na'aseh* and *nishma*, for there, even worldly pursuits constitute a major mitzvah.

Man must strive to lead a life in which his *na'aseh* — how he conducts himself in practice — coexists harmoniously with his *nishma* — the moral worldview to which he subscribes. The way to attain this harmony is for a person to aspire to a life of spiritual fulfillment, spurning the gratification of material urges that do not reflect his moral stature. By engaging in activities that are congruent with his true aspirations, which come to the fore after he has acted, he will prevent any dissonance between his *na'aseh* and the subsequent *nishma*.

Terumah

A Donation That Atones for Man's Monetary Sphere of Activity

☞ Three Donations That Are One

OUR *PARSHAH* OPENS with Hashem telling Moshe, “Tell Bnei Yisrael that they shall set aside a contribution for Me; you shall accept a contribution for Me from every man whose heart prompts him [to donate]. This is the [kind of] contribution that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper...” (*Shemos* 25:2–3).

Noting the threefold repetition of the word *terumah* (contribution), Rashi cites the Midrash: “Chazal said: three contributions are mentioned here. One was the half shekel donated by every person, from which the sockets [for the boards that formed the walls of the Mishkan] were made, as is stated explicitly in *parshas Pekudei* (ibid. 38:26–7); one is mentioned in the section about the contributions for the altar — a half shekel per person — to go for the purchase of communal sacrifices (ibid. 30:11–16); and one was the contribution to the Mishkan, which each and every individual could donate [according to his generosity].”

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal asks: “Since only one of the [three] contributions is explained here — the one that went towards the construction of the Mishkan — why are the other [two] contributions, which are not relevant here, mentioned at all?”

According to the Maharal, the Torah’s mention of the three

contributions in close proximity to one another indicates a deeper connection between them. “These three contributions are related to one another,” he writes. “One does not have its desired effect without the others, and they are all as one.”

What is the factor common to the three contributions?

☛ Three Realms Are Affected by Sin, for Which the Three Contributions Atoned

THE MAHARAL CITES the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 51:8) that says, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, ‘Let the gold of the Mishkan come and atone for the gold of the Golden Calf.’” The Mishkan’s construction thus atoned for the episode of the Golden Calf.

The sin of the Golden Calf involved all of the three components that make up a person:

1. His soul — man’s ability to think; they erred in this area by imagining that the Calf was invested with some divine power, as the *pasuk* says, “These are your gods, Yisrael” (ibid. 32:4).
2. His body — man’s physical faculties; these were involved in the Calf’s worship, which included offering sacrifices to it (ibid. *pasuk* 6).
3. His financial resources — they sinned by donating their money towards making the Calf.

“Yisrael deserved to be punished in all these three realms,” writes the Maharal. “They thus needed atonement in all three. Hashem therefore commanded them to make three contributions, corresponding to the soul, the body, and money.”

The three contributions thus shared a common denominator of achieving atonement for the three aspects of man that were involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.

While man’s body and soul are both clearly parts of him, how are we to understand the third component, his money? Is this really an essential component of who and what a person is?

☛ Money as One of the Components of a Human Being

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Hateshuvah*, Chap. 5), the Maharal explains that a person's assets also form an integral part of his being, for as Chazal say "If a person steals [even] a *perutah*'s worth from his colleague, it is as though he is taking [away] his life" (*Bava Kama* 119a). Accordingly, the Torah says, "You shall love Hashem, your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your means" (*Devarim* 6:5). "Your heart" refers to a person's body, "your soul" refers to his soul, and "your means" refers to his financial resources. These are the three realms in which a person serves Hashem.

By the same token, we find that a city whose residents have all been found guilty of idol worship (the *Ir Hanidachas*, a city that has been led astray) suffers not only the execution of all its inhabitants, but also the burning of its entire contents. The Torah tells us, "And all its spoil you shall gather into its main square and burn the city and all its spoil completely in fire, for the sake of Hashem..." (ibid. 13:17). We might wonder in what manner the people's possessions can have sinned that they should require incineration. The answer is that a person's money is indeed a part of him, and if the town's entire population has forfeited their lives through idol worship, their belongings, too, must be destroyed.

Therefore, when a person repents and wants to rectify himself, he must address every aspect of his being, as we find in the *U'nesaneh Tokef* prayer (said in Musaf on the *Yamim Nora'im*), "Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil of the decree." These three measures correspond to *tzom* (fasting), *kol* (voice), and *mamon* (money) — which all share the numerical value of 136. Fasting denotes repentance on the physical plane; using one's voice in prayer manifests repentance in the realm of the soul; donating money to *tzedakah* rectifies man's third dimension of assets.

However, although we have demonstrated that a person's means comprise a further dimension of his being, we have not explained why this should be. After all, money is something external that a

person acquires; it is not one of his limbs or mental faculties. How are we to understand the Maharal's assertion?

☛ The Extent of a Person's Reach and His Sphere of Influence Depend on His Means

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Gemilus Chasadim*, Chap. 5) the Maharal writes that "Money too is part of what defines a person, because money constitutes his vitality (i.e., by fueling his life force)." He adds further (ibid., *Nesiv Ahavas Hashem*, Chap. 1) that "A person's wealth and possessions are akin to the person himself, because when a person loses his money, his intellect departs, as Chazal say (*Yerushalmi, Terumos* 8:4), 'All of a person's limbs are dependent on [the inclination of] his heart, and his heart is dependent upon [the contents of] his pocket,' for money enables him to exist." In other words, "All of a person's limbs are dependent on his heart," because without inclination or interest, a person will not embark on any activity, yet "his heart is dependent upon his pocket," for the extent to which he is able to pursue his inclination is ultimately dependent upon his financial means.

The extent of a person's reach and of his sphere of influence are no less dependent on his financial means than upon his intellectual and physical powers.

☛ The Three Spheres of a Person's Influence

IN REFERRING TO a person's money as a dimension of his being, we are focusing upon its crucial role in determining the extent of his field of activity and of its ability to provide thrust and momentum. Each of the three contributions Bnei Yisrael made to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf corresponds to one of the three planes on which man operates: the intellectual, the physical, and the financial.

The Maharal then explains the specific characteristics and the purpose of each of the three contributions along these lines.

☛ Two Half-Shekels Correspond to Body and Soul

CORRESPONDING TO THE physical body was the half-shekel contribution to the sockets, which were hollowed out to serve as a receptacle for the pegs protruding from the boards (*Shemos* 26:17, Rashi). The sockets thus supported the entire Mishkan from below, just as the body serves as the receptacle that holds man's soul. The second half-shekel donation was used for purchasing the animals that were offered as communal sacrifices, which rectify man's soul, as the *pasuk* says of this contribution, "To atone for your souls" (*ibid.* 30:15).

☛ All Contributed Equally

THESE TWO CONTRIBUTIONS were identical amounts for everyone because, as the Maharal writes, "All people are equal in having a body and a soul; no one possesses any more of these than another person, irrespective of whether he be poor or rich. Hashem therefore commanded that in these two contributions, everyone should be equal — half a shekel."

☛ Why a Half, Not a Whole?

THE REASON WHY the amount was fixed at a half-shekel and not a whole shekel is that "A person is human by virtue of both his soul and his body." Each individual component thus represents only a fraction of the complete person, who can exist only when both are together. "The soul is a half-shekel and the body is a half-shekel," writes the Maharal, "and therefore, a half-shekel needed to be given for each of them."

☛ Money Represents an External Addition to Man's Stature

SINCE WE HAVE seen that man's being comprises three dimensions, we may wonder why all three contributions were not fixed at a third of a shekel.

The answer to this is that while money serves as the means through which man deals with reality, it is nonetheless an extraneous medium, appended to him externally. While man's heart and soul are his basic building blocks, his money is his tool for attaining and fulfilling his desires, thus extending his sphere of activity beyond himself.

Chazal therefore understand the words of the *pasuk* containing the mitzvah to love Hashem “*b'chol me'odecha* (with all your means)” as referring to a person's financial resources, for the word *me'od*, meaning “very,” denotes amplification and extension of the subject of the description beyond what is usual, e.g., “very good” rather than merely “good.” This is precisely the type of role a person's financial resources play, enlarging and extending his field of activity.

☛ The Third Contribution Was Not Equal

THE THIRD CONTRIBUTION, towards the construction of the Mishkan, corresponded to man's financial dimension, which was also part of the sin of the Golden Calf. Not everyone is equal in this realm; some people are poorer, while others are wealthier. The Torah therefore commanded that this contribution be from “every man whose heart prompts him,” i.e., depending on his means.

☛ Why Did This Contribution Depend on a Person's Heart's Prompting Rather than His Actual Wealth?

THE MAHARAL WONDERS why the contribution towards the Mishkan's construction was made according to an individual's generosity rather than his actual wealth. “At times,” he writes, “a person will have a lot of money but will make a small contribution, while a poor man will give a lot, the size of his contribution being disproportionate to his means, [whereas] it would be appropriate that a wealthy individual with a lot of money should give a lot, while a person with a little money should give a little.”

☛ Wealth Is a Function of the Donor's Generosity

IN ORDER TO answer this question, the Maharal lays down an important principle. "A good-hearted person who gives generously is a [genuinely] wealthy individual, whereas those people who possess a lot but are miserly and stingy when it comes to donating are not [actually] wealthy monetarily. The wealthy man is he who is generous and good hearted, whereas the miser is lacking."

The Maharal's contention that a miser is considered to be indigent seems counterintuitive; after all, he has wider means at his disposal than most people do, and his stinginess boosts his wealth and capabilities.

In *Derech Chaim* (*Avos* 4:1), the Maharal provides an answer to this seeming paradox. He writes, "One can answer that it is inappropriate for a person to be classed as wealthy when he has a lot of money that is hidden away and secreted in his stores or his money-box, for this remains unrelated to him."

In other words, wealth can be considered part of a person only to the extent that it reflects his ability to reach out of himself and expand the sphere of his activity. If a person's miserly nature inhibits his ability to use his wealth, his horizons have not broadened at all. The money that belongs to such a person has no connection to him and fuels no personal growth. It is as though he owns enormous wealth that is locked up in a safe to which he has no key. A person whose heart is closed, preventing him from sharing his abundance with others, cannot be considered wealthy. It makes no difference whether he is kept from using his money by the metal walls of a locked safe or the inhibitions and indifference of a stony heart.

☛ When Is a Wealthy Person's Wealth Truly a Part of Him?

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS the Mishnah's statement, "Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his lot" (*Avos* *ibid.*) in the same way.

Wealth (*ashirus*) apparently denotes abundance. We find the term used this way in the *Yerushalmi* (*Rosh Hashanah* 3:5): “The Torah’s words are *aniyim* (lit. poor, i.e., sparse) in one place and *ashirim* (lit. wealthy, i.e., plentiful) elsewhere,” i.e., the meaning of an unclear phrase is often illuminated by a fuller treatment in another place.

While someone who doesn’t have a lot of money but is happy with his lot might be a happier person, in what sense can he be called wealthy?

The explanation is that wealth is measured by the extent of money’s connection to its owner and the expanded field of activity it facilitates, thereby enhancing his personal growth. A million gold coins inside a locked box remain unconnected to their owner and contribute nothing towards the expansion of his horizons. He is truly poorer than the owner of a hundred such coins that are available for use and who is willing to translate their potential into accomplishment.

A person whose nature inhibits him from using his wealth to broaden the sphere of his activity cannot be considered wealthy; his hand cannot extend as far as his pocket.

☞ Atonement for Misdirecting One’s Monetary Component Is in Proportion to His Generosity

THE PEOPLE’S CONTRIBUTIONS towards the Mishkan’s construction, which atoned for the part of the sin of the Golden Calf involving their monetary component, was therefore to be given according to each individual’s generosity. This donation came to atone for having misused their monetary dimension for expansion into a forbidden sphere of activity. Money that a person’s stinginess keeps him from using is not part of him. Thus, when a contribution representing its owner’s wealth and means needed to be made, the sole yardstick was the donor’s generosity. Since a generous person is a wealthy person, each individual contributed according to his true wealth.

The Maharal opens our eyes to a radically new approach, whereby

a person's financial means are part of his very being, since they dictate the extent of his field of activity. His hand extends to others only in proportion to his wealth, meaning his generosity. Only money that a person is able and willing to donate can be termed wealth, for if his heart prevents him from using his money, he is truly lacking in means.

Tetzaveh

The *Kohen Gadol*'s Vestments Facilitated Atonement

☛ The Role of the Priestly Vestments in Atoning for Sin

THIS *PARSHAH* DEALS with the special garments worn by the *kohanim* when serving in the Mishkan. The Torah writes, “You shall make sacred garments for Aharon, your brother, for [his] honor and splendor” (*Shemos* 28:2). Evidently, the purpose of these special articles of clothing was to enhance the honor and dignity of those who were conducting Heaven’s service.

From the Gemara, however, it is apparent that the priestly garments had an additional, seemingly unrelated function, namely, to atone for various sins. Thus, we find in the Gemara (*Zevachim* 88b): “Why is the section dealing with the sacrifices placed next to the section dealing with the priestly garments? To teach you that just as the sacrifices atone, the priestly garments also atone.”

The Gemara (*Arachin* 16a) tells us that the tunic atoned for murder, the trousers for immorality, the turban for arrogance, the belt for sinful thoughts, the breastplate for errors in judgment, the *ephod* for idolatry, the *me’il* for derogatory speech, and the *tzitz* for brazenness.

☛ Three Sins That Destroy the Three Components of Man’s Existence

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Zevachim* *ibid.*), the Maharal gives a detailed explanation of how each garment represents the particular sin

for which it atones. He explains further that man's existence comprises three components: his intellect, his soul (i.e., his life force), and his body, upon each of which one of three fundamental sins — idolatry, immorality, and murder — has a destructive effect, with all other sins being subdivisions of one of these three.

Idolatry is a sin that involves man's intellect. It is the only sin about which Chazal tell us (*Kiddushin* 40a), “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* reckons thoughts along with action,” i.e., a mere idolatrous thought is reckoned as a sin.

Bloodshed involves man's soul, for the Torah tells us that a living creature's life force is in its blood (*Vayikra* 17:11). Thus, a person who spills blood sins in a manner that affects the victim's soul and life force.

Immorality involves man's physical component; it is a sin of the flesh, in which a person's most material aspect comes to the fore.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 74a) therefore rules in regard to all three of these sins that a Jew must give up his life rather than transgress, unlike all other mitzvos which, in face of danger to life, can be violated. By violating any of these three sins, a person loses one of the essential components of his existence and “is tantamount to being lost and void; thus, if he intends to violate such a sin in order to preserve himself, he will gain nothing, for with this sin, he will anyway be as good as lost and gone from the world.”

☛ How Do the Priestly Vestments Affect a Sinful Soul?

HOW CAN ITEMS of clothing effect atonement simply by virtue of being worn? How do the garments that bedeck the *Kohen Gadol* in honor and splendor serve as the antithesis of sin?

Another general question to consider is how clothing worn by the *Kohen Gadol* is able to atone for a sin committed by an ordinary person. In regard to animal sacrifices, the principle “The *kohanim* eat [the sacrificed animal's meat], and the owner attains atonement” (*Pesachim* 59b) operates, implying that one person's action *can* have

an effect on someone else. However, this is because the owner of the sacrificed animal is a party in the process of its offering. This explanation is offered by the Ramban (in his commentary to *Vayikra* 1:9), who notes that each of a person's actions is composed of thought, speech, and deed. He writes that the Torah therefore commands a sinner to bring a sacrifice and: "Lean his hands upon it — corresponding to his deed; confess his sin verbally — corresponding to his speech; burn in fire its stomach and kidneys — which are the organs of thought and desire; as well as its legs — corresponding to a person's arms and legs, which perform all his actions; its blood is sprinkled upon the altar — corresponding to his blood, which represents his life force. In doing all this, a person should consider that he has sinned to his G-d with his body and soul and deserves to have his own blood spilled and his body burned, if not for the Creator's kindness in taking in his stead the substitute of this sacrifice, whose blood takes the place of his blood and whose life takes the place of his life."

In other words, a sacrifice effects atonement since it gives external expression to the turmoil taking place within its owner, who while it is being offered considers how he deserved to have what is being done to it done to him and thereupon sincerely repents his misdeed. This rationale can be extended to include the consumption by the *kohanim* of those parts of the animal that are not offered on the altar. However, what effect do the garments worn by the *kohen* exert upon a sinner's soul?

☛ Garments That Confer Respect Contrast with the Sinner's Lowliness

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Zevachim* *ibid.*), the Maharal explains that priestly vestments represent the antithesis of sin by bespeaking respect and dignity, whereas sin is an expression of the sinner's lowliness and degradation.

"The priestly garments, which are holy and confer honor and splendor [upon their wearer], atone for sins which are despicable and

abhorrent, rendering a person defiled, and by [the *kohen*] wearing these garments, he removes despicableness and abomination from Yisrael.”

The deeper meaning of this explanation is that a person will refrain from debasing himself by sinning in order to preserve his dignity and standing in the eyes of both himself and others.

☛ Maintaining Human Dignity Safeguards against Sinning

A PERSON'S SENSE of self-worth shapes his personality and determines his conduct. This underscores the supreme importance of preserving a person's dignity and his image in other people's eyes as a means of preventing him from sinning. There are people who would not shrink from sinning because of their fear of Heaven or of a particular punishment but who nonetheless go out of their way to avoid sin in order to preserve their dignity. Holding onto both one's self-respect and other people's respect thus motivates a person to refrain from sinning, whereas if he has little regard for himself and commands little respect in the eyes of others, he doesn't care whether he sins or not, because his self-image is poor in any case.

The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 29a) describes how *beis din* would threaten witnesses in order to impress upon them the importance of testifying truthfully. The Gemara says that the climax of this was a warning to the witnesses that “False witnesses are scorned in the eyes of those who hire them” — they are objects of contempt even to those who hired them to testify falsely. Now, why should the witness care about being despised by the person who paid him to testify? It can only be because a person's self-respect and what others think of him is important to him, and this constitutes the final barrier keeping him from moral deterioration.*

* See *Letters of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook*, Vol. 1 #226:

Our early Sages, who possessed a true understanding of the human psyche, instruct us that when intimidating witnesses to testify truthfully, we convey to

This basic idea is also found in the Rambam's writings (Commentary to the Mishnah, *Avos* 1:12): "They said that when Aharon sensed about a person that he harbored evil inside him and had sinned, or was told this about him, he would greet the person, befriend him, and speak to him a lot. The person would feel ashamed and say to himself, 'Woe to me — if Aharon knew my private thoughts and the things I have done, he wouldn't allow himself to look at me, let alone speak to me. Yet he considers me a virtuous person, so I will justify his impression,' and he would repent and become one of Aharon's disciples, benefitting from his advice and counsel."

☛ Human Dignity Reflects the Divine Likeness within Him

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Ahavas Rei'a*, Chap. 1), the Maharal writes that: "A person who causes his colleague's face to pale in embarrassment is akin to a murderer — for he who causes his colleague to blanch is tantamount to having extinguished the lamp. This is called spilling the person's blood, for there is something very wonderful

them a concise message that has a powerful impact: "False witnesses are scorned in the eyes of those who hire them." If an insensitive heart has ceased to recognize the good and correct path, its derisive willfulness can repel any reproof or castigation, any fear of retribution or scare of distress. A moribund heart that has forgotten the life imparted by any degree whatsoever of ethical awareness has lost its motion and its moral compass. Threats or intimidation will not restore such a heart to life so easily. *Yet there is one way to reach the place where a spark of life hides deep within a person even after he has deteriorated to the lowest moral level — his ability to recognize his own worth and his feeling of dignity.* [Thus is] the dignity of the soul of which every person, by virtue of being a human being, is worthy. When a person is awakened to the realization of his own worth, all his dormant ethical faculties and sensitivities will gradually be restored and come back to life. *The warning that "False witnesses are scorned in the eyes of those who hire them" thus has a magical property capable of reclaiming from sin even the sleeping ones who were enticed [to sin] and slumbering strayers. It is a reproof of truth, of wisdom, based upon the firm foundation of the feeling of dignity.*

about this image, which is a person's form. Therefore, he who pales and does away with the image of his face, to the point where he makes him pale and extinguishes his light — this is called bloodshed. For bloodshed denotes doing away with the [entire] person, and he who causes a person's face to pale cancels the form by which he is recognized, which is his image, thereby doing away with the person as well, because the image is the person.”

The connection between embarrassing a person and wounding his dignity on one hand and his Divine image and attachment to life on the other is not readily apparent. The key to understanding the above comments is that when the Torah says that man is created “in the Divine image” (*Bereishis* 1:27), this refers to man's free will and ability to choose — by which he resembles G-d — between good and evil.

A person needs his dignity intact in order to keep him from sinning. Once a person is debased in his own eyes, he loses the barrier holding him back from engaging in shameful conduct from which someone who enjoys self-respect and the respect of others will ordinarily automatically refrain. Damaging a person's dignity and embarrassing him is thus the equivalent of doing away with his Divine image and extinguishing his light.

☛ A Person's Dignity Is Enhanced by His Clothing

QUALITY, HIGH-CLASS CLOTHING confers respectability on its wearer, lending him a dignified bearing. It may be a mere external trapping, but its role in determining the image he projects to his environment, as well as his self-image, is significant.

Torah scholars have always made a point of wearing dignified clothing. In the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 91b), we find Rabbi Yochanan referring to his clothes as “That which honors me.” The Maharal (*Chiddushei Aggados, Shabbos* 140b) explains: “It is correct that a person should be particular about something that constitutes his respect and splendor, and if he doesn't do so, he lacks [self-]respect.”

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 145b) asks: “Why do the Torah scholars of Bavel stand out?” Rashi explains this as meaning that “They adorn themselves with fine clothing.” The Gemara answers, “Because they do not possess Torah scholarship.” Rashi explains, “They do not excel in Torah scholarship to the extent that they command respect on that count, as do those in Eretz Yisrael; therefore, they are honored on account of their clothing, because of their distinguished appearance.”

From here we can learn that when a person lacks a sense of self-worth, which is a crucial tool in maintaining an appropriate ethical level, he can still maintain his dignity and self-image by dressing in a dignified manner.

☛ The Priestly Vestments Yielded the Image of Man in His Full Splendor

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol*, which conferred dignity and splendor, projected to observers the full stature that a human being is expected to attain and were thus the antithesis of sin, which is a consequence of lowliness and shame and which aggravates them yet further.

In the Maharal’s words, “The holy garments that Hashem commanded the *kohen* to wear atone for and remove the sins that represent the sinner, having donned soiled clothing, and they remove those disgusting clothes, [meaning,] his connection to that [type of] clothing.”

In *Gur Aryeh* (*Bamidbar* 28:15), the Maharal explains that the word *cheit* (sin) doesn’t refer only to the actual transgression of a sin, but also encompasses the idea of having missed the mark and being lacking. We thus find Yaakov Avinu reminding Lavan, “*Anochi achatenah*, if it was missing from [with] me, you sought payment from me” (*Bereishis* 31:39). In other words, Lavan had demanded restitution for any sheep that had gone missing from the flock that Yaakov was tending. No sin was involved; the word *achatenah* denotes a missing animal. The word is used in a similar sense in the

pasuk, “aiming his stone within a hairsbreadth, without missing” (*Shoftim* 20:16). Similarly, Bas Sheva told David Hamelech that were he to die without having named Shlomo as his successor, “I and my son Shlomo will be *chata'im*” (*Melachim I* 1:21). In other words, they would be missing out, dispossessed of what should have rightfully been theirs.

A person who sins is thus deficient; he feels lowly and disgraced. His sense of self-worth is perilously low. In this situation, with his Divine image eclipsed, his ability to successfully grapple with his urges is compromised, for these depend on having healthy self-esteem and being respected by others. This leads to a vicious cycle, with one sin leading to another, seemingly justifying his own poor opinion of himself and further weakening his resolve and ability to reverse the trend. To enable the sinner to elevate himself to his former standing, he is presented with the sight of the *kohen* wearing his special garments. He witnesses the full stature that a human being can achieve, which demonstrates to him what a person is capable of attaining.

The sacrifice he has come to offer thus demonstrates to the sinner the fate that he himself in his present state ought to be suffering, while the sight of the priestly vestments shows him the stature that could be his and the summit of human perfection for which he ought to strive.

After viewing the *kohen's* splendor, he will divest himself of his stained clothing and his lowly self-image and will strive to regain dignity and respect, which constitute the rectification that his soul needs.

We have seen that respectable clothing is not merely a matter of externals. A person's dress contributes to the respect he commands, even if only in his own eyes. Respect is vital for the healthy functioning of a person's soul, for self-respect prevents him from sinning. A sinner feels lowly and disgraced; in such a state, he doesn't care if he continues sinning, because his self-image is so poor anyway. He must therefore glimpse a figure that embodies dignity that he can strive to emulate. This is the purpose of the priestly vestments.

Ki Sisa

Why Did the Sin of the Golden Calf Take Place Precisely When the Torah Was Given?

☛ The Sin Takes Place at a Time When the People Are at a Spiritual Peak

SHORTLY BEFORE MOSHE'S descent from Har Sinai bearing the *luchos*, which should have been the climax of *Matan Torah*, the people committed the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah tells us: "The people saw that Moshe was late coming down from the mountain, so the people congregated around Aharon and said to him, 'Arise, make us a god who will lead us, because this man, Moshe, who brought us up from the land of Egypt — we do not know what has happened to him' ...The entire people then divested themselves of the gold earrings that were on their ears and brought them to Aharon. He took the gold from their hands, tied it all in a cloth, and made it into a molten calf. They then said, 'These are your gods, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt'" (*Shemos* 32:1–4).

Rashi explains why the people believed that Moshe was late in returning from Har Sinai: "For when Moshe ascended the mountain, he told them, 'I shall return when forty days have elapsed, during the first six hours of the day.' They thought that the day of his ascent was counted as one of the forty, etc."

The people's mistake in counting the days led them to expect

Moshe's return a day early and, once the first six hours had elapsed, to believe that he was late in returning. This error led to their precipitous descent from the sublime spiritual heights of Har Sinai to the depths of the grave sin of idolatry, accompanied by dancing around the Golden Calf and the declaration that "These are your gods, Yisrael!"

☛ How Did Things Deteriorate So Greatly So Fast?

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (Chap. 48), the Maharal asks, "We are faced with an extremely difficult question: how is it that immediately, 'They strayed quickly from the path' (ibid. 32:8) and made a molten calf? This is a formidable question, for there is no doubt that considering their high level, this should not have come about."

Change in a person, particularly spiritual change, usually takes place gradually. We thus find in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 105b): "This is how the *yetzer hara* works: today he tells a person, 'Do this,' tomorrow he tells him 'Do that,' until he tells him, 'Go and worship idols.'" How could the people have changed so drastically all at once? How could they have gone in a moment from having scaled spiritual summits to sinning in the gravest manner?

☛ A Person's First Thought Indicates Where His Focus Lies

THE QUESTION BECOMES even more difficult in light of the principle that a person's initial, instinctive thought or action is indicative of his essence. A person is usually subject to the ongoing influence of his physical and social environment and adjusts himself to them accordingly. However, his very first action, before any outside influences act upon him, is the product of his own inner promptings. For example, a person's first thought upon waking in the morning attests to what is most important to him and what lurks at the edges of his consciousness. His subsequent activity is adjusted in response to his surroundings and may not reflect his inner self. As the Maharal

writes in *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 35), “A thing’s essence precedes any incidental influence; that which is incidental comes afterwards.”*

In *Be’er Hagolah* (*Be’er* 2), the Maharal uses this idea to explain the Gemara’s ruling (*Sanhedrin* 32a) that “Capital cases are brought back to consider an argument for the defendant’s innocence but not to hear an argument for his guilt.” Once a *beis din* reaches the conclusion that a defendant should be acquitted, they do not reverse their decision even if they now have second thoughts. Only if their initial verdict was to convict him can they reopen the case to consider whether he may in fact be innocent. Why is this?

The Maharal explains that a person’s first thought reflects his essence, and a *dayan*’s natural inclination ought to be to save and acquit the accused, whereas conviction should only be a last resort undertaken with a heavy heart when there remains no avenue of acquittal. If he is initially inclined toward acquittal, he has fulfilled his duty and acted correctly. He should not cancel that verdict because of second thoughts, which are prompted by some external factor that is foreign to his independent thought and reasoning. In the Maharal’s words, “Acquittal ought to be inherent and take priority in *beis din* (i.e., it should be *beis din*’s default position), whereas guilt is not inherent or first but is merely incidental, and something incidental cannot displace something inherent. Therefore, it is not possible to go back to consider guilt and cancel the acquittal.”

Now, the sin of the Golden Calf was the first thing Bnei Yisrael did after having been given the Torah, and according to the above principle, it should apparently be seen as a reflection of their inner essence.

* In Chassidic thought, it is commonly accepted that an *Admor*’s initial response to a question put to him by his Chassidim is prompted by a type of Divine inspiration, arising from the Heavenly assistance accompanying the leader of a flock in providing sound counsel and channeling blessing to his followers. By contrast, any subsequent comments he utters are the product of thought and deliberation prompted by outside influence.

☛ The Greek Claim That Yisrael Carry an Inner Resistance to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*

THE ANCIENT GREEKS actually employed this argument against the Jewish nation when they told them to “Write on an ox’s horn that you have no portion in the G-d of Yisrael” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:5). Why did they specify an ox’s horn rather than any other medium, and in general, what was their intention with this demand? In *Ner Mitzvah* (p. 13), the Maharal explains that the Greeks wanted to prove from the fact that Yisrael’s first deed after they received the Torah was to make the Golden Calf, that they have no portion in the G-d of Yisrael. This supported their claim that Yisrael and their G-d were in fact two opposites that were incapable of bonding. This was why, they said, at the very point of contact they had withdrawn, like a pair of magnets whose like poles repel one another.

In the Maharal’s words, “[They argued that] it appears that there is a degree of separation and departure from Hashem on Yisrael’s part due to something inherent in Yisrael, for if Yisrael inherently and essentially bonded fully to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, making the Golden Calf would not have been the first thing they did after Hashem had taken them as His nation.”

Because a person’s first activity attests to his inner essence, the Greeks instructed Yisrael to “Write on an ox’s horn that you have no portion in the G-d of Yisrael.” It was evident, they said, from the fact that the sin of the Golden Calf was the people’s initial response to the reality of having received the Torah that this was no gradual spiritual deterioration on their part arising from the difficulty of maintaining high spiritual tension long term. It was not an incidental defeat in the ongoing and constant battle between man’s spiritual yearnings and his physical urges, they argued. The fact that the sin took place immediately indicates some inherent resistance that manifests immediately, creating a reaction at the point of closest and most sublime spiritual contact. The Greeks argued that G-d and Yisrael were thus two opposites that had nothing in common and, in fact, never had anything in common.

They therefore said, “Write on an ox’s horn,” because they wanted to demonstrate that just as the horn is an inseparable part of the ox, “This sin is an inherent feature of Yisrael’s, not something incidental, and therefore, they have no portion in the G-d of Yisrael.”

☛ Was the Sin of the Golden Calf a Matter of Timing?

THIS ARGUMENT IS powerful and persuasive; it seems hard to refute. What is our response to this? How could such a grave sin have happened at this very time?

In *Tiferes Yisrael* (Chap. 48), the Maharal explains that while Yisrael and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* are indeed one, the sin took place at a time when Yisrael faced an extremely difficult trial which, given the principles governing human free will, was almost impossible for them to withstand.

☛ The Greater the Person, the Stronger His Evil Inclination

MAN IS ENDOWED with the ability to choose between good and evil; throughout his life, he must struggle to make the right choices. Since exercising his free will is the purpose for which man was created, he never loses this faculty. A person who has refined himself, becoming spiritually oriented and distant from worldliness, still retains his free-will, for the more elevated his stature becomes, the correspondingly stronger his evil inclination grows. As Chazal point out, “No guarantor can safeguard against the sin of immorality.” The higher the spiritual seeker climbs, the deeper yawns the abyss beneath him. As Chazal say (*Sukkah* 52a), “Anyone who is greater than his colleague has a correspondingly stronger evil inclination.” And in the Maharal’s words, “Emptiness attaches itself more strongly when a person’s stature is more elevated.” A person who scales spiritual heights still finds himself confronted by the need to choose between good and evil,

for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* intensifies his evil inclination as a counterbalance to his heightened spiritual sensitivity. Thus, the greater the person, the stronger is the enticement of the evil that he must resist.

It therefore follows that when Bnei Yisrael received the Torah and attained sublime levels that no other human beings attained, the attraction that evil exerted upon them also intensified in order to maintain the balance of their free will.

☛ Downfall Is Part of the Process of Climbing

WE CAN NOW appreciate that the sin of the Golden Calf was no sudden occurrence, but rather part of a process — not a process of deterioration, but of elevation. Upon receiving the Torah, Bnei Yisrael attained a peak of spirituality and removal from worldliness. In order to preserve this level and take it with them into the ordinary days that would follow this uplifting, festive period, they needed to “come down to earth,” while taking with them some tangible expression of what they had gained, something that physically embodied it. Moshe therefore went up to Heaven to bring down the *luchos*, a physical substance upon which the words of the Living G-d were inscribed. The inculcation of Hashem’s Heavenly words such that they could be engraved into a physical piece of rock was a creative process that took forty days (*Devarim* 10:11), just as the process of instilling a Divine soul into a body of flesh and blood takes forty days.

Throughout this period, Yisrael underwent a parallel spiritual process of absorbing the Divine teachings. As they gradually climbed higher and higher, the enticement of the evil that beckoned to them intensified, and the liability of falling grew.

☛ The Evil Inclination Is Stronger than Man — the Solution Is to Keep Climbing

WHEN A PERSON scales spiritual heights, the allure of evil grows. This attraction is actually stronger than a person’s resistance, as the

Gemara says (*Kiddushin* 30b), “A person’s evil inclination becomes more powerful every day, trying to kill him, and were Hashem not helping him, he would be unable to overcome it.” Hashem extends help in the form of the Torah, which has been given to man to toil over and occupy himself with, as the Gemara says there: “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Yisrael, ‘My son, I have created the *yetzer hara*, and I have created the Torah as its antidote. If you occupy yourselves with Torah, you will not be delivered into its clutches.’” Continued spiritual ascent thus prevents a person’s spiritual downfall.

When a person arrives at a summit and stops climbing, he is liable to fall. This is a weak spot in the growth process. After the Torah was given, this danger was removed, because the Torah is infinite, and a person’s ascent need never stop. Since intense occupation with Torah never ceases, man can save himself from sinning.

☛ The Weak Spot

WHEN FORTY DAYS had elapsed since Moshe’s ascent, Bnei Yisrael thought that he had been delayed. They were at a point where their spiritual elevation had peaked, and they were no longer ascending. While they could climb no further, the process of receiving the Torah was still incomplete, for they had not yet received the *luchos*, which were designed to enable them to assimilate the Torah into their everyday lives. At this point, Bnei Yisrael were vulnerable to the enticement of the *yetzer hara*, which is especially intense for a person at a spiritual peak, but they still lacked the protection of delving into an infinite Torah and continued, constant spiritual ascent. “For,” writes the Maharal, “this was before they had received the *luchos*; it was not [yet] after they had received the *luchos* completely, at which time the Satan would have had no dominion over them, for the Torah neutralizes the power of the evil inclination, as Chazal say in *maseches Kiddushin* (30b): ‘If this rascal (i.e., the *yetzer hara*) encounters you, draw him into the *beis midrash*. If he is stone, he will dissolve, and if he is iron, he will shatter.’”

☛ The Struggle over the Two Middle *Tefachim*

THE SINGULAR CHARACTER of the moment that Bnei Yisrael sinned is noted by the *Yerushalmi* (*Ta'anis* 4:5), where the Gemara explains that it took place just as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was giving the *luchos* to Moshe, “at the very moment they were being given, neither before nor after.” In that moment, Moshe was holding on to two *tefachim*, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was holding two *tefachim*, with two *tefachim* remaining in the middle whose direction was unclear. The Gemara says, “The *luchos* were six *tefachim* long and six *tefachim* wide. Moshe was holding two *tefachim*, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was holding two *tefachim*, and there was a space of two *tefachim* in the middle. When Yisrael did that deed, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to refrain from giving them, but Moshe gripped them tightly, as it says, ‘I gripped the two *luchos*’ (*Devarim* 9:17). Moshe’s grip prevailed and he snatched them from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* praised him for this, as it says, ‘and regarding everything [he carried out with] his strong hand’ (*ibid.* 34:12).”

☛ Torah Had Not Yet Been Transferred to Man to Be Implemented

THE MAHARAL ELUCIDATES this esoteric passage in *Tiferes Yisrael* (*ibid.*). He explains that the sin took place at a moment when on one hand, Bnei Yisrael had received the Torah and climbed to spiritual heights, but on the other hand, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was still holding onto the Torah, meaning that it was still abstract and spiritual and had not yet been brought completely into this world and transferred to flesh and blood, enabling them to inculcate it into their day-to-day lives and bring it to full expression.

Chazal mean to tell us, says the Maharal, “that when they made the Golden Calf, receiving the Torah was already underway, but it had not yet been completed. The main part of receiving the Torah had begun to be realized but had not been fully realized. The two

tefachim that were in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Hands were the uppermost two *tefachim* whose transfer would have completed *Matan Torah*, [but] they still remained in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Hand because the giving was not yet complete. Two *tefachim* of the *luchos* were in Moshe's hand — these were the lower part of the *luchos* with which *Matan Torah* had begun, while the two middle *tefachim* were the main part of *Matan Torah*. Their sin took place at the very moment of the giving, for had He not yet given them anything, the Satan would not have started up with them, for the main cause of the [Satan's] provocation was on account of the actual giving. And had the *luchos* already been [fully] in their possession, they would not have sinned, for the *luchos* would have already been theirs, and the Satan wouldn't have had dominion over them. But during the actual giving, which had not yet been completed, the Satan had dominion.”

We shall now explain this in the light of the ideas presented above.

☛ The Sin Took Place upon the Completion of Yisrael's Ascent but before the Torah Had Been Fully Given

HAD BNEI YISRAEL not received the Torah at all, their evil inclination would have merely been simmering on a low flame, as it were.

Had the process of receiving the Torah been completed, Torah's property as the antidote to the evil inclination would have counterbalanced even the hottest flame it could muster.

But the sin of the Golden Calf happened before the process of receiving the Torah was complete. Since the people had risen to a spiritual peak, the temptation to fall was tremendous. On the other hand, at the stage they were at, the process had not yet been completed, so they did not yet have a tangible Torah to cling to in order to power their continued ascent.

Although a person will not ordinarily fall from a spiritual height, Bnei Yisrael at that time had not yet achieved a balance. On one side, they were menaced by huge temptation, while on the other side, they had no Torah yet to protect them.

☛ *Kudsha Berich Hu*, Torah,
and Yisrael Are One and the Same

A PERSON'S INITIAL thought or action indeed indicates where his focus truly lies. But this rule applies only when he is in a balanced state, with Torah on one side and the *yetzer hara* on the other. In this situation, his first choice indicates which way his heart is inclined. This was not the case at the time Yisrael sinned, when there was no balance between Torah and *yetzer hara*. Given their state of imbalance, their downfall did not result from any inherent resistance to the Torah or *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. In fact, the Zohar (Part III, 73, col. 1) states that "*Kudsha Berich Hu*, Torah, and Yisrael are one and the same." The cause of their sin was the spiritual imbalance that made their downfall almost unavoidable. It was a predictable catastrophe, to avoid which they needed abundant Heavenly mercy. Moshe therefore prayed in their defense, "Why, Hashem, should Your anger flare at Your people?" (*Shemos* 31:11).

We have seen that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* creates and maintains an individualized balance between every person's competing urges in order to preserve the integrity of his free will. When this balance is in place, a person will not suddenly veer off track, and his first independent action indicates his inner essence and natural proclivity. The sin of the Golden Calf, however, took place in a situation of imbalance. The giving of the Torah had begun, raising the level of temptation that challenges any spiritual climber, but the process had not yet finished, and Yisrael lacked "the two middle *tefachim*" that would have enabled them to absorb and apply the Torah within the parameters of their physical existence. With the process unfinished, they lacked any means of resisting the burgeoning temptation, and they suffered a swift downfall with sin of the Golden Calf. Our task is to completely avoid any such kind of spiritual imbalance between the *yetzer hara*'s temptations and our own inner spiritual content.

Uyakhel

Yaakov Avinu Was the Mishkan's Central Rod

☛ The Rods of the Mishkan Were Prepared in Advance

THE TORAH TELLS us about the Mishkan's construction from the materials donated by Bnei Yisrael. In the course of this account, we find: "He made rods of acacia wood; five for the boards on one side of the Mishkan, five rods for the boards on the second side of the Mishkan, and five rods for the Mishkan's boards at the rear, on the west side. He made the central rod to run through the boards from one end to the other" (*Shemos* 36:31-3).

The vessels inside the Mishkan were made of gold, silver, and copper. With the spoils that Bnei Yisrael took out of Egypt and that they later gathered from the dead Egyptians at the Red Sea, it is clear where they obtained these materials. But where in the desert were they able to obtain the acacia wood that they needed for these rods and for the central rod in particular? These required extremely long pieces of wood, and trees do not grow to such heights overnight. Where were such pieces of wood available in the desert?

In response to this question, Chazal tell us that the necessary boards had been prepared in advance upon the instructions of Yaakov Avinu, who had seen with prophetic foresight that his descendants would erect a Mishkan in the desert. The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Terumah* 9) tells us, "When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Moshe to make a Mishkan, He said to him, 'Make the boards for the Mishkan

from acacia wood, standing [upright]' (ibid. 26:15). It does not say 'Make boards' but rather, 'Make *the* boards,' referring to those that their ancestor had [already] prepared. 'Standing' means standing ready, [i.e.,] that had been previously prepared."

☛ The Central Rod Was Brought by Yaakov Himself

ALTHOUGH BNEI YISRAEL planted acacia trees in Egypt at Yaakov Avinu's instructions, the Mishkan's central rod was brought from Eretz Yisrael by Yaakov Avinu himself when he moved to Egypt. The Midrash (ibid.) relates: "Where were the boards from? When Yaakov Avinu was going down to Egypt, he told his sons, 'My sons, you are going to be redeemed from here, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is going to tell you to make Him a Mishkan. Plant cedars already so that when He tells you to make Him the Mishkan, you will have cedars ready in hand.' They immediately arose, planted, and obeyed. The central rod that ran through the boards came down with Yaakov Avinu to Egypt."

Why did Yaakov tell his sons to plant cedars in Egypt? Why not just tell them that before leaving Egypt, they should take out wood along with them?

The Midrash also tells us that the Mishkan's central rod was donated by Yaakov Avinu himself hundreds of years before it would be needed. Why did Yaakov bring the central rod himself rather than rely on the acacia trees that his sons would plant to provide the wood for the central rod as well, like he did with the other boards and rods?

The Midrash implies that this central feature of the Mishkan had to have been supplied directly by Yaakov Avinu. What was Yaakov's connection to the Mishkan altogether?

☛ Yaakov Constitutes the Central Rod in the Jewish Nation's Unity

IN *GUR ARYEH* (*Shemos* 25:5), the Maharal explains: "This is something very wonderful, namely, that it was appropriate that their

ancestor Yaakov in particular have a share in the boards, for Yaakov was the central rod, supporting everything and unifying all of Yisrael.”

Yaakov’s overarching characteristic was unity — “The tribes of Yisrael are together” (see *Devarim* 34:5, where Yeshurun, one of the names of Yaakov Avinu, is mentioned in connection with the nation’s unity). He was the father who united within the people all the diverse elements resulting from being composed of the various tribes of Yisrael. Yaakov himself therefore contributed the central rod that united the entire structure of the Mishkan that belonged to the entire nation of Yisrael. The central rod that held together all the boards had to come from Yaakov, who encompassed all the tribes, being the root from which they all issued.

While Yaakov thus brought the central rod, we need to better understand the connection between the tribes’ unity that he brought about and the central rod that held all the boards together.

☛ The Boards of the Mishkan Represented the Tribes of Yisrael

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the boards of which the Mishkan’s walls were composed symbolize the sons of Yaakov Avinu, representing each and every tribe, with the number of boards in the Mishkan corresponding to the number of the tribes. This is why the trees that provided the wood for the boards had to be planted by the tribes themselves.

There seems to be a problem with the numbers though, for not twelve, but no fewer than forty-eight boards made up the walls of the Mishkan. The Maharal resolves this difficulty by explaining that four boards corresponded to each tribe, for any spiritual entity that assumes physicality — moving from the spiritual realm of potential to that of material realization — splits into four, because every physical object has four sides. In *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 60), the Maharal writes, “Everything that comes from the upper, spiritual

world [down] into this world is characterized [here] by multiplicity and is divided into four, which is the multiple corresponding to the four sides of any physical entity, as we find, ‘And a river flowed out of Eden...and from there it split into four paths’ (*Bereishis* 2:10). For everything that comes from the abstract world, like the river that came out of Eden to irrigate the garden, was [originally] a single entity [while it was] above, but when it entered the natural world, which is the world of multiplicity (i.e., every physical entity is composed of its own distinct substance), it divides into four paths.”

☛ Yaakov Symbolizes Holiness and Abstraction and Thus Unity

IN *GUR ARYEH* (on *Bereishis* 28:11), the Maharal discusses at length Yaakov Avinu’s characteristic of unifying disparate and even opposing forces. He elucidates the Gemara’s comments (*Chullin* 91b) concerning the Torah’s account of Yaakov’s overnight sojourn on Har Hamoriyah, when he gathered stones to place around his head.

The Gemara points out that one *pasuk* says, “He took from the place’s stones” (the plural implies that there were several stones), whereas another *pasuk* says, “He took *the* stone” (implying that there was only one stone):

“Rabbi Yitzchak said, ‘This teaches us that all those stones gathered in one spot, and each of them said, “That tzaddik shall rest his head upon me,” and they all became subsumed into a single stone.”

“What quarrel could stones, which lack intellect, have had?” asks the Maharal.

The Maharal answers: “Yaakov’s level was distinct and highly exceptional, for he was holy and separate from all worldly pursuits. Hashem therefore is referred to by the epithet ‘The holy One of Yaakov’ (*Yeshayah* 29:23), because Yaakov was holy and separate. Something that is holy and separate (i.e., that lacks connection to physicality) remains undivided and is one.

“This is what led to the stones’ quarrel; for something that is

separate is one from all angles; there is no multiplicity or division about it whatsoever, just unity.”

In other words, Yaakov embodied holiness. The nature of something holy is to be wholly abstract, divested of any trace of physicality. It thus represents unity, because division into separate entities is solely a feature of physical bodies. As mentioned, every physical entity has four aspects, whereas a spiritual entity has but a single core. The stones that Yaakov placed around his head were physical entities, which by definition are subject to division — not divisiveness in the sense of quarreling, but division into separate entities reflecting different aspects of material existence. A tzaddik’s head, by contrast, is wholly intellect; it is all unity, without multiplicity. When the stones came into contact with Yaakov, they all became subsumed into a single stone, as Yaakov’s holiness sublimated and unified them, removing the divisiveness that had reigned among them.

☛ Yaakov’s Presence Engenders Unity

YAAKOV AVINU WAS holy, and his holiness exerted an influence upon his surroundings. When his name became associated with them, even separate physical entities became sublimated and merged into a unified whole. The Maharal applies this very idea to the Mishkan’s central rod, using it to explain why the rod needed to be contributed by Yaakov himself. As mentioned, Yaakov represented abstract holiness and thus unity. Division and separation are features of physical existence, whereas in the pristine spiritual realm, which is untainted by any trace of physicality, utter unity reigns supreme. Just as Yaakov brought about the stones’ unification, his presence among his sons has a similar effect. “When they connect to Yaakov,” writes the Maharal, “and Yaakov’s name is associated with them, they also become one, without any division between them. The principle is that whatever Yaakov’s name is attached to becomes one.”

Recognizing as they did that Yaakov is the root of connection and unity, Chazal thus explain that while the tribes themselves

planted the trees that would provide wood for the Mishkan's boards, which corresponded to each individual tribe, the central rod representing the connection between them all could not be yielded by their handiwork, for they were separate from one another, representing physical existence with its four sides or aspects. Yaakov had to bring the central rod with him because it represented the connection between all the different boards and their unification into a single entity. This unity is ordinarily not a feature of physical existence and was possible only with the inclusion of Yaakov, who was essentially spiritual and thus a unifying force.

Every physical entity possesses its own singularity, itself yielding four different sides or aspects that can be viewed from different angles. Each tribe thus had its own unique character, and the Mishkan that represented all the tribes had to reflect each and every tribe's uniqueness. But the Jewish nation has a holy, spiritual patriarch. A spiritual entity lacks differing aspects; it reflects unity and uniformity. Despite the diversity arising from the tribes' multiplicity, the nation unites around its spiritual core and essence, which is represented by the central rod, which consolidates all the different tribes, demonstrating that "The tribes of Yisrael are together."

Pekudei

The Foundation Precedes the Building

☛ Betzalel Divined Directly What *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Had Commanded Moshe

UPON THE COMPLETION of the Mishkan's construction, the Torah tells us, "Betzalel, son of Uri...had done all that Hashem commanded Moshe" (*Shemos* 38:22).

Betzalel had not received his instructions directly from Hashem but from Moshe, who conveyed to him Hashem's words. This *pasuk*, however, doesn't say that Betzalel had done all that Moshe commanded him on Hashem's behalf — it says he did "all that Hashem commanded Moshe." By juxtaposing Betzalel's actions with Hashem's command, the *pasuk* indicates that Betzalel had somehow circumvented Moshe and directly followed Hashem's command to Moshe rather than what Moshe had told him.

Rashi elucidates this more fully, explaining that "Even regarding those things that his teacher [Moshe] did not tell him, his mind accorded with that which had been said to Moshe at Sinai. Moshe instructed Betzalel to first make the vessels and only then the Mishkan. Betzalel told him, 'It is the way of the world to first make a house and only then to place vessels inside.' Moshe said to Betzalel, 'That is actually what I heard from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.' Moshe [then] said to him, 'Were you *b'tzel Keil* (in G-d's shade, i.e., sheltering in G-d's proximity — a play on his name "Betzalel")? For

that is certainly what *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commanded me.’ And thus, he first made the Mishkan and then the vessels.”

Betzalel seems to have corrected Moshe, realizing by himself the correct sequence of the work that Hashem had told Moshe.

☛ Betzalel Argues with Moshe

RASHI'S SOURCE IS the Gemara in *Berachos* (55a) that says:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in Rabbi Yonasan's name: Betzalel was [so] named on account of his wisdom. When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him (i.e., Moshe), “Go and tell Betzalel, ‘Make Me a Mishkan, an *aron*, and vessels,’” Moshe went and reversed [the order]. He (Moshe) told him (Betzalel), “Make an *aron*, vessels, and a Mishkan.”

Betzalel said to him, “Moshe Rabbeinu, the way of the world is that a person builds a house and then brings vessels inside, yet you are telling me, ‘Make Me an *aron*, vessels, and [only then] a Mishkan?’ The vessels I make [first] — where shall I put them? Perhaps *this* is what *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told you: “Make a Mishkan, an *aron*, and vessels?’”

Moshe told him, “Perhaps you were *b'tzel Keil* and you knew?!”

☛ Why “In G-d's Shade” Rather than “In G-d's Illumination?”

CHAZAL'S RECORD OF this exchange gives rise to several questions that demonstrate the need for further explanation:

1. If Hashem's instruction was indeed to build the Mishkan first, how could Moshe reverse the order when speaking to Betzalel?

While Chazal cite several occasions when Moshe erred, this is not mentioned as one of them, implying that what Moshe told Betzalel was intentional. How could he have altered Hashem's explicit command?

2. Moshe conveyed the Torah that he heard from Hashem. How is it even possible that Betzalel could have understood something that Moshe did not understand?
3. If Betzalel successfully understood Hashem's instruction, why was his name Betzal-el, alluding to him being in G-d's shade, rather than, Uri-el, which would denote *obr* (light)? Surely, light is more suggestive of an extra measure of comprehension than shade?
4. The Gemara states, "Betzalel was [so] named on account of his wisdom." How is this apparently localized episode concerning the order in which the Mishkan was to be constructed sufficiently revealing of Betzalel's essence to justify his name?
5. It is clear from the Gemara that Hashem instructed that the Mishkan be built first, followed by the vessels. In *parshas Terumah* however — where the command for Bnei Yisrael to donate materials for the Mishkan is followed by the details of what was to be made from them — the Torah first specifies the vessels, such as the *shulchan* and the *menorah*, and only then the components of the Mishkan itself, e.g., the boards that made up the walls, the hangings that served as the roof, etc.
6. What was Moshe's rationale for putting the vessels before the Mishkan? Could the vessels indeed have been made before there was a Mishkan in which to place them?

☛ The Finishing Touch Realizes the Original Plan

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that when there are plans for building a dwelling, only after the house and its contents are complete does the inhabitant arrive. This is not because he is at the bottom of the list, the least important detail of the plan. On the contrary, it is because he is the most important part of the operation, the one for whose sake everything else is being done, that he arrives last,

at the end of the day, when all the preparations have been completed. Only upon completion of the work does the original idea, the goal of all the activity along the way, crystallize. As the Maharal puts it (*Gur Aryeh, Bereishis 37:3*), “The final outcome is [what was] in mind at the beginning, because the final outcome is [the realization of] the initial concept.”

☛ The Mishkan Was the Outer Casing for the Service That Took Place Within

IN ORDER TO allow His *Shechinah* to dwell among Bnei Yisrael, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* requested that a Mishkan be built wherein they would serve Him through the various vessels: the *shulchan*, the *menorah*, the *aron*, and the *mizbe'ach*. Since this service was the purpose of the Mishkan's construction, in the planning stage, when the contributions were being gathered, the vessels were mentioned first. The vessels were more important than the actual Mishkan. As the Maharal points out, “The vessels were the burden of the Bnei Kehas (*Bamidbar 4:15*), whereas the Mishkan was carried by the Bnei Merari (*ibid. pesukim 31–2*), and the Bnei Kehas were more distinguished than the Bnei Merari.”

☛ Planning Starts with the Main Goal, Whereas Execution Starts from the Periphery

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS further that, “When [in the] thinking [stage], one should begin with the principal (i.e., the vessels).” Thus, when gathering the contributions, they started with those that were needed for the vessels.

“In practice, however, the Mishkan should be put first, because the Mishkan is the protection of the vessels.” When implementing the plan, the less central Mishkan was to be built first for the very reason that it served as the receptacle for the content. This was not just a practical imperative. It was a matter of dealing first with what

was of secondary importance before that which was of primary importance, of passing through the corridor before entering the parlor, in the same way that one encounters the peel before reaching the fruit that it contains.

☛ Man of Concept and Man of Execution

HEREIN LIES THE difference between Moshe and Betzalel.

Moshe presided over the abstract world of Torah study, whereas Betzalel was in charge of its practical implementation.

The conceptual scheme focuses first on the principal element, the purpose that is first in mind and for whose sake everything else is undertaken. Moshe, who was a person of concept, saw with an intellectual perspective and therefore started with the vessels.

In practice, though, the program begins with the periphery. The foundation must be laid before construction of the actual edifice can take place. Betzalel, who presided over the project's execution, began with the Mishkan, putting its construction before that of the vessels.

“Moshe therefore said to Betzalel, ‘Perhaps you were *b'tzel Keil*’” says the Maharal, “because Moshe was devoted to study, not practical execution, and Betzalel [was devoted] to execution. The knowledge [of the Mishkan and its vessels] came to Moshe according to the order of study, because he presided over study, and when studying, the main concepts should be dealt with first. And to Betzalel, who presided over the execution, this [knowledge] came in practical form, and Betzalel therefore knew how they were to be made.”

☛ Shade as an Object's Mirror Image

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Berachos* 55a), the Vilna Gaon explains that shade, like a seal, creates a mirror image of reality such that right appears on the left and left appears on the right. Moshe saw Hashem's instruction as it was, with its goal and purpose stated at the outset. Betzalel, however, saw a mirror image, a shadow, because

from the perspective of practice, the peripheral elements must be attended to first, gradually working from there inwards to the main element.

☛ In G-d's Shadow, Rather than His Illumination

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that Betzalel took no issue with Moshe in regard to what was primary and what was secondary.

On his sublime level of prophecy, Moshe perceived the Divine blueprint in which the principal element of the Mishkan is the service using the vessels. The Mishkan's hangings, boards, and surrounding enclosure were peripheral to this content, providing the backdrop against which the service was conducted.

Betzalel, though, was *b'tzeil-Keil*, in Hashem's shadow, rather than in His illumination. He sought the practical angle, and there, the ancillary elements claimed attention before the principal ones.

☛ From Differing Viewpoints

MOSHE AND BETZALEL were in agreement. A person coming from above and descending to the level of the people puts the upper level before the lower one, whereas a person who is starting at the bottom and working his way up puts the lower level first. They both agreed, though, about which level is in fact lower and which is higher. Interestingly, this was actually Moshe's perspective when he made his third ascent to Har Sinai to receive the second *luchos*. Moshe was speaking to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who on that occasion was descending from above, and Moshe adopted Betzalel's perspective. The Torah records Moshe telling Bnei Yisrael, "At that time Hashem said to me, 'Carve for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones and come up to Me to the mountain, and you shall make for yourself a wooden *aron*'" (*Devarim* 10:1). Hashem instructed Moshe first about the *luchos* then about the *aron*, which is the order when coming down from Above — the main item (the *luchos*) comes before

the secondary one (the *aron* that would hold them). Rashi (ibid.) tells us, however, that Moshe made the *aron* first, saying, “When I come with the *luchos* in my hand, where shall I put them?” This is the perspective of the person coming from below and ascending. In *Gur Aryeh* (*Devarim* ibid.), the Maharal explains, “For what is first in mind is the ultimate purpose of the practice, and the *luchos* were the ultimate purpose of building the *aron*. The Torah therefore mentions the *luchos* and then the *aron*, but Moshe, who was executing [this command] in practice, did the opposite, making the *aron* first.”

☞ The *Aron* Derived Its Holiness from the *Luchos*

WHEN COMMANDING HIS people to build the Mishkan, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told them to make the Mishkan first. When speaking to people, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* expresses Himself in their human, practical terms. When commanding Moshe about the *luchos*, though, He spoke from the abstract perspective and instructed him about the *luchos* before the *aron*, for without the principal, that which serves it lacks significance.

Without the service taking place within, the Mishkan itself would be devoid of holiness, and its surrounding structures would be insignificant. If a person made a bag to hold *tefillin* before the Torah was given, it would not have any holiness. Only once the mitzvah of *tefillin* was given could the bag that holds them attain holiness by serving a holy item. First must come the content and only afterwards the surrounding structures. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s first command was therefore about the *luchos* even though in practice the *aron* had to come first.

We have seen that on the theoretical plane, priority must be accorded to the principal goal, whereas on the practical level, the ancillary elements must be attended to first. Herein lies the difference between the perspectives of a visionary and an executor. In his notes on *parshas Chukas*, the Shelah clarifies further that Moshe was a holy man of G-d with a spiritual perspective. For his part, the *aron* was

wholly miraculous; it “carried its carriers” and “took up no space.” Its contents needed no protection or fences. From such a perspective, the *aron* and other vessels could indeed have been made first. Betzalel, however, understood that in practical life, some protective fence is needed to enclose and contain Hashem’s service. Betzalel was thus indeed in G-d’s shadow, rather than in His illumination, for in his position on the practical plane, the Mishkan had to come before the vessels, for an outer casing was indeed necessary to guard the inner content.

Vayikra

Aspiring Is Greater than Achieving

☛ The Covenant That Assured the Lower Waters That They Would Ascend

THE TORAH COMMANDS us to salt every sacrifice that goes onto the altar. The salt used for this purpose is referred to as *melach bris*, salt of [the] covenant. As the Torah writes, “You shall salt every one of your meal offerings with salt, and you must not withhold the salt of your G-d’s covenant from upon your meal offering. Upon every offering of yours (i.e., even animal sacrifices) you shall bring salt” (*Vayikra* 1:13).

Rashi (ibid.) explains which covenant this was and the salt’s relevance to it: “A covenant was established with salt from the Six Days of Creation, in which the lower waters were promised that they would be offered on the altar as salt and as the water libation on Sukkos.”

This is explained at greater length in *Tikkunei Zohar* (19b). The Torah tells us that on the second day of Creation, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* divided the upper waters from the lower waters: “G-d said, ‘The firmament shall form between the waters, and it shall separate between the [lower] waters and the [upper] waters.’ G-d positioned the firmament and separated between the waters below the firmament and the waters above the firmament, and so it remained” (*Bereishis* 1:6–7). The Zohar comments that this division elicited weeping from the lower waters, who said, “We want to be present

before the King who is the Cause of all causes that sustain the world, and we want to ascend upwards.” Because of the waters’ weeping, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* promised them two opportunities for elevation by being brought upon the altar.

One opportunity was the daily water libation that was offered during the festival of Sukkos. Whereas throughout the year wine accompanied the sacrifices that were offered, on Sukkos, there was an additional libation of water — drawn from the Shiloach spring — which was also poured onto the altar.

The waters’ second opportunity for elevation was in the form of the salt that accompanied every sacrifice. Salt is derived from water; if salt is melted, it yields the water that the salt had absorbed. This offering of salt, which the Torah terms “salt of the covenant,” elevates its water component, restoring it to Hashem’s presence above.

☛ Why the Weeping?

THE ZOHAR’S COMMENTS elicit two basic questions:

Firstly, what made the lower waters cry? All of creation is divided between two tiers: an upper tier (consisting of the heavens and all their contents) and a lower one (the world and all it contains). Why did the lower waters cry more than any other component of Creation’s lower tier, such as man and other creatures? Why didn’t Adam Harishon cry over being assigned to the lower tier?

Secondly, how did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s response comfort the lower waters? While some indeed ascend through the altar, the body of the lower waters remains in its place, no nearer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than it was previously.

☛ Every Creation Ascends, Whereas the Waters Descended

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal writes, “This Midrash contains a sublime idea, for everything is constantly ascendant, and [this is clear

from the principle] ‘We ascend in holiness and do not descend’ (*Berachos* 28a), and the lower waters were divided from the upper ones and became low, which is the opposite of the order of Creation and existence, wherein everything always ascends.”

The waters originally belonged to the upper world, the heavens, where they were always in close proximity to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, for as the Torah tells us, at the beginning of Creation, “G-d’s Spirit was hovering over the surface of the water” (*Bereishis* *ibid.* *pasuk* 2). *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* then took part of the water and brought it down to the lower world. This ran counter to the prevalent trend throughout creation, whereby things move incrementally upward, not downward. The lower waters therefore wept, complaining that they were being treated worse than other creations.

This idea contains profound depth, as we shall explain.

☞ Water and Torah Are both Subject to an Unnatural Downward Pull

THE GEMARA (*TAANIS* 7A) tells us, “Torah teachings are compared to water, as it says, ‘Ho, all who are thirsty, go to the water’ (*Yeshayah* 55:1). This teaches us that just as water leaves a high place and flows to a low place, Torah teachings, too, only endure in a person whose mind is lowly.”

We need to understand why water is singled out here when every physical object falls from a higher level to a lower one under the influence of gravity. How does water differ from all other physical matter?

The answer is that water’s nature differs from the nature of all other matter.

Regarding all other physical matter, the conceptual basis of the power of gravity is the tendency of every object to return to its origin and the root from whence it issued. Since all physical matter originated in the earth, it aspires to return to its origin and find a fitting resting place somewhere down at its source. A physical object can certainly be

lifted up, but this is an unnatural state of affairs, and as soon as it can, the object will drop downward to its natural resting place.

Water undergoes an opposite process. Its source is above, where it belongs together with the heavenly, upper waters. Water is the only substance in creation whose real place is above, in the heavens. When the waters left their original place in the form of a thick, heavy cloud, they were propelled downward against their inherent nature. This is why the lower waters cried. In this respect, water resembles Torah, which is a sublime entity that belongs up above. Despite Torah's exalted nature, however, it has descended to this world, where it seeks the company of the humble-minded.

☞ The Highest Level Is Attained by Aspiring to Ascend

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS Hashem's promise to the waters and His covenant with them: "He promised them that they would be brought upon the altar so that they would attain elevation." In other words, the level of the lower waters is more exalted than that of the upper waters, because the lower waters have acquired their elevation by having been distanced from Hashem and then aspiring to ascend and get closer to Him. The level of an individual who was originally low and has elevated himself is greater than that of the individual who was originally assigned a high position, "For things that are pushed downward seek to rise higher," says the Maharal. "This is the lesson to which Chazal allude in several places: '...to teach you that whoever makes himself lowly, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* exalts him.' Therefore, all who are currently beneath great lowliness shall obtain a sublime level. Therefore, because the waters were divided and were assigned to be down below, they were promised that they would ascend upon the altar." In other words, the waters' forced distance from their natural habitat created a powerful yearning in them for ascent. This yearning is the most sublime of all levels, for the individual who aspires to ascent is actually higher than he who has already ascended.

☛ The Virtue of a Constantly Aspiring Individual

THE LOWER WATERS attained their exalted level through their constant aspiration to ascend to Hashem — which is a function of the distance separating them from Him — which is uninterrupted, determined, and boundless.

The Zohar (Vol. I, 69b) comments on the *pasuk*, “You rule over the sea’s swell, in its waves’ rise You praise them” (*Tehillim* 89:10): “It is praiseworthy on their part, for they rise to see Hashem with longing. From here [we learn] that whoever yearns to perceive and to attain knowledge of Hashem, even though he is unable to do so, is praiseworthy, and all praise him.”

In other words, the power that propels the waves is their constant, unrelenting attempts to try and ascend toward Hashem. Time and again, the waves rise up and ultimately fail in their efforts, yet they never despair of continuing to try, for they are imbued with fierce yearning that brings them to a more sublime level than that of the upper waters.

☛ Aspiring Is Greater than Achieving

THE GEMARA IN *maseches Sotah* (22a) says that there is a virtue in attending a *beis haknesses* that is farther from one’s home rather than one that is nearer because of the *sechar pesios*, the reward for the extra steps that must be taken to get there. At first glance, this is puzzling — if there is no need for a person to walk any further because he has a *beis haknesses* close to home, what does he gain by going to needless bother? Why should reward be given for something that apparently lacks rhyme or reason? Will he receive extra reward for filling his pockets with stones that make walking harder?

In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha’avodah*, Chap. 5), the Maharal explains that a person making his way to a *beis haknesses* is aspiring to the closeness to Hashem that he will attain once he gets there. He adds that “It is known that a person who aspires in his heart to attain

a goal is attached to it more strongly than the person who has already physically reached it.”

The walking itself then is a mitzvah, not on account of the exertion involved but because of its essential nature as an expression of aspiring for closeness to G-d.

In *Derech Chaim* (*Avos* 4:18), the Maharal explains the Gemara (*Shabbos* 118b) that says, “Rabbi Yosi said, ‘May my lot be among those who die on their way to fulfill a mitzvah.’” The Maharal asks, “Why did he say, ‘Those who die on their way to fulfill a mitzvah’ rather than ‘Those who are doing a mitzvah?’” His answer is that the aspiration is greater than the actual attainment.

The Maharal explains the Gemara’s statement (*Kiddushin* 39b) that “Emissaries on their way to fulfill a mitzvah will not come to any harm” in a similar manner. In *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Kiddushin* *ibid.*) he points out that the Gemara speaks about “mitzvah emissaries” rather than those who are engaged in actually fulfilling a mitzvah because, “When a person is going to do a mitzvah, he is wholly connected and attached to Hashem, for whoever is moving towards something is completely connected and joined to it.”

The underlying logic of this phenomenon is that whereas the heart’s yearning and aspiration is wholly spiritual — and is therefore infinite — the realization of an aspiration creates a new physical reality, which by its nature is bounded and limited by constraints of time and reality.

☛ The Waters’ Division Parallels Human Free Will

IN *PACHAD YITZCHAK* (Rosh Hashanah, Essay 13), Rav Hutner explains that man’s ability to choose between good and evil is a consequence of having been created with a component from the upper world (his soul) and one from the lower world (his body), which are engaged in constant struggle. Man thus resembles the waters, which were divided into upper and lower bodies. This can explain the lower waters’ tears, for Chazal say of man (*Erwin* 13b) that “It would have

been preferable for man not to have been created than to have been created,” for man is endowed with free will, which carries with it the risk of error.

In fact, it is certain that man will err, for it is written, “For there is no righteous man on earth who does [only] good and does not sin” (*Koheles* 7:20). The waters’ tears are thus understandable, for it was decreed that they will be distant from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, entrenched in the physical world of urges and sin.

Although human free will makes erring inevitable, it also represents the Divine image he bears and his potential for overcoming the pull of his material component and elevating himself above all else.

Similarly, the lower waters were comforted by the promise that they would be offered on the altar. Precisely on account of their distance from the upper world they are invested with the holiness of ascension upon the altar and with the superiority of the distant over the close, by virtue of their yearning to overcome and swallow up the distance separating them from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

☞ The Lower Waters Purify Man

THE ZOHAR (VOL. II, 198b) tells us that on each of the Six Days of Creation, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* stipulated with that day’s creation that it would defy its own nature in order to allow the performance of a miracle at some time in the future. For example, when He created the sun, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* stipulated with it that it would cease moving and stay still in the sky when Yehoshua would pray, “Sun in Givon, be still!” (*Yehoshua* 10:12). Similarly, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* stipulated with the sea that it would split when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt and needed to pass across it on dry land. It is further evident that on the second day of Creation, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the firmament that divides the upper and lower waters, He stipulated with the waters that they would separate Yisrael from impurity through their immersion in the waters of the *mikveh*, which purify a person from his impurity.

Now, in regard to all the other creations, this stipulation clearly took the form of a predetermined limitation of their function that would enable the performance of a miracle when needed. What limitation of the waters' function underlies Yisrael's ability to attain purity by immersing in them? What supernatural miracle does this purification represent? In what way, when a person immerses in them, do the waters defy the properties with which they were endowed upon their creation?

The explanation has to be that the lower waters embody that part of the water that is distant from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, rendering it counterintuitive that by completely immersing himself within them, a person should attain purity, thereby becoming close to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This supernatural phenomenon runs counter to the regular natural order, wherein a spiritual entity engenders purity, and a physical entity engenders impurity. However, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* stipulated in advance with the lower waters that despite their division from the upper waters, the two would not be completely severed. Although they were banished to the lower world, the lower waters would not become entirely subsumed into the physical realm, but rather would retain some affinity for the upper world, thus constantly aspiring to ascend heavenward. This yearning raises them to a sublime spiritual level. A person who is impure and distanced from G-d can thus derive a sublime level of holiness and purity from the lower waters by immersing himself in their aspiration for purity, holiness, and elevation.

It is thus obvious that man is supposed to derive instruction and an aura of purity from contemplating the inner power that drives the waves' unrelenting attempts to ascend heavenward towards Hashem. A sinner attains purity when he acknowledges that while he is indeed rooted in physicality, he must emulate the waves that repeatedly leap skyward, never despairing of continuing to try even though his efforts may fail. This aspiration brings the lower waters to a higher level than that of the upper waters, for aspiring for elevation is more important than attaining it. The test of man's mettle, too, is not what he succeeds in achieving, but in the level to which he constantly aspires.

Tzav

A Simple Garment for a Humble Person

☛ Moshe Filled the Role of *Kohen*, Though without the Priestly Vestments

IT WAS MOSHE RABBEINU who inducted the altar with its very first offerings during the seven days of *Milu'im* (inauguration). The Torah tells us, “He slaughtered [the sacrifice]; Moshe took the blood and placed it on the corners of the altar, all around, with his finger and [thereby] cleansed the altar; the [remaining] blood he poured onto the altar’s foundation; he [thereby] sanctified it to atone upon it [henceforth]” (*Vayikra* 8:15). Moshe thus performed acts of service that can ordinarily only be performed by a *kohen* during the Mishkan’s seven inaugural days.

A *kohen* may only serve wearing the priestly vestments. The Gemara (*Zevachim* 17b) derives this from the *pasuk*, “The priesthood shall be an everlasting law for them” (*Shemos* 29:9) as follows: “When their vestments are upon them, their priesthood is upon them; when their vestments are not upon them, their priesthood is not upon them (i.e., any service they perform in that state is invalid, as though it had been performed by a non-*kohen*).”

Accordingly, we would expect Moshe to have worn priestly vestments while serving during the seven days of *Milu'im*. But this is not the case. Rashi (*Shemos* *ibid.* *pasuk* 28) writes, “Moshe served throughout the seven days of *Milu'im* wearing a white robe.” Rashi’s

source is the Gemara in *Ta'anis* (11b) that says, “In what was Moshe garbed when serving throughout the seven days of *Milu'im*? In a white robe. Rav Kahana learned: ‘In a white robe that lacked a seam.’” Rashi (*Ta'anis* *ibid.*) explains, “The entire robe was knit from a single thread, unlike our garments, whose sleeves are attached to the garment with stitches.”

Why didn't Moshe wear priestly vestments, and what is the significance of the white robe that he wore? Why did his robe lack any seams?

The Maharal discovers profound depth in the answers to these questions, thus revealing much to us about Moshe's uniqueness.

☛ White, Which Is Not a Color, Symbolizes Simplicity

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that “White symbolizes simplicity, for all other hues are colors, except for white, which is not a color; therefore, it symbolizes simplicity.” The Maharal distinguishes between something which is composite, being composed of multiple components and something plain, which is uniform. White is considered a substrate or background rather than a color, whereas color results from a blend of several elements.

☛ Simplicity Reflects Either a Lack of Uniqueness or Sublime Abstraction

SIMPLICITY CAN BE the consequence of a lack of any outstanding feature, reflecting the lowest common denominator among a group. However, it can equally result from the uniqueness of a highly lucid, abstract, and spiritual object. An idea or insight that is the fruit of true genius is usually utterly simple and lucid. Whereas physical matter is a complex blend of basic elements, a spiritual entity is simple and uniform. Thus, at the most sublime levels of abstraction, simplicity reigns.

☛ White Clothing Can Reflect Either Lack of Uniqueness or a Very Sublime Level

ON ONE HAND, a *kohen bedyot* (an ordinary *kohen*) wore white clothing because this is the lowest common denominator uniting all the regular *kohanim*. On the other hand, the *Kohen Gadol* wore white garments on Yom Kippur for his entry into the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, the holiest, innermost chamber of the Beis Hamikdash.

As the Maharal explains: “There is a difference between the *kohen bedyot*’s white garments and the white garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur. Whereas the white worn by the *kohen bedyot* represents his commonality with his fellow *kohanim*, the *Kohen Gadol*’s white garb was for his special use, and no *kohen bedyot* was allowed to wear it (as we find in *Yoma* 60a), and even the *Kohen Gadol* was forbidden to wear the same white garments [on Yom Kippur of] another year.” This indicates that the *Kohen Gadol*’s white garments were a function of his uniqueness and his singular role in a particular place and time.

The *Kohen Gadol*’s white garments symbolized his uniqueness. Their whiteness reflected the sublime spiritual heights attained by the holiest individual (the *Kohen Gadol*) at the holiest time (Yom Kippur) in the holiest spot (the *Kodesh Hakodashim*).

☛ Moshe Embodied Humility, Spirituality and Simplicity

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Ha’anavah*, Chap. 8), the Maharal explains further that “Within humility lies simplicity; it is therefore appropriate that this trait is associated with Torah, which represents simple intellect, whereas pride, which is a trait arising from physicality, is its diametric opposite.” By way of elucidation, the Maharal notes that “Whatever is simple is neither bound nor limited,” meaning that lucidity and spirituality are incompatible with the expanse and complexity that typify the arrogant, prideful individual.

“The person whose mind and whose thoughts are proud is separate from other people and is far removed from simplicity,” notes the Maharal. By contrast, the Maharal says (*Tiferes Yisrael*, Chap. 23) that a humble individual doesn’t regard himself as being at all special, doesn’t consider himself “a somebody,” and conducts himself with utter simplicity, for he is not outstanding in any respect and is not complex.

As a “man of G-d” (*Devarim* 33:1), Moshe Rabbeinu was utterly divorced from physicality, and the Torah thus attests that “The [great] man, Moshe, was extremely humble, more so than all the people on the face of the earth” (*Bamidbar* 12:3).

☛ Moshe’s Simple White Clothing Was a Sign of His Sublime Level

THIS EXPLAINS WHY Moshe wore white clothing. People of physicality and complexity require the splendor of color in order to be accorded the honor they need. The respect accorded a sublime figure like Moshe Rabbeinu is on account of his spiritual personality — honor and complexity are foreign to him. On Moshe, complex, colored clothing would be a distraction. He needed to wear a simple, white garment.

Moshe dressed in white rather than in the priestly vestments because his level was more sublime even than that of the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur upon entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, “because,” says the Maharal, “he possessed the virtue of being akin to a supremely simple intellect.”

☛ Seamless Clothing Also Indicates Virtue

IN KEEPING WITH this approach, the Maharal explains the significance of the absence of any hem (formed by doubling over the material at its edge, or seam, where two pieces of material are sewn together) on Moshe’s clothing, which was a simple, smooth tunic: “That which lacks a seam indicates simplicity, and according to his

stature, this befitted Moshe Rabbeinu, for he was akin to a straight intellect, for this was Moshe's virtue."

☛ Moshe Suffered from a Speech Impediment, for While Speech Is Physical, He Was Spiritual

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 28), the Maharal expresses his difficulty in understanding Moshe's statement to Hashem, "I am not a man of words" (*Shemos* 4:10): "Moshe, who embodied every virtue and was physically perfect too — as Chazal note about his stature — how is it possible that he had difficulty speaking?" The ability to express oneself is a very important human faculty. How can it be that the greatest Jewish leader of all time experienced difficulty in speaking?

By way of response, the Maharal explains that whereas Moshe was spiritual and far distanced from physicality, the faculty of speech is one of man's physical faculties. The mouth is the point of contact between man's spiritual and physical realms; it is where spirituality is transformed into something physical. Whereas sight and hearing occur passively, requiring no input on the part of the owner of a pair of eyes or ears, speech requires that the speaker actively move his organs of speech. Though man certainly needs to activate his intellect in order to ensure that what he says makes sense, he is unable to form intelligible words unless he physically moves his lips and tongue. Even babies and animals can produce expressive sounds, though they lack the ability to express abstract thought, for all that is required for the most basic speech are the necessary physical organs. Chazal actually considered speaking a physical activity, as they note (*Pesachim* 99a), "Much talking yields much nonsense." As the Maharal explains, "For speech is a physical activity, for with much talking, a person distances himself from his intellect." Chazal in fact point out that "Silence protects wisdom" (*Avos* 3:13). A spiritual individual such as Moshe, who is rooted in the abstract rather than the physical realm, is thus not a man of many words. The more intense a person's spiritual side, the more tenuous is his bond to physicality. Speech was thus difficult for Moshe Rabbeinu.

☛ The Consequence of the *Malach's* Slap upon a Newborn's Mouth

CHAZAL (*NIDDAH* 30B) TELL us that “As a newborn emerges into the world, a *malach* comes and slaps him on his mouth and makes him forget the entire Torah [that he had learned *in utero*].” What is the significance of this slap in banishing all of the infant's knowledge? The Maharal explains: “So long as the fetus has not emerged into the world, his soul is separate from the physical world and is wholly rational. The fetus is therefore able to learn the entire Torah. However, as he emerges into the world, he becomes fully functional; his soul bonds with his matter (i.e., body), and the person becomes physical. He thus forgets the entire Torah, which is spiritual and abstract.”

In other words, the *malach's* slap upon the fetus's mouth represents implanting the faculty of speech into the newborn, which results from the rational soul's fusion with the body. This causes him to forget all the Torah that he learned prior to the rational soul's bonding with the physical body. Since Moshe remained abstract and spiritual even after his birth, he was able to receive the Torah.

☛ The Double Meaning of the Word *Imra* (Seam)

THE HEBREW WORD for seam, *imra*, has a double meaning: it can refer to the seam of a garment, and it can also mean speech. This is apparent from Chazal's interpretation of the *pasuk*, “*Bitza emraso*, He has carried out His *imra*” (*Eichah* 2:17). The Midrash Lekach Tov explains that this means that Hashem fulfilled his earlier utterances (*imra* being related to *amirah*, speech) to visit destruction upon Yerushalayim. By contrast, in *Eichah Rabbah* (Sect. 2), Chazal explain the *pasuk* as meaning, “He has torn (*bitza* can also mean to break) His clothing,” as it were (i.e., in mourning over the Destruction). Chazal thus interpret *imra* as denoting both a garment and speech.

Accordingly, it appears that here too, when Chazal tell us that Moshe served during the seven days of *Milu'im* wearing a white robe

that lacked an *imra*, the word can be understood in both ways. Not only did Moshe's clothing lack any seam, but Moshe himself was without words. Moshe's simplicity and uniformity as a spiritual figure found expression both in his physical speech impediment — he lacked *amirah*, speech — and in his white, seamless, hemless garment that lacked any *imra*.

☛ *Safah*, a Garment's Edge and a Person's Lip

AS WE HAVE shown, Moshe's *amirah*, his faculty of speech, which denotes the soul's assumption of physical form, was deficient, for he was wholly spiritual. By the same token, due to his spirituality and simplicity, his garment lacked an *imra*, a folded edge.

The Maharal reveals a further layer of depth to this idea, showing how this double meaning of the word *imra* is by no means incidental: "Speech (denoting the soul's entry into and its manifestation within the body) is the finishing touch to a human being and his completion, and the hem is similarly the completion and finish of the garment's shape."

The Hebrew word *safah* means edge. It is used to denote a riverbank, i.e., the river's edge. *Safah* also refers to a person's lips, as well as his speech and language, for these denote a person's farthest reach, at which his spiritual faculties assume a physical dimension. It was therefore appropriate that Moshe should serve in the Mishkan wearing a seamless, white tunic, for such a garment reflected his character. His white clothing befitted his humility, spirituality and simplicity and his sublime spiritual level, in which he was unique.

We have gained much insight into the nature of humility: a person who lacks spirituality is a complex, outwardly oriented character who favors beautiful clothing and speaks with a smooth tongue and haughty air. By contrast, our nation's greatest prophet, whose mind was least influenced by physicality, was a humble, simple individual who had difficulty speaking and who wore a simple, white tunic without any fold or hint of embellishment.

Shemini

A Good Name Surpasses Fine Oil

☛ Nadav and Avihu Are Contrasted with Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah

WHILE THE DEDICATION of the Mishkan was at its height, the Torah tells us, “Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took a pan, placed fire on it, put incense upon it, and offered alien fire to Hashem that He had not commanded them [to bring]. Fire [thereupon] went out from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem” (*Vayikra* 10:1–2).

In connection with this tragedy, the Midrash cites the *pasuk* in *Koheles* (7:1), “A good name surpasses fine oil,” noting that “We find individuals who bore fine oil (i.e., the special oil with which the *kohanim* were anointed) who entered a place of life (i.e., the Mishkan) yet left it having been burnt — they were Nadav and Avihu. By contrast, we find individuals who bore a fine reputation who entered a place of the dead yet who left it alive — they were Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah, who entered a fiery furnace yet exited it alive.”

☛ Comparing and Contrasting a Good Name and Fine Oil

THE MIDRASH CONTINUES, further contrasting these two types of distinction:

Whereas fine oil trickles downward, a good name ascends.
 Whereas fine oil is fleeting, a good name is forever.
 Whereas fine oil comes to an end, a good name doesn't finish.
 Whereas fine oil is purchased with money, a good name is free.
 Whereas fine oil is relevant to the living, a good name is relevant to
 the living and to the dead.

All this apparently implies that there is some likeness between a good name and fine oil, necessitating the clarification of the differences between them.

In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Shem Tov*, Chap. 1), the Maharal asks, “What connection is there between a [fine] reputation and fine oil? They don't seem to have anything whatsoever in common.” The question is compounded by the Midrash's comparison between Nadav and Avihu on one hand and Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah on the other. What connection is there between the two incidents, and why is one identified with fine oil and the other with a good name?

☛ The Name Reflects the Essence

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the term “a good name” reflects a person's essence and his self-determination. A person's name is conferred upon him by his parents, his colleagues, and by his deeds, and it expresses “the virtue [or lack thereof] of the person himself, for a name reveals an item's essence.”

A good name thus reflects a person's essence and is inseparable from him. It follows that changing a person's name changes the person, and the Rambam indeed rules (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:4) that a penitent “should distance himself greatly from the object of his sin and should change his name, as if to say, ‘I am different; I am not the same person who did those things.’”

In *Pri Tzaddik* (*parshas Chayei Sarah* 2), Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin cites the Arizal as having taught that a person's name is the source of his life force, which is why a sleeper awakens upon hearing his name called. We find in the Zohar that when the dead

are revived, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will call to each person by his or her name, whereupon the slumberers in the dust will awaken, for a person's name is the source of his vitality.

☛ Fine Oil Denotes a Person's External Attainments

IN CONTRAST TO his name, which expresses his essence, a person is also identified by his accomplishments and by the standing he acquires. However, these are not etched into his core personality and do not define his essence, for they are extraneous to him, and as such they can also be lost.

This applies to wealth, physical strength, and even Torah knowledge, about which Chazal observe, "Torah teachings are as difficult to acquire as gold vessels and as easy to lose as glass ones" (*Chagigah* 15a). We find, for example, that despite his vast scholarship, Rabbi Meir's teacher, the *Tanna* Elisha ben Avuyah, left the Torah path. Royalty can also be lost — Shlomo cried out "I am Shlomo!" when he ceased being a king. Priesthood also belongs in this category. The virtue conferred by the special oil with which a *kohen* is anointed is also external, referred to as being "above" his head (see *Tehillim* 133:2 — "like fine oil upon the head"). The virtue of the priesthood can be lost if, for example, a *kohen* marries a divorcee — their son loses his standing as a *kohen* and has the status of a *chalal*. "Fine oil" thus denotes some external distinction that neither alters nor is absorbed into a person's inner essence.

☛ Fine Oil Is Material; a Good Name Is Spiritual

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS further that Koheles chose the term "a good name" to denote any inherent virtue a person possesses because "A name indicates the essence, which is divorced from the material realm." Fine oil, on the other hand, denotes "a virtue that a person receives from outside himself that is not inherently his, for this is like

oil with which one anoints a vessel, which is external to the vessel.” This is the key to understanding the differences between fine oil and a good name that are listed by the Midrash. For example:

- 1) Fine oil, which is a tangible substance, can be purchased for tangible currency, whereas there is no way that a good name can be purchased.
- 2) An abstract, spiritual entity is not subject to physical constraints of time and space. Whereas fine oil is limited as to how far it can flow, a good name, like anything else spiritual, has an unlimited reach and can extend from one end of the world to the other.
- 3) Fine oil eventually evaporates and disappears, and similarly, with a person’s death his acquired rank and titles become meaningless. A good name, on the other hand, is a spiritual and abstract virtue, which is eternal, outliving the person himself.

The superiority of a good name over fine oil is thus obvious, for the former reflects the indivisible inner core, which is spiritual and eternal.

☞ The Three Crowns Represent External Distinction, Whereas the Crown of a Good Name Is from Within

REFERRING TO A person as a *kohen* describes something about him but does not reveal his essence. As an external virtue, it therefore deserves to be classified with “fine oil,” rather than with “a good name.” The Maharal delves into the essence of this distinction in his discussion of the Mishnah in *Avos* (4:13): “Rabbi Shimon said, ‘There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of royalty, though the crown of a good name is superior to them.’” The Maharal asks several fundamental questions on this Mishnah:

Why does the Mishnah say there are only three crowns, when it lists four?

How can it be that the main and highest crown isn't considered one of the three crowns that can adorn a person?

He asks further from the Gemara in *Yoma* (72a) that says, "There was a vessel in the Beis Hamikdash corresponding to each of the three crowns. The *aron* was adorned with a raised edge resembling a crown, symbolizing the crown of Torah. The *shulchan* also had a raised edge, symbolizing the crown of royalty. And the golden altar had a raised edge, symbolizing the crown of the priesthood." Why was there no vessel in the Beis Hamikdash corresponding to the crown of a good name, which is superior to all the other crowns?

The Maharal's answer is that wearing a crown denotes some extraneous rank that elevates its bearer beyond the ordinary person's level. Whereas an item of clothing is made or is adjusted to perfectly fit its wearer, a crown consists of two parts: its base sits upon and encircles its bearer's head, but its upper part rises above and away from him. A crown thus symbolizes some distinction that elevates its bearer while rising above him and remaining external to him.

☞ A Good Name

THE MAHARAL PROVIDES yet deeper insight in *Chiddushei Aggados* on *maseches Sanhedrin* (100a). The Gemara says that in the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will bestow upon each and every tzaddik three hundred and ten worlds. The Gemara derives this from the *pasuk*, "To endow those who love Me with *yesh* (lit. there is)" (*Mishlei* 8:21) i.e., there is sufficient bounty for them. The Gemara, however, interprets *yesh* differently, as a direct object, i.e., "to bestow *yesh* upon those who love Me," and the *gematria* of *yesh* is three hundred and ten.

By way of explanation, the Maharal points out that the *gematria* of *yesh* (*yud* [10] + *shin* [300] = 310) is half that of *keser* (crown) — *Kaf*(20) + *tav* (400) + *reish* (200) = 620 — signifying the two components of every crown, one which sits snugly, fitting like a garment, on its wearer's head and another that extends upward, beyond his head.

In an ordinary scenario, *yesh* (310) denotes what there is, what exists in reality. This is the reward that every tzaddik will receive to the extent that he has realized his potential. This is the crown's first component.

Anything beyond this might be a sublime level that he has attained, but it does not reflect his essence. Therefore, when the time arrives for him to receive his reward for having worked on himself, this distinction — his crown's second component — sublime though it may be but that does not reflect his essence, will not be a factor in his reward.

Such are the “three crowns” that can adorn a man: the crown of the priesthood, the crown of royalty, and the crown of Torah. In these areas, a person can attain distinction, even sublime distinction, but it is merely an acquisition, like wealth or strength, which are not identified with his essence and which can be lost. A person's good reputation differs in that it does not rise above him but fits him snugly, for it is part and parcel of who he is. The crown of a good name does not rise above its bearer; it is situated within him. This is why it is not listed together with the crowns of priesthood, royalty, and Torah. The Mishkan contained no vessel surrounded by a raised edge corresponding to “the crown of a good name,” because this is an inner virtue that does not belong to the surroundings.

☛ External Distinction Offers

No Protection against Inner Turmoil

NADAV AND AVIHU scaled a lofty spiritual height that was foreign to their true stature and lay beyond their nature, and they were therefore burned. In *Nesivos Olam* (ibid.), the Maharal explains that a level that is not reflected in a person's essence cannot protect him when he experiences inner trauma. “A distinction that is [merely] descriptive but not part of his essence cannot shield a person when destruction confronts him.” An external shield protects its bearer against external threats, such as an arrow shot at him, but not against

inner trauma that can potentially topple and destroy him. An external crown will not save him from destruction, and in fact should he succumb, the title of distinction that adorned him like a crown will also be lost.

☛ The Difference between Aharon's Sons and Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah

IN LIGHT OF the above, we understand that Aharon's sons, who bore the external "crown of priesthood," "which was descriptive but not an essential distinction, entered the Mishkan alive but left it having been burned, for the priesthood was unable to protect them." Akin to "fine oil," which remains external to a person, the priesthood could not protect them when they were assailed by inner turmoil. "The priesthood, which is merely descriptive, could not shield them when they were accosted by something harmful."

By contrast, Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah's inner natures were sublime, and an inner virtue can protect a person even during times of inner turmoil. Thus, says the Maharal, "Those who bore a good name entered [a place of the] dead and came out alive, for the bearer of a good name possesses inner virtue, and since this is an essential virtue, it offers protection."

We see that the external crowns that adorn a person confer honor upon him that can protect him from external attacks. However, they are useless when he undergoes any episode of inner turmoil. By contrast, a person can have inner stature, which constitutes his "crown of a good name." This quality, which remains part of him always and endures for eternity, can protect him even when he is thrust into the fiery furnace of inner, personal crisis.

Tazria

Emptiness Precedes Existence

☛ He Has Turned Completely White; He Is Pure

THERE ARE TYPES of *tzara'as* (leprosy) that do not confer impurity. One of these is when all of the sufferer's skin turns completely white. Usually, a patch of skin that turns white indicates affliction with *tzara'as*, rendering the sufferer impure. However, when the plague is all-encompassing, the person remains pure. The Torah states, "If the *tzara'as* continually develops over the skin, and the *tzara'as* then covers the afflicted body in its entirety, from the person's head to his feet, whatever the priest can see. The priest shall look at the person, and when he sees that the *tzara'as* has covered the entire flesh, he shall declare the plague pure. He has turned completely white; he is pure" (*Vayikra* 13:12–13).

Why is this? We would have expected that the more definite and pronounced the signs of impurity, the stronger their effect. Why does the affliction lose its potency precisely when its spread is complete?

☛ Moral Decline in the Generation of the Redemption

THE GEMARA IN *Sanhedrin* (97a) tells us that the generation that will witness Mashiach's arrival prior to the Final Redemption will experience complete moral bankruptcy. This is derived from the above halachah that when "He has turned completely white; he is pure."

The Gemara says: "Rabbi Yehudah says, '[In] the generation in which the scion of David will arrive, the house of meeting will be

[used] for promiscuity, the wisdom of scribes will sour, those who fear sin will be despised, the façade of the generation will be like the face of a dog, and the truth will vanish.’

“Rabbi Nehorai says, ‘[In] the generation in which the scion of David will arrive, youths will embarrass elders, elders will rise in deference to youths, a daughter will rise up [in insolence] against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, the façade of the generation will be like the face of a dog, and a son will not be embarrassed before his father.’

“Rabbi Nechemiah says, ‘[In] the generation in which the scion of David will arrive, brazenness will increase, the kingdom (i.e., government) will become completely heretical, and there will be no reproof.’

“Rava said, ‘Which *pasuk* is this learned from? “He has turned completely white; he is pure.”’”

☛ How Can Moral Collapse Herald Redemption?

THIS PASSAGE RAISES three fundamental questions:

1. Shouldn't the order of events be reversed, with repentance and a return to serving G-d preceding the powerful spiritual illumination of redemption? How are we to understand the process whereby moral desolation is a preliminary stage to redemption?
2. What connection is there between moral collapse and redemption on one hand and the plague of *tzara'as* on the other?
3. The Gemara likens the complete whiteness of the plague to the spiritual desolation preceding redemption, implying that total whiteness ought to unequivocally confer impurity. Why then isn't a completely white plague impure?

☛ Emptiness Precedes Existence

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 39), the Maharal cites the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (98a) that says, “The scion of David will arrive only in a generation that is wholly meritorious or in a generation that is wholly

guilty.” We would expect there to be a causal relationship between a process and the result to which it leads. How can these two wholly opposite pathways lead to the identical outcome?

The Maharal explains that Mashiach will lead the world to its state of ultimate rectification and perfection.

Thus, if the world is wholly meritorious, it is logical that the following stage should be the ultimate perfection that it will attain in the time of Mashiach. If the world is wholly guilty, this means that a process of completely dismantling its previous state of existence is underway, by definition leading to the creation of a new, rectified order of existence that comes into being upon the ruins of the previous one.

The Maharal explains (*ibid.* Chap. 35) that when human existence is defective, a localized repair of the spreading corruption will be an ineffective remedy. Instead, an entirely new system must come into being, which necessitates that the previous state of existence be completely destroyed. Redemption therefore unfolds only after moral corruption has peaked and the previous state of being has ceased to exist.

“Every new state of existence represents the loss of the preceding one; this is the reason that the world will experience emptiness in its existence prior to Mashiach’s revelation to the point of the ruination of its previous existence, and existence will then start anew.”

This process is referred to by the Maharal as “Emptiness preceding existence.”

☞ Dawn Breaks amid Utter Darkness

THE PROCESS WHEREBY decay precedes renewal is mirrored in the natural world and is a feature of organic growth. A seed germinates and sprouts only after it has decayed in the ground. During the world’s creation, night preceded day, as it says, “It became evening and it became morning” (*Beresishis* 1:5), with darkness preceding light, as it says, “The earth was astonishingly desolate and void, with

darkness over the surface of the deep [waters] ... G-d said, "There shall be light'..." (ibid. *pesukim* 2–3).

Utter darkness precedes light. The Midrash (*Esther Rabbah* 10:14) tells us that two *Amora'im*, Rabbi Chiya Rabba and Rabbi Shimon bar Chalafta, were making their way through flat terrain in the pitch black of night when they suddenly glimpsed dawn breaking like a springing deer. Rabbi Chiya Rabba told Rabbi Shimon bar Chalafta, "This is how Yisrael's redemption will be, as it says, 'When I dwell in darkness, Hashem shall be my light' (*Michah* 7:8)." In other words, mere moments before the redemption, utter darkness will reign.

☛ Complete Darkness Is a Precondition and Cause of Illumination

DARKNESS IS A precondition for the approaching daybreak. In *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (*Sha'ar* II), Rabbeinu Yonah writes that when beset by suffering, a person ought to be glad and thank Hashem for it, exactly as he does when he experiences success, "For darkness leads to light, as it is written, 'Rejoice not, my enemy, for when I fall, I arise; when I dwell in darkness, Hashem shall be my light.'" Referring to this *pasuk*, Chazal say (*Midrash Tehillim*, Chap. 22), "Had I not fallen, I would not rise; had I not dwelt in darkness, I would not have light." Complete and utter darkness leads to light's appearance.

For example, although a lie that is close to the truth can be misleading, a wild, blatant lie that is obviously illogical nonsense is immediately seen as lacking substance. Truth similarly illuminates the black darkness of falsehood.

☛ Purity Bursts Forth When Impurity Has Peaked

THE CONCEPT OF emptiness preceding existence that we have encountered in regard to darkness and light holds true also for purity and impurity. The Hebrew word for impure, *tamei*, is related to *otem*,

meaning blocked or obstructed (i.e., they share the same two-letter root, *tes-mem*, meaning blocked). Impurity thus denotes blockage, obscurity, and darkness. The word *tabor*, pure, is related to *tzohar*, a window that lets in light and illumination.

In *Chiddushei Aggados* on the aforementioned Gemara in *Sanhedrin*, the Maharal uses this idea to explain why when his skin affliction turns his entire body white, the sufferer is pure. When an area of skin is affected by *tzara'as*, it means that the flesh below is moribund and in need of a remedy. So long as a person retains his overall vitality and merely suffers from localized blemishes that require fixing, his existing state can yet be rectified. However, when the decay is total and he is sapped of vitality, he is beyond repair. His existing state has reached the point of no return. Henceforth, a new state of existence develops upon the ruins of his previous one.

☛ Destruction of the Former State Heralds the Unfolding of a New Reality

SINCE EMPTINESS PRECEDES existence, the process of dismantling a previous reality is as much a part of the latter's renewal and rebirth as the new reality that will replace it. The destruction of the old world order is thus a constructive, rather than destructive, process, for it ushers in the development of a new order of existence.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the life cycle of the bird known as *chol*, mentioned by Rashi on *Iyov* 29:18: "A bird whose name is *chol*, which was not penalized with death [along with all other living creatures on account of Adam Harishon's sin — *Bereishis* 3:19] because it did not taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (see Rashi *ibid. pasuk* 6); every thousand years it undergoes renewal and is rejuvenated."

In this regard, we find in the Midrash (*Otzar Midrashim, Aseres Hashevatim*) that when the life of a certain bird comes to an end, it "is completely burned, and from the resultant ash, a worm comes into being that becomes a bird, whose form is the same as that of the

bird that was burned.” The burning in this case is not a process of destruction but of renewal and rebirth for a further thousand years of life.

☛ With the Destruction of One World, a New World Takes Shape upon Its Ruins

THE UNFOLDING OF our national redemption parallels the process of an individual’s redemption described above. There indeed exists a phenomenon of “generational decline,” i.e., the ongoing moral and spiritual decline of each generation in relation to the preceding one. Despite this — or perhaps because of it — the hour of the world’s redemption is drawing closer. Even with the ever-growing pervasiveness of spiritual darkness and moral deterioration, the world is progressing towards the powerful illumination of the truth. There are no two tracks with contradictory outcomes; there is a single process whereby light bursts forth from the deepest darkness and a new, rectified world grows and develops upon the foundations of the old, debauched world that reached its end.

☛ Emptiness Promotes Further Growth and Development

IN RABBEINU TAM’S *Sefer Hayashar* (*Sha’ar* VI), we find an explanation of the logical basis behind this cyclical process of growth and decay only to be followed by new growth. Were man’s spiritual orientation to remain static throughout his life, he would be afflicted by monotony that stifles all creativity and growth. Man is therefore subject to a dialectical impulse, referred to in *sefarim* as *ratzo vashov* (running then returning) that keeps his level constantly shifting. Man thus naturally experiences what Rabbeinu Tam refers to as “days of fondness” and “days of abhorrence” which are cyclical in nature, alternating between periods of one followed by the other.

He will initially experience excitement and great enthusiasm, but in time, he becomes accustomed to the object of his enthusiasm, and eventually he grows sick of it and pushes it away. These are the “days of abhorrence” and disgust. Only after this period of distancing from the object of his former fondness passes is he able to reawaken and renew his estimation of that which he abandoned, return to it, and become reattached to it with even greater fondness than before. It is thus the period of abandonment, emptiness, and darkness that gives way to the morning that follows on its heels, to the even more intense illumination and renewed attachment that this time around is more firmly rooted, richer, and deeper than before. Emptiness thus serves to promote renewed and even stronger growth and commitment.

According to what we have learned here, a person should never give way to despair during periods of darkness, inaction, and unproductivity, for the rule is that “emptiness precedes existence” and the world was created on the pattern of “it became evening, and it became morning.” Both the larger, external world and a person’s inner world experience cyclical fluctuation, and it is precisely when one cycle closes and darkness reigns that powerful illumination begins to shine forth.

Metzora

Why the Torah Relates to a *Metzora* as an Object

☛ The *Metzora* as an Object and a Utensil

THE TORAH RELATES to a *metzora* as though he were an object rather than an actual person. We thus find: “A person — if he has on his skin a *se’ais* or *sapachas* or a [white] spot, and it appears on his skin as a mark of *tzara’as* — he shall be brought to Aharon the *kohen*...” (*Vayikra* 13:2). The *metzora* does not come on his own to Aharon — he is brought to him, like an object. The Torah writes similarly, “If a mark of *tzara’as* appears on a person, he shall be brought to the *kohen*” (*ibid. pasuk* 9).

We might have attributed this to the *metzora*’s understandable reluctance to come to the *kohen* and hear his verdict, for prior to the pronouncement of the *kohen*’s verdict declaring him a *metzora*, he is not impure. He will therefore surely not approach the *kohen* voluntarily and must instead be brought to him.

This cannot be sufficient though, for the Torah employs the very same expression in regard to the *metzora*’s purification, which he presumably has great interest in furthering and in which he will be a more than willing participant. Yet the Torah writes, “This shall be the law of the *metzora* on the day of his purification, when he shall be brought to the *kohen*” (*ibid. 14:2*).

Why does the Torah repeatedly say that the *metzora* is “brought” rather than that he “comes” to the *kohen*? Has he somehow become an inanimate object, lacking a mind and a will of its own?

☛ Being Positioned by the *Kohen*, Rather than Standing on His Own

THE ULTIMATE “OBJECTIFICATION” of the *metzora* comes in *pasuk* 11 (ibid.), where the Torah writes, “The *kohen* performing the purification shall stand the person being purified and the [animals] before Hashem, opposite the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.” What action on the *kohen*’s part does “standing the person...” entail? Is the *kohen* supposed to physically drag the recovered *metzora* to a particular spot? The absence of any halachah requiring the *kohen* to verbally instruct the *metzora*, “Stand here,” leads us to conclude that the requirement that he stand “before Hashem...” is directed at the *metzora* himself, and he is expected to take up this position on his own. These verses apply equally to all *metzora’im*, including one who is an outstanding Torah scholar or who is himself a *kohen*, neither of whom need to be informed of where they are supposed to stand.

What then is the Torah conveying by instructing that “the *kohen*... shall stand the person...?”

☛ A *Metzora*’s Purification Requires Birds

THE TORAH WRITES, “The *kohen* shall then order [that someone] take for the person being purified two living, kosher birds, a piece of cedar wood, a thread of scarlet [wool], and [a bunch of] hyssop. The *kohen* shall then order [that someone] slaughter one of the birds over spring water in an earthenware vessel. He shall then take the living bird and [separately,] the piece of cedar wood, the scarlet thread, and the hyssop, and he shall dip them, as well as the living bird, in the blood of the slaughtered bird [mixed] with the spring water. He shall then sprinkle [some of the mixture] seven times on the person being purified from the *tzara’as* and [thus] purify him and [then] release the living bird towards the open field” (ibid. *pesukim* 4–7).

We find elsewhere that purification from impurity is achieved through immersion in water or through being sprinkled with water. We also find that sacrifices atone for a person and confer purity upon

him. However, this ceremony is unique. A bird is taken and slaughtered, and its blood is collected, but the *kohen* also takes a second bird, which is immersed in the blood while it is alive and then set free. What is it about this action that confers purity upon the recovered *metzora*?

☛ A Bird's Easy Mobility and Flight Symbolize Vitality

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 19), the Maharal explains that a bird possesses a special measure of vitality “on account of its ease of mobility, rendering it altogether alive, as opposed to a cadaver, which is immobile.”

In his introduction to *Pachad Yitzchak*, Rav Hutner explains that every creature that is created from the ground possesses a degree of inertia, for earth naturally settles and comes to rest, still and inert. Conversely, the more vitality a person possesses, the greater his alacrity and ease of mobility. Thus, a young person who is full of life moves about swiftly. In this regard, Rav Hutner notes, “The Ramchal writes in ... *Mesilas Yesharim* in the chapter on alacrity that it is the coarseness originating in the earthliness of all matter that impedes swift movement. In the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 11:9), Chazal explain that the two concluding words of the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (48:15), ‘He shall lead us *al mus* (above death),’ should be read as one word, *almus*, meaning youth or youthfulness, i.e., with alacrity.”

Vitality is thus evident in ease of mobility, in which a bird is unsurpassed.

The purification of a *metzora* is achieved through a bird and through blood because, writes the Maharal, “Blood is the soul’s life, and it is appropriate to use a living thing to purify him from death — for a *metzora* is considered like he is dead.”

☛ A Metzora Is Tantamount to a Dead Person

A BIRD SYMBOLIZES life and purifies a *metzora*, who is likened to the dead. In *maseches Nedarim* (64b), the Gemara tells us: “Four individuals are considered as if dead: a poor person, a childless person, a blind

person, and a *metzora*.” What these four have in common is that their situations deprive them of the ability to give to others. The poor man cannot give because he lacks the resources to do so. A childless person has no one upon whom to bestow life’s greatest and most significant form of giving. A blind person cannot give because he cannot perceive others’ needs and thus cannot identify with their difficulties. A *metzora* cannot give because, while he may be capable of feeling compassion, he cannot stand seeing another person’s good fortune.

This brings us to the explanation of the phenomenon of *tzara’as* and of the nature of the sins that cause it.

☛ Externalizing Inner Decay

THE MIDRASH (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra 557*) understands the word *metzora* as an amalgamation of two other words: *motzi* (bringing out) and *ra* (evil). In light of Chazal’s attribution of *tzara’as* to the sin of *lashon hara* (derogatory or damaging speech), the simplest way to understand this is that the *metzora*’s lips have brought forth slanderous speech. In *Nesivos Olam (Nesiv Halashon, Chap. 8)*, however, the Maharal reveals further profundity in the Midrash’s analysis, explaining that a person from whose lips pours slander is tainted inside. In other words, the evil that comes from his mouth is an indication of the evil that lurks within him. A person can falter and commit deeds that bring him lower but that still don’t indicate the existence of inner decay. He may have experienced a moral failure, but his core personality remains healthy, and he is still capable of being good and bestowing good upon others. The evil to which he succumbed is alien to his essence. Though it might have been rooted in a dark aspect of his character, this doesn’t overshadow his overall positivity. Other types of evil deeds attest to their perpetrator’s essence, which is their source — inner decay from which purulent matter bursts forth when the opportunity presents itself. This type of evil is evidence of a decadent character; such is the sin of *lashon hara*.

The *lashon hara* that a person speaks about others is not merely

idle chatter; it points to a personality that cannot reconcile itself to others' good fortune. This, says the Maharal, is a case of "offspring' atesting to its 'parent,' for the existence of offspring is certainly evidence of the parent that begat it; thus, the offspring attests to the parent."

Such inner decay removes a person from the framework of social living, for man is "a social creature," as the Rambam writes in *Hilchos De'ios*. It is thus straightforward that a person who cannot function healthily within his social framework is "as if he is dead" — as Chazal term the *metzora* — for he lacks one of the basic components of life.

☛ A Metzora Must Leave All Three Encampments

THE JEWISH COLLECTIVE comprises three "encampments" or spheres that surround one another like the layers of an onion.

In the innermost sphere, which is closest to G-d, are the people who dwell permanently in proximity to the *Shechinah*; this is the *machaneh Shechinah* (the encampment of the *Shechinah*).

In the sphere immediately surrounding them are people who espouse both Torah study and worldly involvement; this is known as the *machaneh Leviyah* (the Levite encampment).

In the outermost sphere are those whose lives center upon mundane pursuits; this is the *machaneh Yisrael* (the encampment of Israelites).

However, despite occupying different spheres, all three encampments surround the *aron habris* (containing the *luchos*, which were conveyed by Moshe from Heaven) and enjoy a deep inner bond to the sanctity of the Jewish nation, which is termed "a united nation in the land" (*Amidah* for Shabbos Minchah).

An individual who harbors decay in his heart, who cannot identify with his brethren and witness their good fortune, must physically leave all three encampments. The Torah says, "He shall dwell on his own" (*Vayikra* 13:45).

Gratitude is the foundation of the human personality. A person who doesn't acknowledge the good that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bestows upon His creations and who cannot perceive them as the

Creator's children is rotten to the core. As the Maharal puts it, "A person who speaks *lashon hara* is wholly evil; a person whose speech is evil is tantamount to an unbeliever."

☛ Obsession with Self and Inability to Identify with Others Eats Away at the Social Structure from Within

THE GEMARA IN *maseches Arachin* (16a) states, "Plagues (i.e., the various manifestations of *tzara'as*) afflict people on account of seven failings: for *lashon hara*, for bloodshed, for swearing in vain, for immorality, for arrogance, for robbery, and for miserliness."

In *Nesivos Olam* (ibid.), the Maharal explains that what these seven failings have in common is their contribution to society's collapse — each of them can be seen as "a thing that departs from the [regular] order of reality." Those who practice them are distanced from all three of the Jewish nation's encampments — "He shall dwell on his own, his residence shall be outside the encampment, for he is an outsider, and it is not appropriate that he should partner with other people."

It is straightforward that murder, immorality, and robbery break down society's foundations. It is also obvious how swearing in vain renders the maintenance of law and order impossible; it even touches on denial of G-d's individualized providence and His existence, for even as he swears in G-d's Name, he is actually declaring that he scorns Him and doesn't truly believe He exists. Yet according to the Maharal's understanding, the Gemara is telling us that the arrogant individual, the purveyor of *lashon hara*, and the miser are all antithetical to society's cohesion. The Maharal explains that each of these three feels that nobody besides himself is of importance. He doesn't identify with the people among whom he lives, regarding himself as different from them. He therefore attaches no importance to seeing the good within another person. This type of character must be expelled from society, for such people undermine its function as a collective unit whose parts identify with one another.

☛ *Tzara'as* Is a Mechanism of Inner Destruction

DESPITE ITS COMPRISING millions of individual cells, forming a wide array of different organs and tissues, the human body functions as a single unit; all the different parts of the body identify as parts of the same “self” and interact harmoniously. The body attacks any foreign matter that infiltrates it. Any cell in the body that lives solely for itself, that grows and reproduces at the expense of its neighbors and that encroaches upon them and attacks them, sows death by causing the person to disintegrate from within. This is the effect of *lashon hara* on society, and such is the plague of *tzara'as*.

What is unique about this affliction is that the body attacks itself. All other physical ailments that are visited on a person as punishment either originate outside of him or result from his own wear and tear. *Tzara'as*, however, is regarded in Chazal's teachings as a type of self-destruction. The *pasuk* which says, “From Him shall His justice and His *se'eis* (His exaltation) go forth” (*Chavakuk* 1:7) is expounded by Chazal (*Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria* 8) as referring to judgment that comes forth from a person's own body:

“From him,” i.e., from his own body; “his judgment,” i.e., his punishment; “and his *se'eis*” — this is one of the types of *tzara'as* (mentioned in *Vayikra* 13:2) — “shall come forth.”

The Midrash says, “When a person sins, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brings upon him suffering from within his own body, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* ways are not those of flesh and blood. If a person's servant is guilty, he brings chains and shackles him or brings a whip and lashes him (i.e., external punishments). *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, however, does not do this. Instead, He disciplines him and smites him with the plague of *tzara'as*.”*

* All the above notwithstanding, note that the leprous skin condition that the Torah terms *tzara'as* was a miraculous phenomenon that occurred in times when G-d's Presence was evident and people were on a higher spiritual level. Our ob-

☛ The *Metzora* Is Like an Object

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (ibid.), the Maharal explains that the seven sins on account of which a person can be afflicted with *tzara'as* eat away at society from within, undermining its cohesiveness, which is dependent on people identifying with one another. “Know,” he writes, “that [*tzara'as*] plagues ought to afflict any person who is set apart from reality.” In other words, this type of affliction is visited upon anyone who weakens the bonds between people and their identification with one another, which is the foundation of society’s survival. The *metzora* is therefore compared to a dead person, who is set apart from the rest of existence. The *metzora* must therefore be brought to the *kohen*, as though he is a lifeless object. By regarding him as an inanimate object, the Torah teaches us that a person who fails to identify with others and engages in self-aggrandizement is not considered to be living.

A *metzora* is considered dead because when he speaks *lashon hara*, his essence is polluted, for he has no wish to see others succeed and does not identify with anyone else. A person who undermines society’s cohesiveness and cannot look benevolently on others is as good as dead. He is tantamount to an inanimate object. His healing comes about through a process of reawakening life in him — by releasing a live bird into the wild.

Indeed, in the words of my late brother, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Weinroth z”l, “Man lives wherever he gives — and dies wherever he takes and sees only himself.”

servations about *tzara'as* should not be connected to any medical phenomena whatsoever affecting people nowadays.

Acharei Mos

When Substance and Spirit Are on a Collision Course

☛ The Holiest Nation Is Exposed to the Worst Depravity

THE SECTION DEALING with the Jewish nation's purity in marriage and the prohibited relationships opens with the warning, "Like the practice of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Canaan where I am bringing you, you shall not do, and their habits you shall not adopt" (*Vayikra* 18:3). The Torah terms adultery and other forbidden relations as "the practice of the land of Egypt" and "the practice of the land of Canaan." Why refer to these abhorrent acts as the practices of other nations? The Torah doesn't attribute idol worship, for example, to other specific nations. Why wouldn't it have sufficed to specify what is forbidden without ascribing these deeds to other nations?

Rashi explains that by specifying these deeds as "the practice of the land of Egypt," the Torah informs us "that the practices of the Egyptians the Canaanites were more corrupt than those of all the other nations and that the place where Yisrael dwelt was the most corrupt of all."

Yisrael were thus exiled among the most debased nations. But why should the holiest nation of all have been exposed to the worst debauchery?

☞ Enslavement Is Harshes When Endured under a Starkly Different Master

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 4), the Maharal explains that the reason Yisrael had to dwell among the most debased nations was that enslavement is harshes when a slave is subject to a master who is his polar opposite.

In order to further clarify this — for we would assume that simply being enslaved is hard enough irrespective of the identity of the oppressor — the Maharal explains that in such a situation any physical hardship is exacerbated by the concern of undergoing change. When subjugated to an authority that shares his own basic values, a slave is able to maintain his identity, which isn't so radically different from his master's. When subjugated to a drastically different entity, though, he is forced to conceal his own, divergent identity. His personality and individuality become utterly crushed, and his worst fear is the prospect of losing his true identity. According to the Maharal, the gravity of this concern arises from the principle that everything undergoes change when it is in conflict with — or even when it is merely exposed to — its antithesis. In the Maharal's words, "Every thing undergoes a reaction to its opposite, and its opposite exerts an effect upon it."

Thus, explains the Maharal, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to implement the decree about which He had informed Avraham Avinu, "Your descendants will be strangers... and they will serve them, and they will afflict them for four hundred years" (*Bereishis* 15:13), "This was only to take place among the nation that was their antithesis." Having decreed that Yisrael were to suffer enslavement and affliction, it was fitting that this should be at the hand of the nation that was their polar opposite.

☞ Yisrael and Egypt — Polar Opposites

THE STARKEST CONTRAST between Yisrael and other nations is in the realm of personal morals.

Whereas the Egyptians and Canaanites engaged freely in immorality and other despicable behaviors, Yisrael were holy and chaste, as Chazal comment on the *pasuk*, “The tribes of *Kah* (*yud-bei*, Hashem’s Name) [which is] testimony about [the purity of] Yisrael[’s lineage]” (*Tehillim* 122:4). In other words, by associating His Name with the tribes, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* attests that they were their fathers’ sons (see Rashi *ibid.*).

Further referring to their virtue in this regard, it is written, “My sister, the bride, is like a locked garden, a plugged wellspring, a sealed fountain” (*Shir Hashirim* 4:12). On this, Chazal (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, *ibid.*) comment: “Rabbi Pinchas said, “A locked garden” — these are the virgins; “a plugged wellspring” — these are the married women; “a sealed fountain” — these are the males.”

In the Maharal’s words, “Yisrael were thus the opposite of the Egyptians. Whereas the Egyptians clung to promiscuity, Yisrael kept apart from immorality.”

☞ The Root of the Distinction between Yisrael and the Nations

THE MORE SIGNIFICANT the material component in a human being’s makeup, the more he tends to be attracted to lewdness, whereas the more spiritual and intellectual he is, the more foreign he finds such a tendency. This is the basis of the distinction between Yisrael and the nations in regard to their attraction to immorality. As the Maharal puts it, “It is well known that a person who is attracted to promiscuity is drawn towards the material and to animalistic behavior. The Torah therefore says that the *minchah* offering of a *sotah* shall be barley meal, [as Chazal say,] ‘Because she engaged in animal-like conduct, her offering shall be the food of animals.’ For promiscuity is one of the physical appetites, and the reason for Yisrael’s separation and sanctity in regard to immorality is because they are drawn to the [spiritual] form (i.e., the soul), which is holy and separate from the material.”

☛ Something Holy That Loses Its Spiritual Configuration Is Finished

THE MAHARAL REVEALS a further layer of depth to this idea.

An essentially material being has physical substance and therefore continues to exist even if it behaves contemptuously. An essentially spiritual being, however, exists only so long as it maintains its purity and integrity.

Once a spiritual entity becomes physical, it has not merely lost a virtue; it is gone altogether, like a person whose soul has left him. For example, non-kosher meat is still meat, whereas a non-kosher *mezuzah* is worthless.

Once a spiritual being loses its spiritual essence, it no longer exists. Thus, if Yisrael lose their uniquely spiritual configuration, they do not merely suffer damage, but rather, says the Maharal, “are as though they never existed — for [spiritual] form has meaning only as long as it remains intact. If it is not complete, it has lost its content as [spiritual] form.”

☛ The Egyptian Bondage Was the Ultimate Negation of Yisrael

BEING ENSLAVED IN Egypt brought exquisite suffering, tantamount to cessation of their existence, upon Yisrael, for they are typified by their spirituality, whereas the Egyptians were utterly immersed in coarse materialism. With their settlement in Egypt, “it was as though they had no [independent] existence whatsoever.” As we have seen, the rule is that when a spiritual entity loses its spiritual wholeness, it isn’t merely damaged; it is altogether gone.

☛ When They Descend, They Descend to the Depths

THE MAHARAL CITES a passage from the Gemara (*Kesubos* 66b) to illustrate this phenomenon. The Gemara relates that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai once saw a young woman gathering grains of barley from

among the dung of the Arabs' animals. This was the daughter of Nakdimon ben Gurion, who had been one of the wealthiest citizens of Yerushalayim. When she married, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai had been one of the signatories on her *kesubah*, wherein her property was inscribed as being worth "a million golden *dinarim* from her father, besides her father-in-law's share."

Upon witnessing this wealthy and respected woman's poverty and abasement, Rabbi Yochanan declared, "Fortunate are you, Yisrael! When you fulfill G-d's will, no other nation has power over you, and when you don't fulfill G-d's will, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* puts you in the power of a lowly nation, and moreover, in the power of the lowly nation's animals."

The Maharal asks how Yisrael's utter debasement when they fall can be deserving of the praise, "Fortunate are you, Yisrael!" What virtue of theirs does it reveal?

He explains that since Yisrael's uniqueness lies in their spiritual level, maintaining its integrity is the key to their survival, for in the spiritual realm, it's all or nothing. The concept of lukewarm is confined to the material realm; there's no corresponding idea of "half kosher" or "almost true." Thus, when Yisrael are ascendant, sublime, and fully spiritual, they are superior to all other nations. However, if they *chas v'shalom* lose this quality, their entire existence is negated, and they come under the control of the very lowest elements. For, in the Maharal's words, "If the [spiritual] form isn't complete, they are given over to the animal kingdom, which is material, for if the complete [spiritual] configuration isn't in its fullest capacity, it is altogether lost."

☛ Spirituality's Reaction to an Encounter with Physicality

IN EGYPT, BNEI YISRAEL sunk to the forty-ninth level of impurity, yet on the other hand, we are told that they merited redemption because they did not change their names, their distinctive dress, or

their language. In other words, despite their outward involvement in their surroundings, the purity of their inner essence remained untainted. In what sense, then, were they mired in the ultimate level of impurity? The answer is that when a spiritual entity encounters the ultimate in defilement, it is repulsed and withdraws into itself in order to remain separate. Immediately upon this withdrawal, its redemption arrives. In fact, spirituality's redemption has a profound effect on the material realm as well.

☞ Physicality's Reaction to an Encounter with Spirituality

REGARDING YISRAEL'S RELEASE from the Egyptian vise and becoming worthy of freedom and assuming Divine elevation, the Maharal adds that "This very change had a negative and damaging effect upon the Egyptians." In other words, the brighter the white highlights, the darker the surrounding blackness appears.

The Egyptians now witnessed before their very eyes how empty and morally bankrupt they were. The emptiness and hypocrisy of their value system became apparent to them, so they abandoned that as well and were left with nothing to fall back on. Consequently, they became even more corrupt, lacking the slightest trace of morality.

"Yisrael's perfection" says the Maharal, "led the Egyptians to become even starker opposites to them. Therefore, in the places where Yisrael dwelt, the Egyptians were more debauched than anywhere else."

Yisrael's experience during their Egyptian exile thus yields the following five lessons:

1. The difference between Yisrael and the nations in the realm of personal morals is a consequence of Yisrael's possession of a holy, spiritual soul that is separate from the material realm.
2. Every thing is affected and undergoes some transformation as a result of exposure to its polar opposite.
3. When a spiritual entity loses its spiritual integrity, it is not merely damaged — it disappears entirely.

4. When something essentially spiritual encounters utter defilement, it is repulsed and withdraws into itself, thus ensuring that it remains separate.
5. When a wholly material entity encounters spirituality, it discovers the hypocrisy of the value system it constructed, so it abandons it and remains devoid of all morality.

Kedoshim

Human Dignity as a Consequence of Man's Divine Mission

☛ Love Your Colleague as You Love Yourself — But How?

THIS *PARSHAH* CONTAINS one of the best known and most fundamental mitzvos: “Love your colleague as [you love] yourself” (*Vayikra* 19:18).

However, this obligation is so sublime and exalted that it actually forces us to stop and think hard, for at first glance, its ethical demands are beyond the average person's capabilities.

How can a person love his colleague to the same degree that he loves himself? This seems to run contrary to human nature. Although in regard to practical obligations, we can grasp the imposition of an obligation to give to others with the same generosity that we show ourselves, when it comes to the emotional realm, how is it possible to command a person to love someone else as much as he loves himself?

Due to this difficulty, the Ramban explains that the Torah is employing exaggerated terms and that the thrust of the commandment is indeed to cultivate generosity, for a person might love his colleague and want to benefit him in certain respects but not in others. The Torah therefore instructs him to uproot any reservation from his heart and instead desire his colleague's benefit in every area, just as he wants for himself.

Wonderful though this explanation is, it is difficult to reconcile with the plain meaning of the words, and the Maharal therefore adopts a different approach in order to explain the matter.

☛ “This Is the Entire Torah” — How So?

THE GEMARA (*SHABBOS* 31A) tells us, “It happened that a certain non-Jew came before Shammai and said to him, ‘Convert me to Judaism, provided you can teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot.’ He pushed him away with the builder’s yardstick that he was holding. He came before Hillel [with the same request], and [Hillel] told him, ‘That which is detestable to you, do not do to your colleague — that is the entire Torah, and all the rest is commentary, go and learn it.’”

Hillel’s summation of the Torah makes no mention of loving in a positive sense, just avoiding doing harm. Important as that may be, is it indeed the basis of all the other mitzvos? Is this sufficient to explain a mitzvah like Shabbos or *tefillin*?

In response to this difficulty, Rashi (*Shabbos*, *ibid.*) explains that the “colleague” to whom Hillel referred is not a fellow human, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, such that his meaning was, “Do not transgress *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s instructions, just as it is hateful to you when others act contrary to your instructions.”

Rashi provides an additional explanation, namely, that although this is not the basis for the mitzvos between man and Heaven, a majority of the Torah’s mitzvos govern interpersonal relations, e.g., stealing, immorality, etc. whose foundation Hillel’s teaching does provide. These explanations, too, seem hard to reconcile with the plain meaning of the Gemara’s. This Gemara therefore points the Maharal in a different direction.

☛ “Love Your Colleague Like Yourself” or “Your Life Takes Precedence over Your Colleague’s?”

CHAZAL’S COMMENTS HEIGHTEN our difficulty. Rabbi Akiva’s comment on this mitzvah is well known: “Love your colleague as you love yourself” — Rabbi Akiva said, ‘This is a major Torah principle’” (*Sifra*, *Kedoshim* Sec. 2, Chap. 4).

On the other hand, the Gemara in *Bava Metzia* (62a) discusses the

case of two travelers on the road, one of whom has a small container of water containing an insufficient supply for both of them. If they both drink from it, they will both die of thirst, whereas if only the owner drinks from it, he will survive long enough to reach civilization. Ben Peturah rules that it is preferable that they both drink and die rather than one of them witnessing the other's death, while Rabbi Aikva disagrees and expounds the *pasuk*, "And your brother shall live alongside you" (*Vayikra* 25:36) as meaning that "Your life takes precedence over your colleague's life" (i.e., make sure he can live, but only as long as it will be "alongside you" — that your own life is assured). The supreme value of human life puts the focus upon the water's owner, obligating him to save his own life rather than share the water. Thus, the very same Rabbi Akiva who stresses the importance of a person loving his colleague as he loves himself nonetheless teaches that one's own life takes precedence over that of his colleague. How are we to reconcile these two teachings?

☛ Rabbi Akiva's Disagreement with Ben Azai

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING Rabbi Akiva's statement that "Love your colleague..." is a major Torah principle, the *Sifra* cites Ben Azai's opposing view that the *pasuk*, "This is the book of man's descendants..." (*Bereishis* 5:1) constitutes an even more important principle. Apparently, this implies that the Torah contains two important principles, "Love your colleague..." and "This is the book of man's descendants..." and that Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azai disagree over which of them is more fundamental. What is the connection between these two principles, and what does Ben Azai mean altogether? Which Torah principle does the *pasuk* in *Bereishis* convey?

☛ "Love Your Colleague Like Yourself" Because He Shares Your Divine Likeness

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Ahavas Harei'a*, Chap. 1), the Maharal explains that the rule, "Love your colleague as you love yourself" is a

consequence of the sublime concept at its root. The foundation of all human interaction ought to be the awareness that every person bears the likeness of G-d in Heaven.

Man's sense of self worth stems from his awareness of his Divine likeness. The Torah views life's value and its purpose in terms of man actualizing his Divine likeness as opposed to indulging his mundane, animalistic aspect. As we learn in *maseches Avos* (3:14), "Man is precious, for he was created in G-d's image."

From this basic idea follows the necessity of treating colleagues equally and demonstrating love for them, for others also bear the Divine likeness. Since this is the basis of a person's worth, it follows that each person should esteem others to the same extent that he esteems himself, for the other person bears the Divine likeness as well.

Rather than appealing to a person's emotions, then, the principle of "Love your colleague as you love yourself" addresses his intellect, reminding him that the very same reason prompting him to love and respect himself ought to lead him to relate to others in exactly the same way.

In other words, the Torah desires that man should maximize and empower his Divine likeness and that perceiving this quality in his colleagues should serve as the basis for interacting with them on an equal footing.

☛ A Major Torah Principle

SINCE PEOPLE'S INTERACTIONS are rooted in the Divine likeness that they have in common, Rabbi Akiva's identification of this mitzvah as a major Torah principle is readily understood, for all of the Torah's mitzvos, each in its own particular realm, serve to elucidate and bring out this fundamental concept. This principle is not limited to the interpersonal mitzvos; it applies equally to the mitzvos between man and Heaven, because the purpose of each and every mitzvah is to reinforce and empower the Divine likeness within the person fulfilling it.

The Maharal explains that the two hundred and forty-eight positive mitzvos correspond to the number of limbs in the human body because they represent the human semblance.

☛ “This Is the Book of Man’s Descendants...”

Conveys Man’s Divine Likeness

LIKE RABBI AKIVA, Ben Azai also identifies the basis of people’s interactions and the source of the value of everything man does as the Divine likeness within him, but he takes this one step further. This Divine likeness is not merely the basis of the Torah’s mitzvos — in this *pasuk*, the Torah refers to itself as “the book of man’s descendants.”

Viewing man on his own as a function of his Divine likeness poses some difficulty in that G-d is eternal — He was, He is, and He will always be — whereas man’s existence is temporary and fleeting. How can man be likened to his Maker? There is one respect in which man is invested with the ability to achieve continuity and eternity, namely, his power of perpetuating himself through his descendants. As the Maharal writes, “The image [of man] must remain in existence [just as G-d exists eternally]. When man procreates, he sires [descendants] in his likeness and image.” This continuity serves to offset the problem in the definition of man as a likeness of the eternal G-d, for like G-d, man too has a link to eternity by bringing forth new generations.

☛ Defining “Divine Likeness”

BEN AZAI’S VIEW needs to be understood better, for the ability to secure continuity does not constitute man’s Divine likeness in and of itself, for animals also perpetuate themselves. How is man superior to them?

Explaining the term “Divine likeness” will help us answer this question.

The Torah tells us, “G-d created man *b’tzalmo* (in His [designated] mold); He created him with G-d’s form” (ibid. 1:27).

Rashi explains that *tzelem*, which usually means an image, here denotes a mold or form. Obviously, this cannot be referring to a mold of the Creator, as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “has no corporeal likeness nor body” (as we affirm in the poem *Yigdal Elokim Chai*) — He is the ultimate in abstraction, lacking any physical form or shape!

☛ Man’s Divine Likeness Is His Ability to Choose

WHEN *HAKADOSH BARUCH HU* is referred to as Elokim, this denotes His capacity as “Master of all forces” (as the *Tur* writes in *Orach Chaim* 5). Man is thus similar to G-d in the sense that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* invested man with the power to control himself and the rest of the world, for either good or evil, as he chooses. Humankind’s Divine likeness is expressed in man’s ability to choose to further good or to further evil (as Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes in *Nefesh Hachaim, Sha’ar* I, Chaps. 3–4). A “Divine likeness” thus denotes man’s freedom of choice.

☛ Embarrassing a Person Deprives Him of His Freedom of Choice and Thereby of His Divine Image

MAN’S ABILITY TO choose is a function of his belief in this faculty and in his special standing. If his honor is slighted, his faith in himself and his abilities is undermined, and his freedom of choice is limited. A person who has been embarrassed, disgraced, or besmirched has had his inner light extinguished and his Divine likeness, which is expressed in his ability to choose and to attain self-fulfillment, diminished.

This is how the Maharal (*Nesivos Olam*, ibid. Chap. 1) explains Chazal’s teaching (*Bava Metzia* 58b) that “A person who causes his colleague’s face to pale in embarrassment is akin to a murderer,” for the person who embarrasses his colleague and causes him to blanch

in public strips him of his dignity and self-respect that he needs in order to keep him from sinning, and he thereby diminishes his colleague's ability to choose. He deprives him of the essence of his life as being a semblance of the Divine and a wielder of the freedom to choose. In the Maharal's words, "He who causes paling and does away with the image of his [colleague's] face to the point where he makes him pale and extinguishes his light — this is called bloodshed. For bloodshed denotes doing away with the [entire] person, and he who causes a person's face to pale cancels the form by which he is recognized, which is his [Divine] image, thereby doing away with the person as well, because the [Divine] image is the person."

A person is therefore enjoined from bringing disgrace and embarrassment even upon himself. The rule is that "A person is unable to establish himself as an evildoer" (i.e., testimony about his own transgression of the Torah is unacceptable; *Yevamos* 25a), for he has no right to damage his own Divine likeness.

☛ Every Person Has a Mission, Which His Freedom of Choice Enables Him to Accomplish

EVEN AFTER HAVING been embarrassed and offended, a person still seems to retain the ability to choose between good and evil. How has he been deprived of his Divine likeness, and how is his blood considered to have been shed? In response to this, the Maharal explains further that a person's ability to choose has been implanted within him to enable him to fulfill and accomplish his destined purpose.

The Gemara in *maseches Berachos* (17a) cites Rava's prayer, "My G-d, before I was created, I was unworthy, and now that I have been created, it is as though I had not been created." In other words, a person is not created before there is a Divinely ordained mission for him to fulfill; at any moment or in any surroundings other than those in which he finds himself, his existence would have no purpose. Heaven therefore demands of man, "Now that you have been created, why aren't you fulfilling your mission?" The implication of being made in

the Divine likeness is having been entrusted by the Creator with a mission that is to be fulfilled using the capacity he has been given for accomplishment within his sphere of influence. Wounding a person's dignity prevents him from accomplishing his mission and is thereby tantamount to depriving him of his Divine likeness.

☛ Human Dignity Is a Function of Man's Divine Mission

THE HUMAN SOUL is a fragment of the Divine, which bears the imprint of the Divine mission it is expected to fulfill. The soul is referred to as "glory," as the Ramban writes in his work *Emunah U'vitachon* (Chap. 17): "The soul is called 'glory' as it says, 'In order that glory shall sing to You' (*Tehillim* 30:13), and it also says, 'Awaken, my glory' (*ibid.* 57:9)."

In his work *Yemei Zikaron*, in the chapter on *Shelichus*, Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik explains that the mission that has been entrusted to each person constitutes the conceptual basis of human dignity, in accordance with the halachic principle, "A person's emissary is like him," i.e., an extension of him (*Mishnah, Berachos* 5:5). The respect due to an emissary thus reflects that of the sender, and a person who is fulfilling his Divine mission thus enjoys something of Heaven's honor.

☛ Respect Your Colleague as You Respect Yourself

WE CAN NOW appreciate the far-reaching implications of Rabbi Akiva's teaching, "Love your colleague as you love yourself" — this is a major Torah principle."

The basis of human dignity is man's standing as an emissary of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as well as the Divine mission entrusted to him. Being aware of this precludes feeling pride in regard to one's fellow men, for just as I am an emissary, so is everyone else. Everybody has a name and a Divine mission of his very own; everybody has his own, individualized task to accomplish. A slight to one's colleague

is thus a slight to the Dispatcher whom he represents. By displaying pride and arrogance relative to others and treating them unequally, a person violates the terms of his mission. He thereby demonstrates his conviction that he operates independently, not as an agent whose sole claim to respect is the Divine mission with which he has been entrusted. Rav Soloveitchik thus explains that “Honor, in and of itself, is a Divine trait. By realizing his own distinction and according honor to others, a person gives expression to mankind’s momentous mission, which is entirely founded upon the Divine image that he harbors within him; then, the emissary’s honor reflects that of his Owner. However, if a person desecrates his colleague’s honor, he thereby desecrates his Divine image and mission.”

☛ Love Your Colleague as You Love Yourself — But Your Life Takes Precedence

VIEWING LIFE AS man’s opportunity to accomplish his Divinely bestowed mission obligates a person to show others respect, because every person has his own mission. However, in order to tackle life as an opportunity for fulfilling one’s mission, the emissary has to be present. If a person has a container of water, he cannot give it to his colleague, thereby cutting short his own life and bringing his mission to an untimely conclusion. “Your life takes precedence over your colleague’s life” because one of the emissary’s obligations towards his Dispatcher is not to abandon his mission.

The Maharal thus provides us with profound insight into the following fundamental principles and commandments:

- “Love Your Colleague as You Love Yourself” is not addressed to a person’s emotions; it is a logical consequence of one of the fundamentals of our faith, namely, that a person’s supreme worth is a function of his Divine likeness, and since every person bears this likeness, all must be accorded equal respect and treated with equal dignity.

- A human being's "Divine likeness" finds expression in his ability to choose between good and evil and in his obligation to fulfill the particular mission for which he was created, which is his Divine mandate.
- "Human dignity" is a consequence of every person's role as an emissary of his Creator.
- Embarrassing a person publicly is tantamount to shedding his blood, because being disgraced and deprived of his dignity hinders his ability to choose and to fulfill his Divine mission in this world, which is the purpose for which he was created.

Emor

Shabbos and the Festivals — A Foretaste of the World to Come and of the Times of Mashiach

☞ Why Is Observing the Festivals Like Having Kept Shabbos?

THE TORAH OPENS the section dealing with the yearly cycle of festivals with a command about... observing Shabbos! It is written, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, ‘Hashem’s festive occasions that you shall proclaim at their appointed times — these [that follow] are My festive occasions. You shall work for six days, and on the seventh day, there shall be a complete cessation of work, called for holiness; you shall do no work. It is Shabbos for Hashem wherever you live’” (*Vayikra* 23:2–3).

Shabbos is a weekly day of rest, resembling none of the festivals. Why should it be mentioned in a section dealing with the festivals? Rashi asks this very question: “What is Shabbos’s connection to the festivals?”

He explains that Shabbos heads the list of festivals, “To teach you that whoever desecrates the festivals is regarded as having desecrated the *Shabbasos*, and whoever observes the festivals is regarded as having observed the *Shabbasos*.”

This explanation is not entirely clear, for if Shabbos and the festivals are essentially unconnected, why open a section about the festivals by speaking about Shabbos? And in what way is desecrating

the festivals like desecrating Shabbos? We are obviously not speaking here about a person who desecrates both Shabbos and the festivals, but rather about a person who observes one while desecrating the other. If he is observing one, how does his desecration of the other affect that which he does observe?

☛ The Festivals “Come under the Heading of Shabbos”

IN EXPLAINING RASHI'S comments, the Maharal (in *Gur Aryeh*) notes that the festivals “are also called ‘Shabbos,’” Shabbos being a general heading of which the festivals are subdivisions. Each festival encompasses another dimension of Shabbos. Desecrating a festival is thus akin to having desecrated a specific aspect of Shabbos.

The festivals are indeed referred to by the Torah in several places as *shabbason*, a day of cessation of work, as in the Torah's commandment about Sukkos: “But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the land's produce, you shall celebrate Hashem's festival for a seven-day period. [On] the first day [there] shall be a *shabbason* (cessation of work), and [on] the eighth day [there] shall be a *shabbason*” (ibid. *pasuk* 39). The word *shabbason* can be understood as a diminutive form of Shabbos, denoting a minor, small-scale Shabbos. A similar relationship is encountered between the words *ish* (man), and *ishon* (pupil [of the eye], lit. little man), for when one person converses with another, his reflection is visible in miniature in the other person's pupil.

Taking this idea further, the Maharal notes that the Torah instructs us about seven annual festive days: two days of Pesach (the first and seventh days), one day of Shavuot, one day of Rosh Hashanah (the second day was instituted due to uncertainty about which day had been designated as the first of the new month), one day of Yom Kippur, and two days of Sukkos (the first day and the eighth day, Shemini Atzeres).

These seven days correspond to Shabbos, which is the seventh day of the week. Thus, says the Maharal, “A person who desecrates the

festivals, which are in the category of Shabbos, is akin to having desecrated Shabbos, which is the seventh day. Understand this well, and you will discover how profaning the festivals is like having profaned Shabbos, for the festivals are parts of the desistence [from work], and Shabbos includes the entire desistence.”

☛ How Are the Festivals Encompassed by Shabbos?

THE MAHARAL'S IDEA that Shabbos heads a general category of which the festivals are subdivisions requires further elucidation, because Shabbos and the festivals seem to be fundamentally different entities, in the following respects:

1. **Timing:** Whereas every seventh day since Creation is Shabbos, the dates of the festivals are specified in the Torah, and their timing is ultimately determined by *Beis Din*, who decide when to declare the beginning of each new month. The Gemara (*Berachos* 49a) accordingly explains that in concluding the middle blessing of the *Amidah* for the festivals, we refer to Hashem as the “Sanctifier of Yisrael and the [festive] times,” because it is Yisrael who sanctify the times of the festivals.
2. **Forbidden Work:** Whereas Shabbos requires ceasing all types of work, certain types of work involved in food preparation, e.g., baking and cooking, are permitted on the festivals.
3. **Commemoration:** Whereas all work must cease on Shabbos in commemoration of our departure from Egypt and because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* desisted from all creative work on the seventh day of creation, the Torah provides quite different reasons for the celebration of each of the festivals.

How then can we class the festivals as subdivisions of Shabbos? They are so different in character. And how can the Maharal call them “parts of the desistence [from work]?”

Appreciating the Maharal's understanding of the essence of Shabbos and of the festivals will yield the answers to these questions.

☛ Shabbos Is the World to Come In Miniature

IN THE MAHARAL'S profound view of them, Shabbos and Yom Tov indeed have much in common. He sees the festivals as representing the time of Mashiach, and Shabbos as an encapsulation of the World to Come. This is indeed the implication of the Gemara (*Berachos* 57b) that describes Shabbos as “one sixtieth of the World to Come,” i.e., a miniature version of the World to Come.

In *maseches Avodah Zarah* (3a), we also find that when the nations of the world will seek a portion in the World to Come, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* response to them will be, “You utter fools — he who toils on *erev Shabbos* shall eat on Shabbos; he who hasn't toiled on *erev Shabbos*, from where shall he eat on Shabbos?” Here too, the World to Come is referred to as Shabbos. What is the meaning of this comparison?

☛ The World to Come Is Wholly Spiritual, as Is Shabbos

IN ORDER TO understand how Shabbos resembles the World to Come, we shall look at the Rambam's portrayal of the latter as a wholly spiritual and abstract experience: “In the World to Come, there is no physical form or body, just the souls of the righteous alone, without any body, like the ministering *malachim*...thus said the Early Sages, ‘In the World to Come there is no eating, drinking or relations — just the tzaddikim sitting, their crowns upon their heads, basking in the radiance of the *Shechinah*’” (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 8:2).

Shabbos thus represents this type of existence in the sense that it is a wholly spiritual experience. All forms of work are forbidden, even those required for preparing food. Therefore, all of the day's physical needs must be prepared in advance — “He who doesn't toil on *erev Shabbos*, from where shall he eat on Shabbos?” Shabbos is solely a time for reaping the reward of efforts expended beforehand, of work done during the six working days that precede its arrival.

☛ The Era of Mashiach — A Corrected Physical World

WE CAN GLEAN some understanding of Yom Tov's similarity to the times of Mashiach from again studying the Rambam (ibid. 9:2), where he portrays this era as a physical existence like our present one but taking place in a world that has attained its ultimate rectification, where we are no longer under the dominion of other nations. In the Rambam's words, "The climax of all reward and the ultimate benefit that has neither interruption nor detraction is life in the World to Come. The times of Mashiach however, are [experienced] in this world. The world will continue its regular pattern, but dominion will return to Yisrael. The Early Sages have said, 'There is no difference between this world and the times of Mashiach except for the domination by [foreign] rulers.'"

☛ Yom Tov Resembles the Time of Mashiach

YOM TOV REFLECTS the times of Mashiach in regard to its dual character — "half for Hashem and half for you" (see *Pesachim* 68b). While the day has a physical aspect — food may be prepared — this is a rectified physical existence that takes place amid joy and closeness to Hashem. The allowance to engage in food preparation indicates that it is not solely a time of reaping reward, but also of engaging in physical labor.

☛ The Time of Mashiach Ushers In the World to Come

WHILE WE NOW understand how Shabbos and Yom Tov resemble the above two states of existence due to the stark difference between them — one being wholly spiritual and the other involving physical enjoyment — we still seem no closer to grasping the Maharal's meaning in comparing Shabbos to a general category with the festivals as its subdivisions.

This should become clearer though after we again refer to the Rambam and see how he describes the relationship between the time of Mashaich and the World to Come. In *Hilchos Melachim* (12:2–5), the Rambam explains: “The Sages said, ‘There is no difference between this world and the times of Mashiach, except for domination by [foreign] rulers...’ so that [Yisrael] should [not be preoccupied, but] be available to occupy themselves with Torah and its wisdom, without any oppressor or disturber ... and at that time there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competitiveness, for good will be abundantly bestowed, and every delicacy will be as available as the dust, and the sole occupation of the entire world will be knowledge of G-d... as it says, ‘For the land will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as water covers the seas (*Yeshayah* 11:9).’”

Although the ultimate good will be experienced in the parlor of the World to Come, the journey to this sublime state of existence passes through a corridor, which is the period known as the era of Mashiach, during which the physical world will have attained its rectification and will be blessed with abundant good. The relationship between these two worlds is that of a corridor and its ultimate destination, the parlor. The purpose of our physical world is that its inhabitants attain knowledge of G-d, and the world’s correction in the time of Mashiach — by providing conditions conducive to this end — will enable this to come about.

☛ In the Rectified World There Is No Free Will and No Repentance

IN *MASECHES SHABBOS* (151b), the Gemara explains the *pasuk*, “And years will arrive when you say, ‘I have no desire in them’” (*Koheles* 12:1) as referring to “the era of Mashiach, when there is neither merit nor liability.” How are we to understand this reference to the time of Mashiach — a seemingly wonderful period of history when the world will be rectified and enjoy abundance — as years in which we have no desire?

In *Netzach Yisrael* (Chap. 46), the Maharal explains that choosing between good and evil is only necessary in our world in its present state of moral obfuscation and lack of clarity. In the time of Mashiach, when the world attains its rectification and a person will clearly witness the consequences of his deeds, free choice will no longer be possible. Just as the decision whether or not to imbibe poison is not one that people grapple with nowadays because of the obvious consequences, at that future time there will be no struggle over whether or not to sin. People will no longer be faced with two seemingly equal options because the consequences of sinning will be evident. By the same token, we will not deserve reward for fulfilling a mitzvah at that time, because the benefits of doing so will be obvious, and people will do good without having undergone any prior struggle.

The Maharal notes further that in its corrected state in the time of Mashiach, where everything is clear and there is no further moral struggle, repentance will no longer be possible either. He explains that this is because, “If, in the time of Mashiach, a person witnesses the good that Hashem will do for Yisrael, he will certainly repent in order to receive this good, and this is not considered repentance at all. Scripture (*Kohel* *ibid.*) thus enjoins a person to repent before the time of Mashiach, when his repentance will certainly be sincere, whereas repentance that comes after Mashiach’s revelation is not repentance.”

☛ Trends That Started during Our Present

Existence Can Intensify in the Time of Mashiach

IF IT WILL no longer be possible to correct anything once Mashiach has arrived, what will the purpose of the world’s existence be? To put the question differently, why can’t the world progress directly to the state of the World to Come, which is the time for reaping the ultimate, spiritual reward in a wholly spiritual existence?

In response to this, the Maharal notes that although repentance will no longer be possible, it will be possible to continue along a path

that one previously chose during the pre-Mashiach era. A resolution to repent that was independently formed in the world's present state can be followed through even more effectively in Mashiach's time, when every opportunity for serving Hashem will be available. In the Maharal's words: "Anyone who has been righteous all his life and has not begun to repent [merely] as a result of all the good that Hashem does for the tzaddikim in the time of Mashiach, but who rather was a tzaddik before Mashiach's arrival, will certainly attain even greater virtue in the time of Mashiach."

Although it won't be possible to change course, upward movement will gather momentum. As the Maharal says, "If he was already righteous, he will certainly be able to achieve greater perfection and virtue."

During the time of Mashiach, the world will thus undergo further preparation, which is necessary before it moves into its ultimate state of the World to Come.

☛ The Deeper Significance of *Eruv Tavshilin*

WE HAVE SEEN the Maharal draw a parallel between Yom Tov and the time of Mashiach and have learned that during this era, prior positive change will continue with even greater intensity. Yom Tov, which represents the time of Mashiach in miniature, can thus serve as a time of ongoing preparation for Shabbos — the World to Come in miniature — so long as this preparation began during the preceding work days. The Maharal shows that this profound idea is contained in the mitzvah of *eruv tavshilin*.

The Gemara (*Beitzah* 15b) explains that when Yom Tov falls on *erev Shabbos*, it ought to be forbidden to engage in preparing food for Shabbos, because the allowance to prepare food is limited to that which is necessary for Yom Tov itself and doesn't extend to preparing for another day. As the Gemara (*ibid.* 2b) says, "Yom Tov shall not prepare for Shabbos." However, if a person begins his Shabbos preparations before Yom Tov, he is allowed to continue them even on Yom Tov.

The Maharal explains that this is because Yom Tov is an encapsulation of the time of Mashiach, at which time nothing new can be introduced. However, prior processes will be able to continue and even to intensify. Therefore, preparations for Shabbos, which represents the World to Come, which were begun on a work day are allowed to continue and intensify, reaching their conclusion and completion even on Yom Tov.

☞ Shabbos Is the Crown of All the Festivals

WE NOW UNDERSTAND why Shabbos is not only part of the Torah section that speaks about the festivals, but even opens it. While the festivals are comparable to the time of Mashiach, Shabbos is “the most precious of days” (as we say in the *Yismechu b’malchusecha* section of the Shabbos day *Amidah*) and encapsulates the World to Come. The era of Mashiach will usher the world into the state of the World to Come, which is the ultimate destination and purpose of all the deeds that people do. The festivals are a time of preparation for Shabbos, an intermediate stage on the journey to Shabbos. Man’s spiritual work on the festivals still contains an element of the physical — they are “half for Hashem and half for you.” They are indeed more sublime than ordinary workdays, for they are “half for Hashem,” but this is because preparations that began during the preceding workdays can intensify and become complete *en route* to Shabbos.

Shabbos is thus the crown and ultimate purpose of the festivals.

The world will pass through three stages: its present state, the era of Mashiach, and the World to Come, each more sublime and elevated than the previous one. Even in this world, these three stages are experienced as ordinary workdays, which are wholly mundane; Yom Tov, which is “half for Hashem and half for you;” and Shabbos, which is wholly spiritual, an encapsulation of the World to Come. Shabbos represents the World to Come in the sense that it is a wholly spiritual existence. Yom Tov represents the era of Mashiach in that it

is “half for Hashem” yet also “half for you.” It has a physical aspect, but this is experienced in a rectified manner amid joy and closeness to Hashem. Each stage leads into the next one and Yom Tov, which is parallel to the time of Mashiach can be a time of ongoing preparation for Shabbos in regard to that which started during the preceding workdays. The festivals are thus times of preparation for Shabbos — an intermediary stop on the journey to Shabbos. Chazal therefore say, “Whoever desecrates the festivals is as though he has desecrated Shabbos,” and the Maharal says that “All the festivals are included under the heading of Shabbos.” It is thus clear why the section dealing with the festivals therefore opens with the obligation to observe Shabbos.

Behar

Yovel and Yom Kippur — Back to the Beginning

☛ *Yovel* Arrives after Seven *Shemittos* Have Been Counted

THE *YOVEL* YEAR is a time of release from bondage and reversion to the world's original state of being. Slaves and land are released from the control of the owners who have been holding them, regaining their independence and reverting to their former ownership respectively.

The Torah provides detailed information as to when and how the *Yovel* year commences: “Count for yourself seven seven-year periods, seven years seven times, and the duration of the seven seven-year periods will be for you forty-nine years. You shall sound a wailing shofar in the seventh month on the tenth of the month, on Yom Kippur sound a shofar throughout your land. You shall sanctify the year of the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom in the land to all its inhabitants; it is *Yovel*, it shall be for you; you shall return, each man to his possession and each man to his family, you shall return” (*Vayikra* 25:8–10).

These *pesukim* convey the three occurrences that must take place so that *Yovel* can ensue:

1. Seven seven-year cycles must be counted.
2. Once the fiftieth year begins, Yom Kippur must arrive.
3. The shofar is sounded on Yom Kippur — thus, in the *Yovel* year, there is shofar-blowing on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Let us examine each of these three components in order, starting with the first.

The Torah does not initially introduce *Yovel* as the fiftieth year, but rather as the year following the counting of seven seven-year cycles. What is the significance of counting seven years seven times rather than counting straight through from year one to year forty-nine?

☛ The Significance of a Unit of Seven

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Rosh Hashanah* 21b), the Maharal explains that every physical entity possesses seven dimensions: the four directions of the compass, up and down, and a seventh dimension being its own essence. The world was thus created in six days, with the seventh day, Shabbos — the “purpose of heaven and earth” (as we refer to it in the Friday night *Amidah*) — embodying the world’s inner content and ultimate mission.

Anything beyond one of these seven dimensions moves away from the physical plane of creation to the abstract, spiritual plane. Thus, *bris milah*, the covenant of circumcision, which represents a Jew overcoming his physical desires and subjugating of his body to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who is the other party to the covenant, is done on the eighth day of a child’s life, for it represents a higher, spiritual level, reaching beyond all of the seven physical dimensions. This also explains the halachah that *milah* (which relates to the eighth and spiritual dimension) is performed on the eighth day even when this falls on Shabbos (which belongs to the seventh dimension of the physical world).

☛ Seven *Shemittos* Signify the Exhaustion of Physical Existence

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS further that each of any given physical entity’s seven dimensions is itself a material entity, encompassing seven dimensions of its own. Seven times seven thus signifies the maximization of every existing dimension of the material universe. Moving

beyond seven times seven denotes the utter exhaustion of every level of material existence and passing on to the spiritual plane of existence.

We find that the Torah, whose essence is pure spirituality and whose full comprehension lies beyond the grasp of human faculties, is described in the following terms: “Its *midah* (extent) is longer than the earth and wider than the *yam* (the sea)” (*Iyov* 11:9). The *gematriya* (numerical value) of *midah* is forty-nine (*mem* [40] + *dalet* [4] + *heb* [5] = 49), and that of *yam* is fifty (*yud* [10] + *mem* [40] = 50).

The Torah thus extends beyond the forty-nine dimensions of material existence, being broader even than the most abstract level of man’s comprehension, whose intellect is limited to the grasp and capacity of the human mind. Torah, on the other hand, says the Maharal, “extends beyond the fiftieth gateway.”

☛ Why Seven *Shemittos* Are Counted before *Yovel*

SINCE TIME IS cyclical in nature, upon the completion of seven *shemittah* cycles, the count has been exhausted, and it therefore starts anew. This is not a continuation of the previous counting, because once physical existence has passed through all of its forty-nine dimensions, it has completed its cycle. Existence now undergoes renewal, and the count starts from a new beginning.

A seven times seven cycle can conceptually be regarded as infinite, because the number goes no higher, and instead there is a new beginning. Therefore, although the Torah says that an *eved nirtza* — a Jewish slave who has his ear pierced after expressing unwillingness to leave his master’s home at the end of his six-year term of servitude — “shall serve him (i.e., his master) forever” (*Shemos* 21:6), Chazal (*Kiddushin* 15a) note that “forever” is not to be understood in the usual manner. Rather, it refers to the *yovel* year, when the *eved nirtza* goes free. In *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Kiddushin* *ibid.*), the Maharal explains that *yovel* is synonymous with “forever,” adding further (*Netzach Yisrael*, Chap. 45) that “every *yovel* [cycle] is considered a world of its own.” *Yovel*’s arrival after counting all forty-nine

dimensions of the physical world thus represents a new beginning. Coming after seven *shemittah* cycles, *yovel* represents the world's return to its starting point and source.

☛ *Yovel* Marks a New Start

TO SUM UP: after counting seven *shemittah* cycles, the fiftieth year is *yovel*, for all the dimensions of physical existence have been exhausted, and creation's material realm is renewed and returns to its starting point.

Yovel thus represents the world's renewal and return to its source; this explains why the Torah specifies that *yovel* follows seven cycles of seven rather than a single continuum of forty-nine years.

☛ The Link between *Yovel* and Yom Kippur

LET US NOW turn our attention to the second trigger of *yovel*'s commencement. As we pointed out, *yovel* doesn't start immediately after the seven seven-year cycles, at the beginning of the fiftieth year, for the Torah specifies that it arrives only on the tenth of the seventh month, even mentioning that this coincides with Yom Kippur. What is the connection between these two special times?

In *Gur Aryeh* (on *parshas Behar*), the Maharal comments: "You ought to know that Scripture's linkage of *yovel* and Yom Kippur is no happenstance. Rather, it is because they are both the same thing, for *yovel* marks the return of everything to its former standing, and [on] Yom Kippur, everything similarly returns to its former standing, for *Hashem Yisbarach* atones for them, and they revert to their original state."

☛ What Deeper Connection Do *Yovel* and Yom Kippur Share?

THE MAHARAL'S COMMENTS need further explanation. Certainly, these are both times of reversion to a former state. On Yom Kippur, Hashem

grants forgiveness for the sins of the person who repents and returns to Him. *Yovel*, too, is a time of fields' return alisa weiss to their former owners and of servants gaining their freedom. However, this seems to be the extent of the comparison. What does the Maharal mean that "They are both the same thing?" Is there any deeper connection?

When a parable is invoked, the lesson it helps to convey can be better understood by contemplating the parable. In order to understand *Yovel*, which the Maharal is here comparing to Yom Kippur, let us try to better understand the essential nature of Yom Kippur.

☛ Two Ways to Crush Rebellion: By Force or through Reconciliation

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 46), the Maharal explains that a person can have only one ruler over him: he answers either to his inclinations or to his Maker. A person who is controlled by his inclinations does not serve his Maker and is thus in a state of *de facto* rebellion against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* rule.

The purpose of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is to guide a person away from his state of rebellion and lead him back to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* rule.

Rosh Hashanah is the day when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is crowned as King. Whenever a king is instated and enforces his dominion, strict justice prevails. Where a Judge is affirmed, justice is served. The kingdom must function according to the rule of law in order to invest the king's rule with authority and uphold his laws. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* coronation as "King of the entire world" (as we conclude the middle blessing of the Rosh Hashanah *Amidah*) therefore necessarily entails Him enacting judgment.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the two ways that a king brings different classes of rebellious subjects back under his control. If the rebels were close to him, he subjects them to the full weight of the law, taking them to task for any minor infringement. If, though, their connection with the king was weak and tenuous

to begin with, the king can extend his dominion over them only by showing them mercy and clemency, for one cannot draw people close and gain their loyalty by subjecting them to harsh judgment. The way for a king to exert his rule over them and prevent them drifting even further away from his stewardship is to adopt the approach mentioned in the *pasuk*, “I shall be kind to those to whom I shall be kind and merciful towards those to whom I shall show mercy” (*Shemos* 33:19). The king calls to rebels such as these to return to Him by promising them clemency. This is essentially what Yom Kippur achieves.

Herein lies the distinction between the judgment prevailing on Rosh Hashanah, affecting those who are closest to the King, and the mercy that is shown on Yom Kippur, through which even those who have become distanced from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* or whose attempts to repent have been unsuccessful are able to return to Him. Of these latter unfortunates it is written, “The *entire* congregation of Bnei Yisrael, as well as the sojourner who lives among them, shall be forgiven, for all the people acted mistakenly” (*Bamidbar* 15:26).

☛ Yom Kippur and *Yovel* Restore Existence to Its Former State

IT SHOULD NOW be clear how Yom Kippur and *yovel* fulfill the same function. On Yom Kippur, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s rebellious children who were estranged from Him return to His embrace. The penitent experiences release from his subjugation to his evil inclination — this constitutes his personal redemption. Yom Kippur affords redemption to the soul of the person who returns to his G-d and breaks free from the shackles of his self-imprisonment.

In this respect, Yom Kippur is just like *yovel*, when slaves regain their independence and land returns to its original owners, thus going free from the bonds that held them subject to the authority of others.

Yom Kippur and *yovel* both symbolize a return from afar to one's former state of existence. They both restore whatever has drifted away from its point of origin to its former connection to its roots and source.

☛ A Yovel Is a Shofar

HAVING DEMONSTRATED THE relevance of the first two components of the onset of the *yovel* year to its essential function, let us now turn our attention to the Torah's third requirement for the year's beginning — *yovel* starts on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year with the sounding of the shofar.

We find that the concept of *yovel* is linked to the shofar that is mentioned in connection with the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai on the fiftieth day following Bnei Yisrael's departure from Egypt after the counting of the seven weeks of the *omer*. Regarding the conclusion of this event, throughout which the people were forbidden to ascend the mountain upon which Hashem's *Shechinah* had descended, they were told, "When the *yovel* draws out [its blast], they shall [be permitted to] ascend the mountain" (*Shemos* 19:13). Rashi explains, "The *yovel* is the shofar (horn) of a ram."

Thus, "when the *yovel* draws out" refers to the sounding of a prolonged shofar blast that "indicates the *Shechinah*'s withdrawal, and when it departs, they are allowed to ascend" (Rashi *ibid.*).

The Torah's specification that *yovel* should begin with blowing the shofar is thus no mere additional mitzvah of shofar on this day, similar to the mitzvah of blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah. *Yovel* itself is identified with and represented by the shofar.

The question then becomes: what is *yovel*'s deeper connection with shofar that renders them one and the same?

☛ The Shofar Calls for the Ingathering of the Dispersed

THE SHOFAR'S CALL gathers all the dispersed members of our nation, calling them to return to their roots. It symbolizes *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s coronation as King of mankind by calling them to gather under His dominion and return from the places of their dispersal where they were under the subjugation of their inclinations that banished them to the ends of the earth.

For this reason, the shofar is the symbol of the final Redemption, as it says, “And it shall be on that day, the great shofar shall be blown, and those who are lost in the land of Ashur and who are banished in the land of Egypt shall come...” (*Yeshayah* 27:13). The shofar will signal the future ingathering of the dispersed and return of the scattered members of our nation.

According to one opinion in *maseches Rosh Hashanah* (11b), Yisrael’s future redemption will take place in the month of Tishrei, a conclusion learned from a *gezeirah shavah* (the equation of two *pesukim* where the identical word appears). In regard to Rosh Hashanah, it is written, “Blow in the month [of Tishrei] on the shofar” (*Tehillim* 81:4), and about the final Redemption it is written, “On that day, the great shofar shall be blown.” Chazal say similarly, “A person who sees a shofar in his dream should anticipate redemption” (*Berachos* 56b). In *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Berachos* ibid.), the Maharal explains that “The shofar produces the sound that gathers the dispersed, so that those dispersed individuals should hear [it] and gather in one place — and this is the redemption.”

Bondage is a function of dispersal and of being displaced from one’s roots; it is a state of being under foreign authority, a state in which nothing is where it belongs. Ingathering and restoration to the source thus constitutes redemption.

☛ Why Shofar Is Synonymous with *Yovel*

ACCORDINGLY, THE MAHARAL explains why a shofar is also called *yovel*. *Yovel* is the time of ingathering of the dispersed, when slaves regain their autonomy and fields revert to their original ownership. The Maharal adds further that the reason why the shofar of Yom Kippur of the *yovel* year — rather than the shofar of Rosh Hashanah — ushers *yovel* in is because of a difference in the nature of the two types of ingathering that these *shofaros* herald.

On Rosh Hashanah, those who are closest to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* proclaim Him their King and lovingly accept His judgment,

such that the elimination of any rebels is justified — as it is written, “Shall the shofar be sounded in a city and the people not quake?” (*Amos* 3:6). This shofar of Rosh Hashanah gathers together the King’s closest subjects.

On Yom Kippur, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s open rule over those who were distant is restored, as the sinner is purified rather than becoming completely lost. On Yom Kippur, even those whose deeds brought about their banishment gather under *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s dominion — which includes and encompasses even sinners without necessitating their destruction — as He extends His protection even to those who drifted far away. The Creator’s coronation that takes place on Yom Kippur is thus more powerful than that of Rosh Hashanah, for it represents complete redemption, with the ingathering of all the King’s subjects, from far as well as near.

It is now clear to us why the shofar-blowing of Yom Kippur, which symbolizes the King’s total dominion, is called *yovel*, and why Hashem proclaims freedom throughout the land to all its inhabitants only upon the sounding of the shofar on Yom Kippur of the *yovel* year.

We have thus elucidated the three conditions for complete redemption:

Seven times seven — the completion of the previous cycle of physical existence, renewal, and starting anew from the beginning.

Yom Kippur — whoever and whatever has drifted away from its source returns, moves close, and reconnects to its root.

Shofar — its blast is a call for a comprehensive ingathering and a return to roots, heralding redemption.

Bechukosai

Toiling in Torah and the Two Levels of Its Study

☛ Why Does “Going” Denote Toil?

THE TORAH INTRODUCES the blessings with which *parshas Bechukosai* opens with the stipulation that their bestowal is conditional: “If you walk in My laws, observe My commandments, and do them...” (*Vayikra* 26:3). Rashi notes that to “walk in My laws” cannot refer to mitzvah observance, since this is mentioned immediately thereafter. To “walk in My laws,” says Rashi, thus means “that you should be toiling in Torah study.”

Thus, the Torah’s words, “in My laws” denote “in the study of My laws,” and “to walk” denotes “to toil.”

What is the connection between “walking” and “toiling”? Does moving forward necessarily indicate toil?

☛ Toiling in Torah Study — Proceeding from One Level to Another

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that the Torah uses the word *halichah* (walking or proceeding) not merely in the narrow sense of the physical act of walking, but for moving forward with a particular intention or towards a particular destination. Take, for example, the *pasuk*, “Yaakov left (*vayeitzei*) Be’er Sheva and went (*vayeilech*) to Charan” (*Bereishis* 28:10). The *pasuk* notes Yaakov’s dual objective: *yetziyah*,

leaving Be'er Sheva in order to flee from Esav, and *halichab*, going to Charan for the purpose of marrying a wife, as his mother instructed.

Similarly, says the Maharal, the goal or destination of person who toils in Torah study is to arrive somewhere — in this case, at a clearer, deeper understanding than he previously had. His toil is what carries him forward to this goal. Just as the word *halichab* denotes going from one place to another, “Toiling in Torah study, too — constantly delving deeper than one has previously delved — is termed *halichab* (i.e., moving forward or progressing) in Torah.”

☛ Achievement in Any Realm of Endeavor Requires Toil

WHY, THOUGH, SHOULD Torah in particular be associated with toil? The benefits of toil seem to be reaped in regard to any holy endeavor, such as improving character traits, where investing hard work enables a person to advance from one stage to the next. In *maseches Avos* (5:23) we learn, “According to the effort is the reward.” Put differently, any deed’s inherent value is a function not of its direct result, but of the effort and exertion invested in it. Indeed, this principle applies to all the mitzvos, not just to Torah study. In *Avos D’Rabbi Nosson* (Chap. 3) we find, “Better for a person once with effort than a hundred times without effort.”

The special quality of toiling in Torah evidently confers additional benefit that making an effort to fulfill other mitzvos does not.

In elucidating the Maharal’s comments about toiling in Torah, Rav Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak*, Shavuos 17) indeed pinpoints the unique nature of toiling in Torah. We shall later discuss his insight in a systematic manner.

☛ “Torah Study” Refers to Learning Gemara

IN *HILCHOS TALMUD TORAH* (1:11), the Rambam writes that a person must divide the time he devotes to Torah study into three, spending

“a third on Scripture, a third on the Oral Torah, and [in] the remaining third, he should understand and comprehend [how] a conclusion [is derived] from its initial stages, deducing one thing from another, and [he] should compare one thing to another and understand the methods by which the Torah is expounded until he knows how the principle methods function and how to derive [halachic conclusions regarding] what is forbidden and what is permitted, etc. based upon what he has learned by oral transmission. This discipline is known as Gemara.”

The Rambam then adds (ibid. 12), “When does this [tripartite division of study time] apply? When a person is still starting out in his learning. However, when he grows in wisdom and no longer needs to learn Scripture or to constantly occupy himself with the Oral Torah ... and he should devote his entire day to Gemara alone, according to his breadth of comprehension and composure.”

Thus, whereas initially Scripture and Mishnah should occupy a person as well, and he should only devote a third of his time to studying Gemara, this latter discipline should eventually become his sole study.

Based on this ruling of the Rambam, Rav Hutner concludes that “Torah essentially consists of learning Gemara alone, and all other learning tracks are merely paths that lead to this goal.”

☛ “Simple” Torah Study as Preparation for Fulfilling the Actual Mitzvah

WE ARE FAMILIAR with the distinction between “a mitzvah act” and “a preparatory act,” i.e., an act that readies a person and creates the necessary conditions for fulfilling the mitzvah itself. These are two distinct categories; a preparatory act, though essential for being able to fulfill a mitzvah, is not actually a mitzvah.

For example, dwelling in a *sukkah* is a mitzvah, whereas building a *sukkah* is a preparatory act. Wearing *tefillin* is a mitzvah, while writing *tefillin* is a preparatory act.

Transposing this distinction to the realm of Torah study, Rav Hutner introduces the idea that even within the mitzvah of studying Torah, it is possible to distinguish between studying Scripture and Mishnah, which are akin to mitzvah preparation, and Gemara study, which is akin to “the heart of the matter.”

“This is wondrously novel,” he writes, “[the idea] that at its core, we do not regard all the components of Torah study equally. Rather, on the scale of Torah, every other type of study besides learning Gemara is considered a preparatory act.”

☛ The Conditions for Torah Study Derived from Our Experience at Har Sinai Apply Only to Gemara

RAV HUTNER CITES proof to this idea from a Gemara in *maseches Berachos* (22a), where Chazal point to the juxtaposition of the *pesukim*, “And you shall make them (i.e., the Torah’s precepts) known to your sons and to your grandsons... the day when you stood before Hashem your G-d, at Chorev” (*Devarim* 4:9–10) as indication that Scripture equates having received the Torah at Har Sinai (“the day when you stood...”) with the mitzvah of Torah study (“make them known to your sons...”). In the same way that at Har Sinai, the Torah was given “in dread and fear, amid quaking and trembling,” so too should all subsequent Torah study be in this frame of mind.

A practical consequence of this parallel is that a person who has had a seminal emission may not engage in Torah study until he has purified himself, for he is not in a sufficiently serious frame of mind, being in a state of “frivolity and arrogance,” as Rashi explains (*Berachos* *ibid.*). This is not an experience that happens when a person is thoroughly imbued with a sense of purpose, in anticipation of life’s most significant pursuit. The state of mind that accompanies an emission is irreconcilable with the mitzvah of Torah study, which must be undertaken in the same frame of mind in which it was received — “in dread and fear, amid quaking and trembling.”

Rabbi Yosi (*Berachos* *ibid.*) however, qualifies this restriction and

allows a person who has had an emission to engage in studying “regular topics.” He is thus permitted to learn “Mishnayos that he knows by heart that he can repeat quickly and on which he does not need to spend a long time” (Rashi *ibid.*). According to Rabbi Yosi, all he is forbidden to learn is Gemara.

What essentially distinguishes “regular topics” from Gemara?

Rav Hutner explains that “regular topics” can be studied without investing toil, whereas the precondition for engaging in Torah study — that it be done “in dread and fear, amid quaking and trembling” — applies only to learning in depth, which demands toil and effort. Har Sinai thus serves as a precedent only for Gemara study, which requires effort. Only in regard to Gemara did Chazal derive from the above *pesukim* that “Its study must be [undertaken in a frame of mind] akin to when it was given” (*Berachos* *ibid.*).

☛ Two Types of Torah Study

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN two types of Torah study thus emerges: whereas Gemara study constitutes the actual mitzvah of learning Torah, other areas of study [Scripture, Mishnah, etc.] in comparison are mitzvah preparation, enabling a person to engage in in-depth Gemara study. The *halachos* derived from the Giving of the Torah at Sinai governing how Torah should be studied (i.e., the condition that the student be “in dread and fear, amid quaking and trembling,” which disqualifies a person who has had an emission) apply only to learning that demands toil, which characterizes the study of Gemara in particular.

☛ What Quality Does Learning in Depth Impart to Torah Study?

WHY DO WE regard Gemara, whose study demands toil and penetration, as the ultimate in Torah study, to the point where it alone is subject to the restrictions applying to this mitzvah (such as the disqualification of a person who has had an emission)? Learning in

depth apparently somehow renders study essentially different. But what is different about learning in-depth? And why do we not find that an absence of effort changes the essence of other mitzvos as well?

☛ Wisdom Is an Individualized Commodity

RAV HUTNER CONTINUES elucidating his approach to understanding the Maharal's comments.

The halachah is that if someone demands an exorbitant price for agreeing to sell medicine to a patient, the patient need only pay the medicine's market value. Any consent on the patient's part to pay more than that was extracted under duress and is therefore not binding. However, if a doctor demands an exorbitant amount for treating the patient, the latter must pay the agreed upon sum. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 336:3) states that the reason for this difference is "because [when treating the patient,] the doctor has sold him his wisdom, which has no price." In other words, no market value can be placed on wisdom. A person who consults the doctor cannot invoke the argument that the cost of the advice he has received is in excess of its market value as a means of avoiding payment of anything other than the agreed upon sum.

Why does wisdom have no market value?

The answer is that the concept of a market value is relevant only to items that have a market, i.e., standardized commodities that are also sold elsewhere by others.

Wisdom that a person has acquired is an area in which he expresses his individuality. It is not a standard commodity possessed equally by a number of vendors. It is impossible for one person's wisdom to be sold by another.

Halachah states similarly that "There is no overcharging for immovable property" (*Kesuvos* 99b), meaning that the laws governing overpricing do not apply to land sales. Land, too, has no market value, because its value depends upon its location, and since no two pieces of land can share the exact same location, each one is unique.

☛ A Person's Uniqueness Lies in His Power of Originality

THE SOURCE OF a person's uniqueness is his ability to show originality, "because there is something novel in each and every mind that no other person's mind possesses," writes Rav Hutner.

Human wisdom is typified by man's power of originality and innovation. "The essential quality of each and every mind lies in its originality," he states. Chazal thus observe, "There is no *beis midrash* that doesn't yield some novelty." The *beis midrash* is a center of intellectual activity, and intellect operates according to its essential nature, which is the power to yield novel thought.

"The intellect is fully engaged only when it is being creative," Rav Hutner writes. "Its main power lies in its productivity — this is the nature of intellectual toil."

☛ Penetrating Study Reveals Fresh Insight into the Topic Being Learned

NOVEL IDEAS ARE the product of in-depth study, which reveals new, unexplored aspects of the subject being studied. Rav Hutner explains:

"A mind deep in thought is searching for a new perspective on the topic upon which it is focused. Prior to this contemplation, the topic appeared differently than it appears afterwards. This fresh insight is yielded by the intellect's faculty for productivity. The fresh insight yielded by focusing the mind on a topic is the product of intellectual toil. To say, 'intellect without the ability to toil' is [an oxymoron,] like saying 'parenthood without the ability to sire offspring.' Toiling in Torah study by definition means 'a mind focused on Torah, in search of fresh appreciation of one or another Torah topic.'"

☛ A Person's Uniqueness Is Expressed through In-Depth Study

IN LIGHT OF the above, we appreciate the distinction between a person's deeds and his ability to focus his mind. His deeds have a "market value" because many other people are doing the identical thing, whereas there is no corresponding scale for calibrating intellectual yield, for no uniformity exists in the intellectual realm. "Their minds differ in the same way that their facial features differ," says the Gemara (*Berachos* 58a).

Superficial study is thus similar to any other realm of practical Torah observance in that it doesn't reflect a person's individuality. Only in-depth study gives expression to a person's own unique capacity for novel thought and for expressing his intellectual prowess. Focused, in-depth study is thus the principal type of Torah learning, whereas other Torah disciplines — the two categories corresponding to a "mitzvah act" and "mitzvah preparation" — are ancillary.

Toiling in learning is what we refer to as Gemara, whereas learning that doesn't require intellectual exertion is referred to as "regular [study]." This explains the Rambam's ruling that Gemara study is the main form of Torah learning, upon which a person should focus after having gained proficiency in abstract and focused thought and in inductive and creative reasoning.

☛ Toiling to Learn In-Depth Transforms Study

TOILING IN TORAH study should not be confused with searching for a source or reference, even if this requires effort. In that regard, there is no difference between Torah and other mitzvos. Searching high and low for a reference in connection with one's learning is no different than searching high and low for a *lulav*. Toil in Torah means focused, incisive thought, mental exertion, penetration, comprehension — in short, all the makings of novel insight!

Every person has his own unique approach to in-depth study and to yielding the novel insight that only he is capable of discovering. This is why in our prayers we ask, “Grant our portion in Your Torah” — grant each and every person his unique share in Your Torah. Only in-depth learning creates something new and unique that didn’t exist beforehand. In this type of learning, toil and exertion are preconditions for creativity.

In the realm of practical mitzvos, investment of toil and energy in order to fulfill a mitzvah increases the mitzvah’s reward, but the *lulav* itself remains the same *lulav*. With in-depth Torah study, however, toil is necessary for *creating* the individual’s unique Torah.

☞ Progressing from Level to Level Symbolizes In-Depth Study

THIS WONDERFUL EXPOSITION elucidates the Maharal’s comment that toiling in Torah study is akin to going from one place to another. Walking takes a person from place to place. Toiling in Torah study also conveys a person from one level to another. This feature is unique to Torah study, for only here are toil and exertion transformative, conveying the scholar from mitzvah preparation to fulfilling the actual mitzvah itself, taking him from “regular” study to learning Gemara.

“While toil in [pursuing] other virtues and worthy traits is very praiseworthy and is supremely elevated,” writes Rav Hutner, “it yields no essential transformation. This is why Rashi interprets ‘walking (i.e., progressing from level to level) in My laws’ as referring particularly to toiling in Torah.”

To sum up, we have learned that:

- Two types of Torah study exist: “regular” study and study that demands penetrating, mental exertion;
- Toil is transformative, conveying the Torah scholar from the occupation with mitzvah preparation to occupation with the mitzvah itself.

- Toiling in Torah means having “a mind focused on Torah in search of fresh appreciation of one or another Torah topic.”
- Toiling in Torah requires application, mental exertion, penetration, and comprehension — the makings of novel insight.
- Learning Torah in-depth creates a new entity that didn’t hitherto exist. Toil is a precondition for this creativity, which gives expression to the scholar’s unique quality, as we pray: “Grant our portion in Your Torah” — grant each and every person his unique portion in Your Torah.
- “If you walk in My laws” means, “If you toil in Torah study” — not merely learning, but toiling.

Bamidbar

The Lion and the Dog

☛ The Fire That Crouched on the Altar Resembled Either a Lion or a Dog

THE TORAH TELLS us: “They shall clear away the ash from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it” (*Bamidbar* 4:13). Rashi explains that this cloth was spread over the copper altar (as were other cloths over the other vessels) when Bnei Yisrael were about to set out to travel from one encampment to another. Rashi adds that “The fire that had come down from Heaven [onto the altar] crouched beneath the cloth like a lion during the journeys and did not burn it, because they placed an overturned copper pot over it.”

In *Gur Aryeh* (ibid.) the Maharal points out that this fire, which “crouched beneath the cloth like a lion,” didn’t move despite all of the altar’s movement during the travel. He adds that were it not for the fire crouching, covering it with the copper pot alone would not have helped avoid burning the cloth, for the fire would have burst forth at the pot’s sides when the latter moved during the travel.

The Gemara in *maseches Yoma* (21b) finds the crouching fire’s comparison to a lion difficult and asks, “It crouched like a lion? But we have learned a *baraisa* that says, ‘Rabbi Chanina *Segan Hakohanim* said, “I saw [the fire] and it was crouching like a dog.”’” The Gemara answers, “There is no difficulty; here we are speaking about the first Beis Hamikdash, and there we are speaking about the second Beis Hamikdash.” In other words, in the first Beis Hamikdash, the fire on

the altar crouched like a lion, whereas in the second one, it crouched like a dog. What is the significance of these comparisons?

☛ A Crouching Fire Denotes the *Shechinah*'s Presence

THE MAHARAL (IBID.) explains that the crouching fire was a miraculous sign of the *Shechinah*'s presence in the Beis Hamikdash. The power and strength of the lion's crouch denoted the intensity of the *Shechinah*'s presence in the first Beis Hamikdash, contrasting with the less powerful crouch of the dog, denoting the *Shechinah*'s correspondingly diminished intensity in the second Beis Hamikdash.

In the Maharal's words, "The fire that was in the Mishkan and the first Beis Hamikdash was firmly attached below and didn't move from there. In the second Beis Hamikdash, however, the Heavenly fire did not crouch powerfully but was like a dog, for the sublime holiness wasn't crouching with complete attachment; therefore, it is compared to a dog's crouching. In the first Beis Hamikdash, though, [it is compared] to the crouching of a lion — of which it is said, 'He crouched and lay like a lion, who shall arouse Him?' (*Bamidbar* 24:9) — because the holiness within the first Beis Hamikdash was present with greater attachment, not departing [upon its destruction] until they had transgressed extremely serious sins. This was unlike the second Beis Hamikdash, when they didn't do so many sins, yet the Beis Hamikdash was [nevertheless] destroyed."

How are we to understand this concept of the *Shechinah*'s presence in the *Batei Mikdash* with greater or lesser intensity?

☛ Discrepancy between the Two *Batei Mikdash* in the External Manifestations of the *Shechinah*'s Presence

THE GEMARA (*YOMA* ibid.) enumerates five indications that the *Shechinah*'s presence was less intense in the second Beis Hamikdash than it was in the first: (1) The *aron*, the *kapores* and the *keruvim* — in the second Beis Hamikdash, there was no *aron* in the *Kodesh*

Hakodashim. (2) The fire — in the second Beis Hamikdash, there was no Heavenly fire that assisted in burning the offerings upon the altar. (3) The *Shechinah*, (4) Divine inspiration and (5) the *urim v'tumim* were all absent from the second Beis Hamikdash.

While these all apparently point to a more intense presence of the *Shechinah* in the first Beis Hamikdash, this conclusion seems to be contradicted by the *navi* Chaggai's declaration that "The glory of this later House will surpass that of the first" (*Chaggai* 2:9).

In *maseches Bava Basra* (3a), we even find the Gemara disputing whether this eminence of the second Beis Hamikdash refers to the greater grandeur of its building or to the longer time it stood (the second Beis Hamikdash stood for 420 years, whereas the first Beis Hamikdash stood for just 410 years). Wherever its superiority lay, the fact that the second Beis Hamikdash surpassed its predecessor would seem to indicate that it possessed some greater inner virtue. How are we to reconcile this with the Gemara's clear evidence that the *Shechinah's* presence was more intense in the first Beis Hamikdash?

☛ The Intensity of the *Shechinah* Was Inversely Proportional to Outward Appearances

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS*, the Maharal answers that Chaggai's prophecy refers to the outward glory of the second Beis Hamikdash, as it appeared to onlookers, whereas the greater intensity of the *Shechinah's* presence in the first Beis Hamikdash was in fact the reason for its humbler external appearance.

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (7a) cites the aphorism: "When our love was strong (i.e., between a couple), we sufficed with a bed the width of a sword's blade, but now that our love is no longer strong, even a bed sixty *amos* wide isn't enough." Rav Huna then shows how this message is borne out by *pesukim* from which it is apparent that the more intense the *Shechinah's* presence, the more contained are its physical manifestations:

In the Mishkan, upon which the *Shechinah* rested in its full intensity, the height of the *aron* together with the *kapores* was just ten *tefachim*. The height of the first Beis Hamikdash where, compared to the Mishkan, the *Shechinah*'s presence was less intense, was thirty *amos*. And regarding the second Beis Hamikdash, it is said that no physical structure can suffice for the *Shechinah*'s containment therein. Thus it is written, "So says Hashem, 'The heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool; which House can you build for Me?'" (*Yeshayah* 66:1).

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 84a) similarly says that when there is love between two people, it "compels the flesh," or, as the saying goes, "When there's room in the heart, there's room in the home," and otherwise, there just isn't enough space.

☛ The Causes of the Destruction of the *Batei Mikdash* Indicate Their Essential Difference

SETTING ASIDE THE external manifestations of the *Shechinah*'s presence in the two *Batei Mikdash*, which were in inverse proportion to its respective intensity therein — how was the *Shechinah*'s greater intensity in the first Beis Hamikdash evident?

The Maharal discusses this in *Netzach Yisrael* (Chap. 4) in the course of analyzing the causes of the destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* as a reflection of what the loss of each of them represented. Studying the reason why each Beis Hamikdash was destroyed will reveal each one's essential quality and thereby provide insight into the nature of the *Shechinah*'s presence therein.

☛ Analyzing the Reasons for the Destruction

FROM THE GEMARA in *maseches Yoma* (9b), it is clear that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of the prevalence of the sins of idolatry, immorality, and murder. "But," asks the Gemara, "why was the second Beis Hamikdash, [in] who[se time] we know [the

Jews] were occupied with Torah, mitzvos, and practicing kindness, destroyed? It was on account of the baseless hatred that existed between them. This teaches that baseless hatred is of equivalent severity to idolatry, immorality, and murder.”

The Maharal raises two questions:

One question is: “Why was the first Beis Hamikdash destroyed on account of those three sins, whereas the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on account of baseless hatred? It cannot be happenstance.”

And the second question: The sins of murder, immorality, and idolatry are manifestations of diverse and unconnected human impulses and failings. They certainly have a halachic connection, as all three of them are subject to the rule that a person should allow himself to be killed rather than transgress them. But what common conceptual factor do they share to which the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash can be attributed?

☛ The Goal of the First Beis Hamikdash Was Purity

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the common factor of these three sins is the defilement and impurity that they introduce into the sinner’s soul. This is evident from the Gemara in *Shevuos* (7b) that cites *pesukim* to this effect: Of idolatry it is written, “in order to defile My Mikdash” (*Vayikra* 20:3); of immorality it is written, “Do not become defiled with all these [immoral practices]” (*ibid.* 18:24); and of murder it is written, “You shall not defile the land...in whose midst I dwell” (*Bamidbar* 35:34).

Once Yisrael transgressed these three sins, the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, explains the Maharal, because Hashem does not dwell among them amid their impurity. Although elsewhere it is written that Hashem “dwells with them amidst their impurity” (*Vayikra* 16:16), this refers only to sins that were committed unintentionally. Intentional transgression of the above sins, which confer

spiritual defilement and filth, is irreconcilable with the purity and refinement that are preconditions for the *Shechinah*'s presence within the Jewish nation.

The special quality of the first Beis Hamikdash was thus the purity that suffused it, enabling the *Shechinah* to rest upon it. The cause of the first destruction was arriving at a situation in which it was no longer appropriate for the *Shechinah* to dwell among the Jewish nation — after their defilement with sins which the Torah terms “impurity.”

☛ The Goal of the Second Beis Hamikdash Was Unity

WHEREAS THE MISSION of the first Beis Hamikdash was to facilitate the *Shechinah*'s presence among Yisrael, that of the second Beis Hamikdash was Yisrael's rectification and the attainment of unity among them. “The level of the second Beis Hamikdash was attributable to Yisrael themselves,” writes the Maharal. “This matter is clear, for Yisrael unite through the Beis Hamikdash, for they had [the service of] a single *kohen* [upon] a single altar, whereas *bamos* (individual, “private” altars for offering sacrifices outside the Beis Hamikdash) were prohibited, [and because they were united around the Beis Hamikdash,] there was no dissension or quarrel in Yisrael. Through the second Beis Hamikdash (i.e., as opposed to the first Beis Hamikdash, throughout most of whose tenure the nation was divided between the kingdoms of Yisrael and Yehudah), they became a single, whole nation.”

In *Derech Chaim* on *maseches Avos* (1:12), the Maharal explains this further. The Mishnah describes Aharon as, “a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace.” The Maharal notes the fundamental connection between Aharon's role as *Kohen Gadol* and the unity that he brought about within the Jewish nation. What unites and binds people is sharing a common spiritual goal.

In his commentary to *Shir Hashirim* (1:17), the Vilna Gaon

observes similarly that the meaning of the concept of the *Shechinah's* presence is that it is present within the hearts of the Jewish People, as it says, "They shall make for Me a Mikdash, and I shall dwell in their midst" (*Shemos* 25:8) — meaning, within the Jewish People themselves. However, "They need a special place where all their hearts can converge together, and how shall all the hearts of all Yisrael converge? *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* therefore commanded, "They shall set aside a contribution for Me ... from every man whose heart prompts him [to donate]" (*ibid. pasuk* 2)." This unison of Klal Yisrael's hearts is the consequence of uniting around a shared goal, like the points along a circle's circumference all focused upon its center.

Commenting on the *haftarah* of *parshas Devarim*, Rav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk points out (in *Meshech Chochmah*) that each Jew has his own special virtue that gives Heaven satisfaction: this person's fear of Heaven, that one's righteousness, another one's love of other Jews, one's generosity, and another's Torah study, etc. — yet each one lacks the others' virtues. Thus, he notes, "The purpose of the Beis Hamikdash was to unite all of Yisrael and their hearts as one, in convergence upon one place."

The second Beis Hamikdash was thus the focal point of the Jewish nation's unity and the means of their collective rectification. In *Netzach Yisrael*, the Maharal explains accordingly: "This is why the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on account of baseless hatred, for their hearts were divided, and they were fragmented and were not worthy [of the presence] of the Beis Hamikdash, whose purpose was [fostering] the Jewish nation's unity."

☛ Different Goals, Different Sizes

THIS IDEA YIELDS an important insight: the first Beis Hamikdash symbolized Hashem's love for His people and, as we have seen, when there is love between two parties, spatial constraints are insignificant. By contrast, the purpose of the second Beis Hamikdash was to foster love and unity *within the Jewish nation*, among and between Jews

themselves, rather than between them and their Maker. Its physical dimensions thus needed to be greater.

Although the second Beis Hamikdash exceeded the first in size, the *Shechinah's* presence in the first and the relatively smaller Beis Hamikdash was superior, for its diminished physical dimension expressed Hashem's love for His people.

☛ The Dog and the Lion

THE *SHECHINAH'S* PRESENCE in the first Beis Hamikdash is compared to a crouching lion, and its presence in the second Beis Hamikdash to a crouching dog. The lion's regal bearing bespeaks dignity. He inspires fear in those who approach him, and nobody dares disturb his repose. His crouching thus serves his own purposes. The dog, on the other hand, is loyal to his master. He crouches while awaiting his master's arrival; that is, for a purpose outside of himself — for his master's sake.

The first Beis Hamikdash served the purpose of the *Shechinah* itself, signified by the crouching lion. The *Shechinah* descended to dwell in the lower world so that Yisrael could bind themselves to it, thereby crowning Hashem king of this world as well as of the Upper Worlds.

By contrast, the purpose of the second Beis Hamikdash was the rectification of man. The *Shechinah* therefore wasn't present there in its full intensity; it was represented by the crouching of a dog, not that of a lion. Its presence served man's needs, to facilitate the unification of the people's hearts in pursuit of a common, spiritual goal. The purpose of the second Beis Hamikdash was not to serve as a means of the *Shechinah* dwelling among us, but rather to enable the members of the Jewish nation to connect with each other and unite.

We have learned that the degree of the *Shechinah's* intensity in the *Batei Mikdash* was a function of their respective purposes.

The purpose of the first Beis Hamikdash was to provide a means whereby the *Shechinah* could dwell in the lower world, facilitating

Yisrael's attachment to it and bringing about Hashem's open dominion in this lower world as well. For this state of affairs to endure, there had to be purity among Yisrael, and the incidence of the three most serious sins — idolatry, immortality, and murder — brought about their defilement and impurity, rendering the realization of this goal impossible and causing the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash.

By contrast, the purpose of the second Beis Hamikdash was man's rectification, with the hearts of all of Yisrael uniting around a common, spiritual goal. This Beis Hamikdash was destroyed as a result of baseless hatred and fragmentation.

It is therefore obvious that unity of purpose is a necessary precondition for rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash. Purity, too, is needed in order to restore the intensity of the *Shechinah's* presence therein to its level in the first Beis Hamikdash.

Naso

“A King Tied to Braids”

☛ What Holiness Does Hair Possess?

THE *NAZIR* MAY not eat grapes or drink wine. He may not contract the impurity that is conferred by a dead body, and he must allow his hair to grow.

All this is mandated by the Torah, where it is written: “During the entire period of his separation vow, no razor may be used on [the hair of] his head. Until the completion of the period that he separates himself for Hashem’s sake, he shall remain holy [by letting] the hair of his head grow wild. During the entire period of separating himself for Hashem’s sake, he must not enter the same building as a dead person. He must not become impure even for his father, mother, brother, or sister when they die, for his G-d’s distinguishing crown is on his head. Throughout the period of his separation, he shall be sanctified for Hashem’s sake” (*Bamidbar* 6:5–8).

In the course of these *pesukim*, it is written twice that the *nazir* is suffused with holiness: “He shall remain holy” (*pasuk* 6) and “He shall be sanctified” (*pasuk* 8). Why mention this twice? Rashi explains that *pasuk* 8 “refers to the holiness sanctifying his body, preventing him from becoming impure for a dead body,” i.e., that due to his holiness, he is forbidden to become impure. *Pasuk* 6, on the other hand, refers to the holiness of the *nazir*’s hair, which leads to his obligation to let “the hair of his head grow wild.”

Rashi's source for this is the *Sifri* (*Bamidbar* 25), where Chazal say, "He shall remain holy' (*pasuk* 6) — this is the hair's holiness. You say that this refers to the hair's holiness, but maybe it refers to the body's holiness? When it says, 'He shall be sanctified for Hashem's sake' (*pasuk* 8), the body's holiness has already been mentioned. To what then does 'He shall remain holy' refer? It refers to the hair's holiness."

Why should the *nazir's* hair become holy? We can understand the *nazir* himself becoming holy due to his abstention from certain material items, but why should his hair become holy? What holiness does hair have?

☛ The *Nazir* Is a Sinner — Yet His Hair Is Holy

THE QUESTION IS magnified upon studying the Gemara in *maseches Ta'anis* (11a), where we find Shmuel and Rabbi Elazar disputing whether a *nazir* is regarded as holy or a sinner for having voluntarily abstained from things that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created for the sake of His glory.

According to Shmuel, a *nazir* is called a sinner, which is why one of the sacrifices he has to offer at the end of his period of *nezirus* is a *chatas*, a sin offering, as it says, "The *kohen* ... shall atone for him for having sinned in regard to the soul and shall sanctify his head on that day" (*ibid. pasuk* 11). "In regard to which soul has he sinned?" asks Shmuel, to which he responds, "This refers to having deprived himself of wine."

Rabbi Elazar, on the other hand, maintains that the *nazir* is called holy, as it says, "He shall remain holy, growing the hair of his head wild" (*pasuk* 6).

The Gemara asks how Shmuel can call a *nazir* a sinner when the Torah calls him holy and responds that *pasuk* 6 isn't referring to the *nazir* himself, but only to his hair.

Thus, even according to the opinion that the *nazir* himself is not holy — and is in fact a sinner — his hair *is* holy! How are we to understand this?

☛ The *Nazir's* Hair Is Akin to a Cord Attaching Him to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*

SO SUBLIME IS the holiness of the *nazir's* hair that when he concludes his period of *nezirus* and offers the sacrifices mandated by the Torah, the fuel beneath the pot in which the meat of his *shelamim* sacrifice is cooked is the hair that has been shorn from his head. The Torah says, “The *nazir* shall shave the hair of his head that is in a state of *nezirus* ... and shall take the hair of his head in its state of *nezirus* and place it on the fire that is underneath the *shelamim* offering” (ibid. *pasuk* 18). His shorn hair is thus being used for a higher purpose.

In his commentary to *Shir Hashirim* (7:6) Rashi goes even further. He explains that the *pasuk*, “Your head [adornment] upon you [inspires awe] like [Mount] Carmel, and the braids on your head are like purple twine; the King[’s Name] is bound to [your] tresses,” refers to the *nazir*: “‘The braids upon your head’ — the braided hair of your *nezirus* is as becoming as purple twine.” Rashi then comments on the *pasuk's* concluding words: “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Name is attached to [your] curled tresses, as it says [of the *nazir*], ‘The crown of his G-d is upon his head’ (*Bamidbar* 6:8).”

The *nazir's* hair, in other words, is akin to a cord creating a bond between the person and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Name. How are we to understand these sublime ideas?

☛ Growing Hair in Order to Cut It

NOW, THERE SEEMS to be something contradictory about the *nazir* and his hair. Throughout the duration of his *nezirus*, he is commanded to let his hair grow, but upon its conclusion, he is instructed to shave it all off and offer it to Hashem. Is the ultimate purpose the growth of his hair or its shaving? Moreover, in *maseches Nedarim* (9b), we find the following account:

“Shimon Hatzaddik said, ‘...On one occasion a person came — a

nazir from the South — and I saw that he had beautiful eyes, a comely appearance, and his locks were arranged in curls. I said to him, “My son, what prompts you to ruin this comely hair of yours?” He told me, “I was [working as] a shepherd for my father in my town. I went to fill up water from the well and looked at my reflection. My inclination hastened to [overwhelm] me and sought to drive me out of the world. I addressed it: ‘Evil one! Why are you taking pride in a world that is not yours, in someone that is going to be [reduced to] worm and maggot? I swear to shave you for the sake of Heaven!’” I immediately rose and kissed him on his head. “My son,” I told him, “May there be many individuals among Yisrael who undertake *nezirus* like you.””

If the lad’s intention was to remove his hair in order to overcome his inclinations, he could have shaved it off immediately. Why did he have to first grow his hair as a *nazir* before shaving it off for his Creator’s sake?

☛ *Nezirus* Centers upon the *Nazir*’s Head

THE HOLINESS OF the *nazir*’s hair is just one aspect of the focus upon his head as the highlight of the entire *nezirus*.

The Torah says of a *nazir* who becomes impure, “And if someone with him [under the same roofing] dies suddenly [or] unexpectedly and makes *his head impure when it is in its state of nezirus*, he shall shave his head...” (*Bamidbar* *ibid.* *pasuk* 9). The Torah doesn’t mention the impurity of the *nazir*’s body or simply of “the *nazir*” as a person; it focuses solely on the impurity of his head.

It is written similarly, “The *nazir* shall shave the hair of *his head that is in a state of nezirus* ... and shall take the hair of *his head in its state of nezirus* and place it...” (*ibid.* *pasuk* 18). This all indicates that the *nezirus* is most evident in regard to the *nazir*’s head. In the *Sifri Zuta*, we find this explicitly: “‘The crown of his G-d is upon his head’ — this tells us that *nezirus* is in the head.”

Why is *nezirus* particularly associated with the head?

☛ *Nezirus* Denotes a Royal Diadem

IN HIS COMMENTARY to the *pasuk*, “A man or woman who distinguishes him- or herself by making a vow of *nezirus* to separate himself [from wine] for the sake of Hashem” (ibid. *pasuk* 2), the Ibn Ezra notes that the term *nezirus* has two connotations.

One meaning is separation and isolation, in which sense the word is used in the *pasuk*, “Speak to Aharon and his sons, and they shall separate (*v’yinazeru*) from the holy items of Bnei Yisrael” (*Vayikra* 22:2). The *nazir* indeed separates himself from physical desires.

The word’s second meaning is a diadem, a crown that rests upon the *nazir*’s head.

The Ibn Ezra prefers the second meaning, because the *pasuk* says, “For the crown of his G-d is upon his head.” He accordingly explains that the *nazir* is regarded as a king and accepts a royal crown, because “All people are servants of worldly desires, and the true king who bears a diadem and a royal crown upon his head is any person who is free from desires.”

☛ Why Does a *Nazir* Have a Crown?

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Sanhedrin* 100a), the Maharal explains that “There are two parts to every crown.” One of these is the part that covers the head while the other part rises upward, extending above the head.

A crown is an adornment of the head, which is the seat of the intellect. The part of it that reaches upward symbolizes that its bearer draws his distinction from a Higher Source. It adorns the king’s head to indicate his elevation above everyone else. The *nazir* is similarly elevated above others, separated from them by his holiness and abstinence.

As the Maharal writes (*Chiddushei Aggados to Sotah* 10a) in regard to the *pasuk*, “He shall remain holy [by letting] the hair of his

head grow wild,” “For the head is the vessel that is ready to receive the holiness of the *nazir*. Therefore, it is written, ‘for the crown of his G-d is upon his head,’ and it is also written, ‘He shall sanctify his head on that day,’ and it is like the crown. A king who bears a crown is separate from the entire people, and therefore it is written of the *nazir*, ‘for the crown of his G-d is upon his head,’ for the holy individual is set apart in his holiness from the other things that are not holy, and going even farther than this is a *nazir*, who is apart from physical desires, for all people have bodies, and this [*nazir*] is apart from the world, abstaining from wine, which is desirable for the eyes.”

☛ The Head Is the Seat of the Intellectual Faculties

THE MAHARAL GOES ON to explain why *nezirus* is focused upon the *nazir*’s head: “because the head is the seat of the intellectual, non-physical faculties, which are worthy of holiness, for when he separates from his body, the non-physical faculties receive Divine holiness, and this is the holiness of the head.” In other words, the source of a person’s holiness is his spiritual component, and his ability to bind himself to abstract, spiritual pursuits is within his head. It is thus clear that it is the *nazir*’s head that becomes holy and that it represents the focus and purpose of his *nezirus*. The crown he receives is placed upon his head as evidence that he is a spiritually elevated person who has put his head and spiritual powers in control of his physical desires.

☛ Cutting Hair Is Forbidden in Order to Demonstrate the Spirit’s Superiority over the Body

SINCE THE *NAZIR*’S head is the main focus of his *nezirus*, explains the Maharal, his hair, which grows from his head, is holy, for whatever issues from something holy is itself holy. “And it becomes forbidden to destroy the hair of his head, for every holy item sustains no damage, and it is therefore forbidden to destroy them.”

It is evident from *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 374) that man is a combination of physicality and spirituality, which are in constant conflict. The *nazir* has discovered the way to navigate this conflict, putting his mind in control of his desires. He thereby crowns himself with the crown of *nezirus*, which takes the form of the prohibition against cutting his hair. The hair that the *nazir* allows to grow wild thus represents his mind's mastery over his physical desires.

In the Maharal's words: "This is the holiness and the virtue of the *nazir*, when he sets aside preoccupation with physicality and breaks his desires in a way that does not cause the utter destruction of the [body that] house[s him], for instance, by abstaining from drinking wine and by growing his hair. Through this, his inclination is subdued, and the house (i.e., his body) will not spring a leak, nor will its corners be destroyed. Instead, the mind's work will be strengthened within it, and [the mind's] ways will provide illumination, and Hashem's glory will rest upon it. The purpose of Creation will be fulfilled in this person, [namely,] that the work (i.e., influence) of a person's mind should not be diminished on account of its partnership with its physical component."

☞ Rather than Battling His Body, the *Nazir* Elevates and Sanctifies It

THIS ENABLES US to understand the Gemara's account of the young *nazir* whose inclination threatened to overwhelm him when he saw his face reflected in the water and noticed his handsomeness. Had he shaved his hair off straightaway, although he would have momentarily quashed his unsavory impulses, this would have amounted to running away from the problem as opposed to putting his mind in control of his body. That is the approach adopted by non-Jewish ascetics, who view the body and its impulses as enemies that must be subdued. In the Torah's outlook, though, rather than identifying the material world as an enemy, the *nazir* sees it as a means of attaining holiness. His *nezirus* sanctifies and elevates his hair rather than

fighting it. The *nazir* doesn't crush the body's rebellion against the King; he fixes the causes of the rebellion and brings the rebels under the King's control. The *nazir* doesn't fight his body; he sanctifies it.

We have learned that the *nazir* embarks upon a process that puts his intellect in control of his body. The hair on his head represents a crown resting upon the seat of his intellect, and it therefore becomes holy. Only upon the conclusion of his *nezirus* does the *nazir* divest himself of his crown by shaving his hair off, but this hair, which elevated him to spiritual heights, remains a repository of holiness and serves as fuel for cooking his sacrifice — veritable “tresses bound to the King's Name.”

Beha'alosecha

Man's Soul Is Hashem's Lamp

☛ The Fivefold Mention of “Bnei Yisrael” Corresponds to the Five Books of the Torah

THE LEVIYIM WERE set apart from the rest of Bnei Yisrael and designated to engage in the holy work of transporting the Mishkan and assisting in its operation. In regard to this, the Torah reports that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Moshe, “I have presented the Leviyim to be given over to Aharon and his sons from among Bnei Yisrael to perform Bnei Yisrael’s service in the Tent of Meeting and to atone for Bnei Yisrael; thus, there will be no plague among Bnei Yisrael when (i.e., as there would be were) Bnei Yisrael [to] approach the Sanctuary” (*Bamidbar* 8:19).

The term Bnei Yisrael is repeated five times in this *pasuk*, even when it seems to be entirely redundant. What lesson does this convey?

Basing himself on the Midrash, Rashi explains, “It says ‘Bnei Yisrael’ five times in this verse to inform us of Heaven’s fondness for them, as they are repeated in a single *pasuk* the same number of times as the Torah’s five *chumashim*.”

Bnei Yisrael are thus equated in some way with the five *chumashim*, and it is in order to indicate this — and Heaven’s fondness towards them — that they are mentioned five times.

However, we still need to understand why this praise of Yisrael appears in this particular *pasuk* and in just what way Yisrael are comparable to the five *chumashim*.

☛ The Connection between the Holy Service of the Leviyim and Bnei Yisrael's Virtue

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal offers two possible explanations for the Torah juxtaposing this message with the appointment of the Leviyim to the task of carrying out their holy service.

His first explanation is that the Leviyim were meant to realize that their service atones for a holy nation that is equated with the Torah, for whose sake the entire world was created. In the Maharal's words, "He told the Leviyim, 'Fortunate are you that you merit atoning for Bnei Yisrael,' and He mentions Bnei Yisrael five times in a single verse corresponding to the Torah's five *chumashim*, to make known that Yisrael and the Torah's five *chumashim* are parallel, for the world was created for the sake of them both" (as Rashi explains on *Bereishis* 1:1).

The Maharal's second explanation is, "The *pasuk* comes to warn the Leviyim to protect the Mikdash [and ensure] that Bnei Yisrael do not approach the Mishkan so that no Divine anger should flare against Bnei Yisrael, [thereby] causing their deaths, for each individual Yisrael is as important as [all of] the Torah's five *chumashim*." The Maharal then explains that a Jew who dies is compared to a *sefer Torah* that was burned, as we find in *maseches Mo'ed Katan* (25a), where the Gemara says, "A person who stands by a dying Jew as his soul is departing is obligated to rend his garment [in mourning]. To what is this comparable? To a burning *sefer Torah* [upon seeing which a person must rend his garment]." The reason that a dying Jew is like a burning *sefer Torah*, says Rashi (on the Rif, *Mo'ed Katan* *ibid.*), is "because [as long as the Jew remained alive] he was still able to learn Torah." That potential for studying Torah is lost upon a Jew's death.

Yet a human being remains a human being, not the actual Torah. In what way are we to understand the individual Jew's resemblance to the Five Books of the Torah, to the extent that witnessing his death incurs the same obligation to rend one's garment as witnessing a *sefer Torah* burning?

☛ Man's Five Levels

THE MISHNAH (*AVOS* 2:9) lists Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai's five disciples, mentioning the praises that their teacher bestowed upon each of them: "Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos is a limed cistern that does not lose a drop; Rabbi Yehoshua — fortunate is the one who gave birth to him; Rabbi Yosi is a pious individual; Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel fears sin; Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is a burgeoning well-spring."

Now, *maseches Avos* is not a mere historical record. What lesson is the Mishnah's enumeration of these disciples and their individual virtues supposed to convey to us?

In *Derech Chaim*, the Maharal explains that the Mishnah teaches us that the five levels of each person's ethical makeup correspond to the virtues of these five special disciples of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai.

These five levels also play a role in determining the *erech* (fixed value) assigned to a person by the Torah, which ranges between five *shekalim* for a young male child and fifty *shekalim* for a male adult (*Vayikra* 27:3–6). The Maharal explains that these values, which are multiples of five, reflect a person's five levels. In this respect, man is comparable to a *sefer Torah*, which is comprised of five books.

☛ Five Divisions of Mental Faculties and Properties

THE MAHARAL POINTS to a parallel between the correspondence of man's five levels to the five *chumashim* and the Rambam's comments along similar lines in the first chapter of his ethical treatise, *Shemonah Perakim*. The Rambam explains there that the division into five distinct parts of a person's soul or life force has a practical outcome that affects his activity and characteristics. He explains that these five parts are the following forces or energies: "the sustaining, the sensory, the imaginative, the arousing, and the intellectual," describing the operation of each of them as follows:

- The sustaining energy — this is the force that attracts (i.e., that draws food from external sources into the body), maintains, digests, expels residue, engenders growth and reproduction, and distinguishes between fluids, separating that which is fit for sustenance and that which deserves to be rejected.
- The sensory energy — these are the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and feeling. This part [of the life force] is everywhere in the body rather than being confined to a particular organ.
- The imaginative energy — this is the imagination, which recalls previous sensory impressions after they have receded from the immediate impression of the senses that apprehended them; [this force] will superimpose some [such impressions] upon others and will separate some from others... [so that,] for example, a person will imagine an iron ship traveling in the air ... the imaginative force will assemble such images and yield them through the imagination.
- The arousing energy — this is the force responsible for a person craving something or loathing it. From this force arise the various actions manifest in seeking or fleeing, choosing something or distancing oneself from it, anger and reconciliation, fear and boldness, cruelty and mercy, and love and hatred. The agents for carrying out these impulses are all the body's limbs: the strength of the hand for grasping, of the leg for walking, of the eye for seeing, of the heart for courage or fear, and so on for the other limbs and organs, both hidden and visible.
- The intellectual energy — this is the force within man with which he grasps concepts, engages in reflection, and acquires proficiency in various fields of knowledge. Also, with this force he distinguishes between those activities that are unseemly and those that are pleasurable. Some of these activities are practical in nature while others are reflective.

☛ The Significance of the Parallel between Man's Soul and the Five *Chumashim*

THIS PARALLEL BETWEEN the five books of the Torah and the five spiritual levels of man's soul is the key to understanding Chazal's observation (*Shabbos* 105b) that the soul's departure from the body is akin to a *sefer Torah* being burned, and thus, "A person who witnesses a soul departing must rend [his clothing]." When a person's soul departs, this is akin to the loss of the Torah, which is divided into five *chumashim*, because man serves as the instrument for Torah's practical implementation by activating his five energies — his five-pronged life force — as well as his individual characteristics in order to fulfill the Torah in practice. The loss of this soul thus represents the loss of an instrument for (i.e., a means of achieving) Torah's actualization.

☛ *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, Yechidah* — The Five Components of a Person's Spiritual Profile

A FURTHER DIMENSION of the parallel between man's five levels and the Torah's five *chumashim* becomes evident when we realize that man's spiritual life force also exists on five levels. The Midrash comments (*Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9) that man's soul is split into five parts, which together confer his spiritual stature. The more elevated his stature, the more limited its bond to the body. The Midrash states that "Man's soul is referred to by five terms: *nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, and yechidah*. The initial letters of these five terms yield the acronym *NaRa"N ChaY*."

The Midrash provides the following explanation of these terms:

1. *Nefesh* provides vitality to the body's limbs and organs, by virtue of which the body maintains warmth, grows, and expands (as in the Aramaic word *nafish*, which denotes growth and expansion). This level of the soul is referred to as "the animalistic soul" because it is also present in animals, is always

attached to the body (even during sleep), and is contained in and embodied by the blood, as the *pasuk* says, “For the blood is the soul” (*Devarim* 12:23).

2. *Ruach* is the property that facilitates verbal communication. This is apparent from Onkelos’s translation of the *pasuk*’s words, “Thus man became an [intelligent] living being” (*Bereishis* 2:7) as “a communicative spirit.” This faculty departs from man while he sleeps and returns to him upon awakening; its ascent to Heaven during sleep and its descent upon his arousal is apparent from the *pasuk*, “Who is aware that it is a person’s spirit that rises up [to Heaven]...?” (*Koheles* 3:21). Man’s communicative faculty is termed *ruach* because it is responsible for raising and lifting him beyond the sphere of his physical activities and instilling awareness into him “such that it lifts his feet above the ground,” as the Maharal writes.

This *ruach* operates above ground level and can elevate material objects above itself. “You will find that *ruach* has the ability to elevate other things, as it is written, ‘A *ruach* lifted me’ (*Yechezkel* 3:12) and ‘A *ruach* of Hashem will carry you’ (*Melachim I*, 18:12),” writes the Maharal.

3. *Neshamah* confers a person’s nature and characteristics. A person’s disposition is referred to as *neshamah*, for it determines his *neshimah* (his breath or breathing rate), which is influenced by his emotional state. When a person is angry or excited, for example, his breaths are shorter and faster. The *neshamah* also expresses a person’s finer disposition — his ability to be easygoing, to forgo, and to deal amiably with others. The *neshamah* illuminates man in an ethereal light, for it is “the radiance and the spark flowing from Hashem, may He be elevated, as it says, ‘For man’s *neshamah* is Hashem’s lamp’ (*Mishlei* 20:27),” as the Maharal writes.
4. *Chayah* is man’s higher life source, the source of all his energy and movement which provides his limbs with vitality

and maintains his constant heartbeat. The organs have no independent vitality, and it is this part of the soul that stands on its own in untainted purity, providing the stimulus that powers their activity. Since this force remains apart from all else, leading no material existence whatsoever, it cannot be sullied or adulterated “by anything undignified or impure.” The soul is pure, as Chazal say in *Berachos* (60b), “The soul You have placed within me is pure.”

5. *Yechidah* (“single unit”) is so named “because,” as the Midrash says, “all of a person’s other limbs are paired (i.e., two arms, legs, eyes, ears, nostrils, lungs, and kidneys; there are multiple organs of digestion; and even the brain and heart have a paired structure, with two double chambers in the heart and two brain lobes), whereas it (the soul) is a single unit within the body.” In other words, the soul is the core and power source of life that is undivided. This is a person’s highest and most sublime part, his Divine spark, as per Chazal’s observation on the *pasuk*, “He inspired into his nostrils a soul of life” (*Bereishis* *ibid.*) — “He who breathes life into another breathes part of himself.”

☞ The Five Afflictions of Yom Kippur Correspond to the Five Parts of the Soul

IN HIS *Discourse for Shabbos Teshuvah*, the Maharal explains that the purpose of the five afflictions we are commanded to endure on Yom Kippur is “to diminish and banish [our] physicality,” as a means of empowering the five parts of the spiritual soul, as follows:

1. Abstaining from food and drink diminishes a person’s physical vitality that is regulated by the *nefesh*.
2. Refraining from wearing leather footwear — a shoe separates a person from the ground. When he is shoeless, his feet are not kept above the ground and bang against it. This affliction

corresponds to the element of *ruach* within a person, which elevates him beyond his physical existence, enabling him to raise his feet above the ground.

3. Abstaining from washing the body — washing is physically pleasurable and imparts radiance, form, and comeliness to a person's appearance. This affliction corresponds to the *neshamah*, which illumines a person, lending him form and comeliness in the eyes of his beholders.
4. Abstaining from anointing the body with oil — anointing the body with oil prevents it from becoming tainted by filth and corresponds to the part of the soul known as *chayah*, which provides a person with power and vitality, for this part of the soul remains pure and is impervious to “anything undignified or impure.”
5. Abstaining from marital relations — “This corresponds to the [part of the soul] named *yechidah*, for the soul is a single unit and is present within the body,” whereas marital relations lead to the merging and unification of two people [in their offspring,] as it says, “They shall become one flesh” (ibid., *pasuk* 24). “Therefore, abstention from marital relations diminishes the body's unity.”

☛ The Intellectual Torah Has No Physical Incarnation Whatsoever

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the purpose of the five afflictions of Yom Kippur is to diminish man's physicality to the point where his soul is wholly pure and is uninfluenced by the body's coarseness, as befits its spirituality and holiness. “You also find that all the measures of Yom Kippur come to banish and diminish the body. Therefore, on this day alone, the *Kohen Gadol* was allowed to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, which was wholly sanctified from any material taint, and there was nothing there besides the *aron* where the two *luchos habris* rested and the [wholly] intellectual Torah. The Torah,

which is [wholly] intellectual, has no physical foothold whatsoever, and in fact, when the body is weakened and its power is waning and diminishing, the intellect becomes dominant. This proves that the [wholly] intellectual Torah has no part whatsoever in the material realm.”

☞ “My Lamp Is in Your Hand and Your Lamp Is in Mine”

MAN RECEIVES A body and a soul. Receiving the Torah obliges us to limit our pursuit of and yearning for physical desires and to engage in empowering our spiritual component that resides within us, which is our life and soul and the light that illumines our lives.

We find accordingly in *Shemos Rabbah* (36:3), “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* tells man, ‘My lamp is in your hand and your lamp is in Mine.’ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s lamp is the Torah, as it says, ‘For a mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is light’ (*Mishlei* 6:23). How is a mitzvah a lamp? Whoever fulfills a mitzvah, it is as though he lights a lamp before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and revives his soul, which is called a lamp, as it says, ‘Hashem’s lamp is man’s soul’ (*ibid.* 20:27).”

We have seen that Bnei Yisrael as a whole are likened to the five *chumashim* of the Torah, and moreover, each and every individual Jew is equivalent to the five *chumashim*, for a Jewish soul is the implement for bringing the Torah to fruition.

Man’s ethical makeup consists of five levels, as does the spiritual life force that permeates him. His soul, too, is composed of five parts: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chayah* and *yechidah* (whose acronym is *NaRa”N ChaY*). Having received the Torah, each of us must fortify the five levels of spirituality within himself and increase their vitality through fulfilling mitzvos. Man thus lights a lamp, as it were, which is his own soul. Hashem thereupon illuminates his soul, for we hold *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s lamp — the Torah — while He holds ours — our soul.

Shelach

Unjustified Weeping Elicits Weeping for Future Generations

Seeming Incongruity in the Severity of Bnei Yisrael's Punishment for Weeping in the Desert

THE SPIES WHO were sent to scout out the land of Canaan prior to Bnei Yisrael's entry returned with a grim report, leading the people to weep in despair. The entire nation shed tears, as it says, "The whole assembly raised their voices and shouted, and that night, the people wept" (*Bamidbar* 14:1).

These tears were unjustified, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had promised to bring them into a good land, and they had already witnessed the miracles He had performed for them in Egypt and when splitting the sea. Their punishment for those tears of unjustified despair was harsh indeed. The Torah tells us that Hashem responded: "Say to them, 'Hashem declares, "As [surely as] I am alive, the very thing of which you spoke for Me to hear, this I will do to you: your corpses will fall in this desert; all of you who are counted in any of your censuses — those twenty years old and over — whom you caused to complain against Me. None of you will enter the land regarding which I raised My hand [in oath] to settle you there, except for Kaleb the son of Yefuneh and Yehoshua the son of Nun. And your young children about whom you said, 'They will be left for plunder' — I will bring them there, and they will experience the land that you have despised. But your own corpses will fall in this desert'" (ibid. *pesukim* 28–32).

At first glance, this punishment seems overly harsh. What was so terrible about the people weeping that an entire generation was sentenced to perish in the desert, without any of them meriting entry into the land they had been promised would become theirs?

☛ How Is This Unjustified Weeping Linked to Future Generations' Weeping?

NOW, IT MIGHT be argued that the generation's fate was not a form of punishment, but rather, their very own foreboding simply became reality, as the *pasuk* states explicitly: "The very thing of which you spoke for Me to hear, this I will do to you." Since they had rejected the precious land, it would not be given to them. Eretz Yisrael is a wonderful gift, and the Jewish People were not forced to accept it.

However, it is clear from the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 104b) that the consequence of this weeping extended far beyond that generation, affecting the Jewish nation for eternity. The Gemara tells us that the night on which Bnei Yisrael shed their unjustified tears was the night of the ninth of Av, and "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, 'You have cried tears for no reason; I shall institute weeping for your future generations.'"

Indeed, both *Batei Mikdash* were destroyed on Tishah B'Av, as the Gemara tells us in *Arachin* (11b). From the *pesukim* in *Tehillim* (106:24–27), it is clear that the punishment of losing Eretz Yisrael was subsequently visited upon the generation's descendants, who were exiled among the gentile nations and scattered throughout the world: "They despised the precious land; they did not believe His word. They grumbled in their tents; they did not listen to Hashem's voice. He swore to them to fell them in the desert and to cast their descendents among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries."

Why did future generations deserve such a terrible punishment on account of the tears that were shed by that single generation? And how is the spies' sin connected to the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*? In order to better understand this topic, we must examine the implications and consequences of the sin of the spies.

☛ The Spies' Sin Was Responsible for the Generation's Failure to Offer the *Pesach* Sacrifice

BAMIDBAR OPENS WITH the counting of Bnei Yisrael: “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month of the second year since they came out of the land of Egypt, saying, ‘Compute the total number of the entire community of Bnei Yisrael by their family groupings, following their fathers’ lineage; every male shall be counted by a head count, according to the number of names’” (*Bamidbar* 1:1–2).

As the Torah specifies, this counting took place in the second month, the month of Iyar.

No fewer than nine chapters later, the Torah recounts earlier events that took place in the first month, the month of Nisan! In *parshas Beha’alosecha*, it is written, “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert in the second year since they came out of the land of Egypt, saying: ‘Bnei Yisrael shall carry out [the service of] the *Pesach* sacrifice at its appointed time’” (*Bamidbar* 9:1–2).

Why does *Bamidbar* begin with an event that took place in the month of Iyar, only later returning to the *Pesach* sacrifice that was offered in Nisan? Rashi (*ibid.* 9:1) writes, “And why didn’t it begin with this [episode]? Because it mentions Yisrael’s disgrace, for throughout the forty years that Yisrael were in the desert, they only offered this one *Pesach* sacrifice.”

The generation that left Egypt offered the *Pesach* sacrifice just once, a year after they left Egypt, but during the following thirty-nine years that they tarried in the desert, they didn’t offer it once. *Bamidbar* therefore doesn’t open with this episode, which highlights Bnei Yisrael’s disgrace. Why didn’t Bnei Yisrael offer the *Pesach* sacrifice during those thirty-nine years?

Tosafos in *maseches Kiddushin* (37b, s.v. *Ho’il*) explains that this was a consequence of the sin of the spies. Tosafos details the following chain of circumstances:

The generation did not offer the *Pesach* sacrifice because either

they or their sons that had been born since the departure from Egypt were uncircumcised, and the Torah says, “Any uncircumcised male may not eat it” (*Shemos* 12:48).

“And why did they not perform circumcision?” ask Tosafos, “Because the northerly wind didn’t blow for them throughout the forty years that they spent in the desert.” As to the reason why no northerly wind blew, Tosafos explain that this was, “because they were disgraced by the sin of the spies.”

Thirty-nine years of failing to offer the *Pesach* sacrifice was thus the end result of a series of circumstances that began with the sin of the spies. However, the apparent absence of any direct connection between the *Pesach* sacrifice and the spies’ sin leaves it unclear how much disgrace in not having offered the sacrifice there actually was.

☛ No *Pesach* Sacrifice before Entering Eretz Yisrael

RASHI OFFERS A drastically different explanation of why the generation that left Egypt did not offer the *Pesach* sacrifice throughout the thirty-nine years.

According to Rashi, there is a fundamental difference between the *Pesach* sacrifice that Bnei Yisrael offered in Egypt prior to their departure and the subsequent annual obligation to offer the sacrifice.

In regard to all subsequent *Pesachim*, the Torah says, “And it shall be, when you come into the land that Hashem shall give you, as He has said, you shall then observe this service” (*ibid. pasuk* 25). Rashi explains, “Scripture makes this mitzvah contingent upon entering the land, and in the desert, they were only obligated to make the single *Pesach* that they made in the second year by Divine command.”

Rather than a consequence of being uncircumcised, the generation’s failure to offer the *Pesach* sacrifice was due to the absence of any obligation prior to their entering Eretz Yisrael. This makes understanding what disgrace this involved even harder, and consequently why *Bamidbar* does not open with the account of the *Pesach* sacrifice that was offered “in the first month” of the second year.

☛ The Disgrace Was the Spies' Sin

THIS VERY QUESTION is asked by Tosafos on Rashi's explanation: "Should you ask, since by rights they were not supposed to offer the *Pesach* sacrifice before entering Eretz Yisrael, what disgrace did their failure imply?" If the reason they couldn't offer the *Pesach* is because they were uncircumcised, we understand why *Bamidbar* doesn't begin with the *Pesach* offering, because this situation was brought about by their sin, but if it was because they were altogether exempt before entering Eretz Yisrael, where is the disgrace?

Tosafos resolve the difficulty: "Their disgrace was that they tarried forty years before entering Eretz Yisrael due to the sin of the spies, and because of this, they remained exempt, whereas had they merited entering Eretz Yisrael immediately, they would have become obligated right away." In other words, they are not considered blameworthy for not having brought the sacrifice earlier, but for not having entered Eretz Yisrael earlier on account of the spies' sin.

This approach also renders the disgrace indirect — Bnei Yisrael's exemption from offering the *Pesach* merely serves as an indication of their failure to enter Eretz Yisrael because of the sin of the spies.

However, a plain reading of Chazal's statement indicates that their disgrace actually lay in not having offered the *Pesach*, not merely because it points indirectly to another sin that prevented them from entering Eretz Yisrael.

☛ Why Should the *Pesach* Sacrifice Be Contingent upon Entering the Land?

THE HALACHAH THAT Rashi cites that there was no obligation to offer the *Pesach* before entering Eretz Yisrael seems puzzling. The general rule is that those mitzvos whose fulfillment is land-based take effect only upon arriving in Eretz Yisrael. Accordingly, since offering the *Pesach* sacrifice is not land-based, its purpose being to commemorate the great miracle of the Exodus from Egypt rather

then arrival in Eretz Yisrael, why should its fulfillment be suspended prior to that?

Moreover, how can it be that the very generation that departed from Egypt and personally experienced this great miracle should be exempt from offering the *Pesach* sacrifice? Surely, it would be appropriate for the actual beneficiaries of the miracle to celebrate Pesach with redoubled enthusiasm.

☛ The Unfulfilled Fifth Stage of the Redemption — “I Shall Bring”

THE MIDRASH (*SHEMOS RABBAH* 6:4) lists the four terms of redemption that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* uttered when speaking to Moshe about the approaching Exodus: “I will free,” “I will release,” “I will redeem,” and “I will adopt.” Corresponding to these, Chazal instituted the obligation to drink four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder. However, Chazal note the Torah’s mention of a fifth expression of redemption: “I will bring.” Why is no corresponding fifth cup of wine drunk on the Seder night?

An answer to this question is that the promise, “I will bring you to the land” will be fulfilled only with the Jewish nation’s complete and final redemption, and the cup of Eliyahu — which is filled towards the conclusion of the Seder but is not drunk — corresponds to this promise.

This answer seems strange, for although the nation didn’t enter Eretz Yisrael immediately, it did happen eventually, albeit forty years after the Exodus from Egypt. Did the nation’s exile several centuries after arriving in Eretz Yisrael render their possession of it only temporary?

☛ The Maharal’s Approach

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 8), the Maharal offers a highly novel insight, whereby the actual Exodus from Egypt marked the start of

Yisrael's redemptive process — both in the physical and spiritual realms — the culmination of which was subsequently aborted by the spies' sin.

Bnei Yisrael's departure from Egypt was not simply a matter of their release from bondage. Rather, it marked the beginning of a process that was to have culminated in their complete and everlasting redemption from any and all types of subjugation, whether physical or spiritual, and their direct entry into Eretz Yisrael.

The people's departure from Egypt and arrival in Eretz Yisrael were to have been akin to “picking up an object in the public domain and putting it down in a private domain,” as the Maharal puts it, these being two distinct physical acts that together achieve the single goal of an object's transfer from one place to another. This accomplishes the *melachah* of taking an item from one domain to another (*hotza'ah*), which is one of the thirty-nine *melachos* that are forbidden on Shabbos. If, though, there is some interruption or delay between these two steps, the process remains incomplete, and on Shabbos, this will not constitute a forbidden act of *melachah* on a Torah level.

Similarly, the replacement of an entire generation between the nation's departure from Egypt and its entry into Eretz Yisrael introduced disconnect between these two stages of redemption, preventing their function as consecutive steps in a single process. The individuals who left Egypt were not those who entered Eretz Yisrael, so in fact there was no departure from Egypt for Eretz Yisrael. Instead, the departure from Egypt was for the desert, this being followed forty years later by a different generation's entry from the desert into Eretz Yisrael.

☛ A Single Process That Didn't Come to Fruition

WE NOW UNDERSTAND why the *Pesach* sacrifice had to be brought only upon entry into Eretz Yisrael, for until that point, the process of departing from Egypt remained incomplete. We also understand how Yisrael's disgrace in not having offered the *Pesach* sacrifice is intimately

linked to the spies' sin. Rather than sharing a merely incidental connection, the two lapses coincide at their core.

Yisrael's departure from Egypt and their entry into Eretz Yisrael were not merely consecutive events; they were integral parts of a single process. By driving a wedge between them, the spies prevented its culmination. The nation's disgrace thus lay not so much in their technical failure to offer the *Pesach* sacrifice but in the very fact of their exemption. Their extended sojourn in the desert attested to the subversion of the original Divine plan for their immediate and complete redemption; it would now run a different course.

☛ The Permanence of the Nation's Departure from Egypt Did Not Extend to Its Entry into the Land

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS: "On [that] Tishah B'Av, they wept without cause, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* designated it as a day of future weeping. This is an extremely profound matter, for when He brought them out of Egypt, He did so with the intention of giving them the land [immediately]. Had those individuals who left Egypt entered the land, they (i.e., the nation) would have remained there forever, because the Exodus from Egypt was everlasting, for it is due [solely] to that departure (i.e., despite being later exiled from the land) that we still belong to Hashem, who took us out of Egypt."

Had their departure from Egypt and entry into Eretz Yisrael taken place concurrently, with the same people who left Egypt entering Eretz Yisrael, their entry would have been everlasting, just as their departure from Egypt was, and they would never have had to relinquish possession of Eretz Yisrael. Because the generation wept causelessly and didn't want to enter Eretz Yisrael, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* swore that He would not bring them there but would take in another generation who would enter joyfully. In this way, the process of leaving Egypt was uncoupled from their entry into Eretz Yisrael, and the two were no longer a single unit. Therefore, only the Exodus remained everlasting, "but," concludes the Maharal,

“not their entry into the land, which was subject to cancellation and interruption.”

☛ The Severity of the Spies’ Sin

IN LIGHT OF this insight, it emerges that by leading the Jewish People to despise the land, the spies aborted the realization of the process of the nation’s redemption. It is now clear why that night of causeless weeping led to weeping throughout our history, leading to the impermanence of our dwelling in Eretz Yisrael, the decrees of our exile, and of the destruction of two *Batei Mikdash*.

We have seen that our departure from Egypt was originally supposed to have been a single process consisting of our extraction from Egypt and our installation in Eretz Yisrael. Had this process been completed, its results would have been permanent, not only in regard to leaving Egypt, but also in regard to our entry into the land. The spies’ sin led those who had left Egypt to back off from their desire to enter the land, with the result that it was their sons, who did desire the land, who entered. The process of leaving Egypt thus remained unfinished, and the permanence that remains a feature of our departure from Egypt did not extend to our entry into the land. Exile is the consequence of this lack of permanence. Rather than being a punishment for the generation’s causeless weeping, this is the natural outcome of the spies’ sin that cut short the process of our complete redemption. This is indeed reason for future generations to weep.

Korach

Inner Content Still Requires External Guidance

☛ What Did Korach Take?

KORACH'S DISPUTE WITH Moshe is introduced by the Torah as an incident when Korach “took” something.

The Torah tells us, “Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, took; and Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, and Ohn, son of Peles, from the members of [the tribe of] Reuven. They arose before Moshe, as well as two hundred and fifty people from Bnei Yisrael, princes of the congregation, who are summoned for meetings, men of repute. They gathered to confront Moshe and Aharon and said to them, ‘It is enough for you, for the entire congregation is holy, with Hashem in their midst, and why do you elevate yourselves above Hashem’s congregation?’” (*Bamidbar* 16:1–3).

What is it that Korach took? Rashi explains, “He took himself to one side, to take issue with the congregation and protest against the priesthood; this [explanation] fits with Onkelos’s translation [of the words ‘he took’] as ‘he separated himself’ — he split off from the rest of the congregation to perpetuate dispute.” According to Rashi, this “taking” denotes splitting off a part from a complete bundle, for Korach was originally part of Klal Yisrael, but with his departure, the community was no longer one unit.

Rashi then cites a second explanation: “‘Korach took’ — he drew the heads of the *sanhedrins* (i.e., the two hundred and fifty men)

among them [to his position].” According to this explanation, the “taking” refers to Korach “taking” others by fomenting rebellion and division through his powers of persuasion.

According to both explanations, Korach’s “taking” conveys the essential character of his dispute with Moshe.

☛ Taking *Tzitzis* in Order to Stir up a Dispute

IN THE MIDRASH *TANCHUMA* (*Korach* 2), Chazal explain that what Korach took was actually a physical object, which he used as a means of demonstrating his argument. The Midrash explains that he took *tallisos* (garments) that were woven entirely from *techeiles*, the bluish dyed thread that the Torah instructs us to tie among the white *tzitzis* threads on a four-cornered garment. Korach, says the Midrash, “gave instructions for the making of two hundred and fifty *tallisos* of *techeiles*, and those two hundred and fifty men draped themselves in them.”

The Midrash explains that the opening words of *parshas Korach* are to be understood as a direct continuation of the previous *parshah*’s concluding section, which opens with the command, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them that they should make themselves *tzitzis*” (ibid. 15:38). Korach jumped at this and told Moshe, “You say [in Hashem’s Name], ‘They shall put on the *tzitzis* of the corner a *techeiles* thread’ (ibid.), but if a *tallis* is made entirely of *techeiles*, must it too have *tzitzis*?” Moshe told him, “There is an obligation to attach *tzitzis* to it.” “How is it possible,” Korach responded, “that a *tallis* made entirely of *techeiles* can’t discharge its own obligation, yet four *techeiles* threads [that are attached to it] do so?!”

The Midrash continues by describing a second challenge that Korach put to Moshe, asking him whether a house filled with *sifrei Torah* has to have a *mezuzah* affixed to its doorpost. Moshe told him that it indeed needs a *mezuzah*. Korach then argued, “If a *sefer Torah* that contains two hundred and seventy-eight *parshiyos* can’t discharge the obligation to affix a *mezuzah*, how can the two *parshiyos* that are written in the *mezuzah* suffice?” The next stage in Korach’s

argument was, “You weren’t commanded by Hashem about these things; you dreamt them up by yourself.”

☛ Difficulties in Understanding the Midrash

THIS MIDRASH RAISES four difficulties:

1. The Torah tells us that Korach’s main argument was, “It is enough for you, for the entire congregation is holy, with Hashem in their midst, and why do you elevate yourselves above Hashem’s congregation?” Rashi explains that he was referring to the fact that “They all heard the things that were uttered at Sinai by the A-mighty,” and therefore argued, “Why do you raise yourselves above the rest of the people? You weren’t the only ones who heard, ‘I am Hashem, your G-d’ (*Shemos* 20:2); the entire congregation heard it.” How did Korach’s “proofs” from *tzitzis* and *mezuzah* buttress his argument that “The entire congregation is holy?”
2. If a person has some question or difficulty with one of the mitzvos written in the Torah, need that necessarily lead him to rebel against Moshe Rabbeinu? Is there any shortage of mitzvos whose reasons are unclear to us? Are the mitzvos of *parah adumah*, *kilayim*, and *sha’atnez* completely understood? And are *tzitzis* and *mezuzah* in particular, the strangest and most obscure obligations that spring to mind?
3. Did Korach anticipate Moshe’s response? What if Moshe would have responded that a *tallis* made wholly of *techeiles* is indeed exempt from *tzitzis*? How would Korach have continued fanning the flames of dispute in such an eventuality?
4. Chazal cite the Torah’s juxtaposition of the account of Korach’s rebellion to the mitzvah of *tzitzis* at the end of the preceding *parshah* as their source for identifying the topic of Korach’s first question. What indicated to Chazal that Korach also leveled a second challenge at Moshe regarding whether a house filled with *sefarim* needs to have a *mezuzah*?

☛ *Tzitzis* and *Mezuzah* as Symbols

RABBENU BACHYE EXPLAINS that the “*tallis* made entirely of *techeiles*” and the “house filled with *sefarim*” both symbolize the Jewish nation, whom Korach argued were “all holy, all distinguished and filled with every virtue. Why, [then,] do they need others who assume control of them and elevate themselves over them? He likened those who take control of them to the *techeiles* thread and to the *mezuzah*.”

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal explains further that Korach expected Moshe to reply that a *tallis* made entirely of *techeiles* was exempt from *tzitzis*, in which case “He would have responded to Moshe, ‘In that case, we don’t need a *Kohen Gadol*, for just as a *tallis* made entirely of *techeiles* is exempt from *tzitzis*, “The entire congregation is completely holy” and we have no need for a *Kohen Gadol*.”

Moshe, however, responded that the *tallis* of *techeiles* does need *tzitzis* with *techeiles* threads. Korach therefore responded that the mitzvos are illogical, for just as there is no apparent logic in attaching *techeiles* threads to a *tallis* that is entirely *techeiles*, there is no logic to appointing a *Kohen Gadol* for a nation that is entirely holy.

☛ Why Did Korach Draw Two Comparisons?

WHILE THE MAHARAL’S approach answers our first three questions, the fourth question not only remains unanswered, but is strengthened. If putting a *techeiles* thread on a *tallis* made of *techeiles* was simply a parable for conveying the lack of any need for spiritual leadership, what purpose did the second example of the *sefarim*-filled house serve? What did it add to the message of the first example?

The Maharal responds that whereas the parable of the *techeiles* thread served to undermine Aharon’s role as *Kohen Gadol*, the second parable of the *sefarim*-filled house was intended to take issue with Moshe’s leadership. How so?

☛ Moshe and Aharon Represent Torah and Serving Hashem in Practice, Respectively

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that serving Hashem can be subdivided into two realms: study and practice. The Jewish nation therefore needs two leaders to provide them with guidance in each realm, one for the world of abstract study and one the realm of practical application.

The two parables Korach employed were directed at Aharon and Moshe, respectively. Korach used them to argue that Yisrael didn't need either of them — neither a teacher to guide them in practical observance, nor a guide in the realm of study and reflection.

Moshe is known forever as our teacher — Moshe Rabbeinu. He is not known to posterity merely as a king or leader, but principally as a teacher. He taught the Torah's precepts to Yisrael as a theoretical discipline, being personally identified with Torah to the extent that the *navi* says, "Remember *the Torah of Moshe My servant*, to whom I commanded laws and judgments at Chorev, to convey to all of Yisrael" (*Malachi* 3:22).

By contrast, Aharon was appointed to oversee the Torah's practical implementation. The Maharal thus explains that Aharon was "unique in serving Hashem on behalf of all of Yisrael; he is the *Kohen Gadol*, and he aligns Yisrael's actions in practical service, meaning the sacrifices. Moshe Rabbeinu would hear the Torah and the mitzvos directly from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and would teach them to Yisrael. Aharon was appointed over practice and Moshe over study."

☛ The *Tallis* Symbolized Aharon

WHILE THE HOUSE filled with *sefarim* was likened to Moshe Rabbeinu, who taught Yisrael Torah, the *tallis* symbolized Aharon, who was responsible for regulating practical mitzvah observance. How does the *tallis* convey this?

The Maharal explains: "He cited proof regarding Aharon, who

was responsible for practice, from the *tallis* made entirely of *techeiles*, because the mitzvah of *tzitzis* is also meant to serve as a reminder to fulfill all of the practical obligations conferred by the Torah's mitzvos, as it says, 'You shall see it and remember all Hashem's mitzvos and practice them' (*Bamidbar* 15:39)."

Aharon, who was the pillar of practical halachic guidance and who instilled holiness into physical, everyday life by virtue of his involvement in the sacrificial service — of which Chazal say, "The *kohanim* eat [the *korban*] and the owner receives atonement (*Pesachim* 59b) — was thus likened to the *tallis*. The *tallis* envelops its wearer's body, reminding him of the Creator's existence even amid his most mundane, physical activities. We find *tzitzis* filling this role in *maseches Menachos* (44a), where the Gemara tells us, "It happened that a certain person who was meticulous in fulfilling the mitzvah of *tzitzis* heard that there was a woman of ill repute overseas who took four hundred gold coins as her wage. He sent her four hundred gold coins and booked an appointment. She arranged seven beds for him, six of silver and one of gold; each one was joined to the next by a ladder of silver and the top one by a ladder of gold. ... His four *tzitziyos* came and lashed his face. He left and sat on the ground. She too left and sat on the ground. She said to him: 'What blemish have you found in me?' He told her: 'I have never seen as beautiful a woman as you. However, there is one mitzvah that our G-d has commanded us — it is known as *tzitzis*, in connection with which the words "I am Hashem, your G-d" are written twice, [to convey that] I am He who will punish in the future, and I am he who will apportion reward. Right now, the *tzitzis* resemble four witnesses against me.'"

☛ The Response That Korach Anticipated

THE MAHARAL WRITES, "Korach said, 'Is a *tallis* woven entirely of *techeiles* obligated in *tzitzis*, or is it exempt?' He expected Moshe Rabbeinu to say, 'It is exempt,' for since it is anyway made entirely of

techeiles, it doesn't need another *techeiles* thread in order to fulfill the command, "You shall see it and remember all Hashem's mitzvos."

In *Tiferes Yisrael* (Chap. 22), the Maharal explains Korach's reasoning as follows. Chazal explain the reason for the command to wear the *techeiles* thread as "because *techeiles* is similar to the Throne of Glory, so by seeing *techeiles*, a person will remember and do all of Hashem's mitzvos" (*Sotah* 17a). Through its resemblance to the Throne of Glory, *techeiles* is thus a spur to practice, since it is through practice that a person accepts upon himself the yoke of the King Who has commanded him. Korach thus reasoned that since nothing could remind a person of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* more than a *tallis* that is woven entirely of *techeiles*, why should he need to tie an additional *techeiles* thread to it?

Korach therefore anticipated being told that a *tallis* made entirely of *techeiles* is exempt from *tzitzis*, the message being that a nation all of whose members are holy doesn't need an Aharon. Korach planned on using this answer to rouse the people to rebellion, for it would enable him to argue, in the Maharal's words, "All of Yisrael, too, are holy in serving G-d, and we don't need a *kohen* in addition for our service of Hashem to be fulfilled through him."

☛ The House of *Sefarim* Symbolized Moshe

TORAH'S DIMENSION AS an abstract discipline, over which Moshe presided, was naturally compared to a house filled with *sefarim*. Here too, Korach, using similar logic, expected Moshe to answer that a house filled with *sefarim* doesn't need a *mezuzah*, since the *mezuzah*'s purpose is to lead to Torah study. The Torah writes, "You shall discuss them when you dwell in your home... and you shall write them [and affix them] upon the doorposts of your house and your gates" (*Devarim* 6:7, 9). The *mezuzah* thus serves to remind a person of the Torah's teachings upon entering or leaving his home so that they are always upon his lips. In the same way that *tzitzis* engender practical mitzvah observance, the *mezuzah* firmly anchors

the obligation to engage in Torah study in a person's heart. Thus, if a house is already full of *sefarim*, it follows that no *mezuzah* should be necessary. Korach expected Moshe to confirm this and planned on using Moshe's reply to stir up rebellion, arguing that since all of Yisrael were filled with Torah, they had no need for a leader and teacher to serve the function of a *mezuzah*.

In the Maharal's words, Korach wanted to be able to argue, "They are exempt from [listening to] that person who teaches them, because if Hashem wants to give the Torah, it ought to be done without any intermediary, for it cannot be that they are unfit to hear Hashem's word directly, for at Sinai they heard [Him utter], 'I am Hashem' and 'You shall not have [any other gods]' (*Shemos* 20:2). Therefore, why shouldn't the Torah be conveyed to them directly?"

☛ Korach's Examples Were Self-Sabotaging

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (ibid.), the Maharal points out that the analogies Korach cited ultimately achieved a result described by the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (37:16) as, "Their sword shall enter their [own] heart." Just as a *tallis* woven of *techeiles* still needs *tzitzis* with *techeiles* and a house full of *sefarim* still needs a *mezuzah*, Yisrael indeed require a guide for Torah study and a guide in mitzvah observance.

☛ Inner Content Still Requires External Assistance

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that rather than having in common an exemption from *tzitzis* and *mezuzah*, the *tallis* of *techeiles* and the house of *sefarim* demonstrate that even an individual who has rich inner content needs an external mentor. Just as a person can miss seeing the forest for the trees, a person who is in a house filled with *sefarim* still needs an external reminder — a *mezuzah* on the doorpost — to remind him of his purpose.

There is an old story told about a man whose daily schedule is crammed to overflowing. He rises at daybreak to pray and then

rushes off to learn Torah, spending all his waking hours in Torah study and prayer, at the end of which he declares, “I’m so busy that I don’t have any time to think about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu!*” Although each and every Jew is holy, a guide in studying Torah and observing mitzvos is still irreplaceable.

The Maharal elucidates the dialogue between Korach and Moshe as centering on the question of why the Jewish nation needs spiritual leadership when they already have a “direct line” to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* through their Torah study and mitzvah observance.

While confirming the existence of this “direct line” by virtue of which every individual has independent access to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Moshe’s response stressed that a *kohen* and a teacher are nonetheless necessary to enable us to improve our deeds.

Although *techeiles* is associated with the Throne of Glory, a garment of *techeiles* still needs a special *techeiles* thread that is not part of it but remains separate, for a person who is constantly draped in his *tallis* forgets about it. Even if it is made of *techeiles*, wearing it becomes routine. He feels it is part of him and is no longer aware of it. There needs to be some external factor that lifts him out of his routine, reminding him of Hashem’s mitzvos and elevating him to spiritual heights. A house filled with *sefarim* needs a *mezuzah*; *sefarim* alone are insufficient. A spiritual mentor is necessary for study as well, for the authentic transmission of Torah takes place through the interaction of teacher and disciple.

Chukas

A Dead Body's Exalted Status — Rather than Its Deficiency — Is the Source of Its Impurity

☛ Cessation of Life Confers Impurity

PARSHAS CHUKAS OPENS with the laws concerning the impurity imparted by a dead body. It is written, “This is the law: if a man dies in a tent, whoever enters the tent and whatever is in the tent will become impure for seven days” (*Bamidbar* 19:14).

The broad concept of impurity is intimately bound up with death.

A dead human being has the halachic status of “the source of sources of impurity,” because it renders a person who has contact with it a source of impurity himself, who then imparts impurity to others. In addition, further sources of impurity exist, all of which are related to the cessation of some type of life: a dead creeping creature, an animal carcass, menstrual blood (which represents an unfertilized ovum), and semen (which also represents unrealized potential for life).

Why is impurity a consequence of the cessation of life?

We shall discuss two explanations of this phenomenon. According to the *Sefer Hachinuch*, it is due to the dead entity's deficiency and unseemliness, whereas according to a novel insight of the Maharal's, a dead body's impurity is actually a function of its elevated nature.

Distance from G-d as a Cause of Impurity

IN *DERECH HASHEM* (Part I, Chap. 3), Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato points out that man is composed of two contrasting components: a refined, intellectual soul and a coarse, earthly body, each of which exerts a pull upon the person in its direction. The consequence of this ongoing struggle, writes the Ramchal, is that “If the soul is victorious, it is elevated and elevates the body along with it, while if a person allows his physicality to get the better of him, he degrades his body, and his soul is degraded with it.”

From the *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 263), it is evident that all that remains behind in this world after a person’s death is his coarse, lowly physical component that during his lifetime was drawn towards physicality and sin, distancing him from his G-d. This propensity confers impurity — “which is contemptible and filthy,” says the *Sefer Hachinuch* — upon the body. The purpose of this impurity is to keep people away from the lifeless body “that has been denuded of all its glory, i.e., its life force, with only the evil physical matter left behind.”

Why the Graves of the Righteous Do Not Confer Impurity

THE *SEFER HACHINUCH* cites proof for his approach from the fact that the burial places of the righteous do not confer impurity. We thus find in Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* 944): “It happened that Rabbi Akiva was imprisoned, and Rabbi Yehoshua Ha’garsi was his disciple and was attending him. On *erev Yom Kippur*, he took leave of him and went home. Eliyahu Hanavi came and stood at the entrance to his (Rabbi Yehoshua’s) home. He (Eliyahu Hanavi) told him, ‘I am a *kohen*, and I have come to tell you that Rabbi Akiva has died in prison.’ The two of them immediately set out for the prison and found that the door of the prison was open, the jailer was sleeping, and all the prisoners were asleep. They lay Rabbi Akiva on a bed and

left. Once they were outside, Eliyahu carried him across his shoulders. Rabbi Yehoshua saw this and said to Eliyahu, ‘Rabbi, yesterday you told me that you are a *kohen*, and a *kohen* may not become defiled by a dead body.’ He told him, ‘My son, there is no impurity among [deceased] Torah scholars nor among their disciples.’”

Based upon this account, the *Sefer Hachinuch* concludes that impurity arises from the dead body’s distance from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and therefore that “Wholly righteous individuals do not confer impurity, because their bodies are pure and clean and did not lead their souls to sin. In fact, their body assisted in refining it[self], and therefore, their souls ascend to Heaven by Divine ‘kiss,’ leaving an everlasting light sown upon their body.”

Since their body contributed to the soul’s refinement instead of debasing it, it itself has become refined in the process and does not become impure even after the soul has departed from it.

☛ Why Graves of Non-Jews Do Not Confer Impurity

THIS APPROACH TO understanding the impurity of a dead body seems difficult in light of the Gemara’s statement (*Yevamos* 61a) that the graves of non-Jews impart impurity neither upon people nor upon utensils that are with them under the same roofing (whereas a Jewish grave does, as stated explicitly in the *pasuk* quoted earlier) because the Torah specifies “*adam ki yamus b’ohel...* (if a man dies in a tent)” and “Non-Jews are not referred to as ‘*adam*.’”

Now, if the source of this impurity is the dead body’s distance from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as the *Sefer Hachinuch* maintains, this rationale is surely all the more relevant in the case of a deceased non-Jew. Why shouldn’t this mode of conferring impurity apply to a deceased non-Jew as well?

A possible answer might be that impurity arises from unrealized potential and the disappearance of unfulfilled life force. Since a non-Jew’s life force lacks the potential for transcending the restraints

imposed by physicality and leading him to holiness, no void is created by his death and no impurity results.

The basis of this approach is presented by the Maharal in *Chiddushei Aggados* (to *Bava Metzia* 114a), where he writes that impurity is a consequence of a deviation from the world's natural order. The death of a Jew constitutes such a deviation, because man was not originally supposed to die. Adam Harishon was created such that he would have lived forever had he not sinned by eating from the *etz hada'as*. However, it cannot be said that a non-Jew's death represents a change from the natural order, for non-Jews have no connection with the level of Adam Harishon prior to his sin. When there is no irregularity in the natural order, no impurity results.

☛ A Dead Body's Exalted Status, Rather Than Its Deficiency, Is the Source of Its Impurity

ACCORDING TO THE approach of the *Sefer Hachinuch*, death causes impurity because left on its own, bereft of the soul, the body is degenerate and is distant from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Since every contact with it is injurious, it is impure.

The Maharal accepts this idea regarding other sources of impurity but rejects it completely in regard to the impurity of a dead human being, for which he proposes a radically different approach.

In a eulogy that he delivered* (printed in *Gur Aryeh* at the end of *Bamidbar*), the Maharal explains that whereas other sources of impurity are rooted in matter's inherent lowliness, the impurity imparted by a deceased human is attributable not to its degradation but to its elevation. He writes, "It is not because of the dead body's deficiency that it confers impurity." Its impurity is rather a means of creating a separation. The deceased is impure because "The dead and the living have no connection with one another, and the living are separate

* For Rav Akiva Ginzburg, in the year 5357/1597.

from the dead. Therefore, when he attaches himself to something from which he is distant and separate, there is a separation between it and him; this is the impurity [that attaches itself to him].”

We shall now elucidate these remarks.

☛ Any Connection between the Living and the Dead Obscures Vision

THE HEBREW WORD for purity, *tohar*, is related to *tzohar*,* meaning an opening through which light shines. Thus, the Mishnah (*Yoma* 5:6), speaks of *toharo shel mizbe'ach*, which refers to the clear space atop the altar where no ash obscures its surface.

By contrast, the word for impurity, *tumah*, is derived from *atum*, something closed or blocked, through which light cannot penetrate. *Tumah* thus refers to a state where there is no light.

Two situations can prevent a person from seeing: darkness, where there is no light whatsoever, or the aftermath of a flash of blinding light. Light that illuminates too strongly interferes with a person's sight just as darkness does.

Accordingly, *tumah* can arise in one of two situations. Encountering an entity that is below man's level and that can pull him downward to the murky depths confers *tumah*. This is the *tumah* of a dead crawling creature, a carcass, etc. The second situation involves encountering something much more sublime that is on a level beyond our comprehension. This is akin to a flash of blinding light.

Both cases interfere with a person's sight, i.e., the clarity of his spiritual vision, and this obstruction manifests as *tumah*.

We now need to determine whether death results in spiritual darkness and obscurity or in blinding light.

When a person dies, his soul obviously hasn't ceased to exist. It is his body that no longer functions, whereas his soul has moved to

* The initial letters of *tohar* and *tzohar* — *tes* and *tzadi* — are interchangeable.

a far more elevated and sublime world. The deceased individual is now in a place of revelation, in greater proximity to the *Shechinah*, having departed from the world of the living and taken up residence in a realm inaccessible to the living. This is the reason that separation needs to exist between the deceased and the living and the reason for the impurity that guarantees this separation. Any contact between the living and the deceased interferes with the spiritual perception of the living and blocks their vision, not due to any deficiency on the part of the deceased, but precisely because of its sublime level and the powerful illumination prevailing in its new surroundings.

☛ Sacred Manuscripts' Exalted Status Is the Source of Their Impurity

THE MAHARAL POINTS out that this explanation can help understand Chazal's remarks in the Mishnah in *maseches Yadayim* (4:6) regarding the impurity imparted to bare hands by contact with a manuscript of any one of the twenty four books of *Tanach*. This impurity was instituted to dissuade people from storing *terumah* — which must be preserved in purity — alongside these sacred manuscripts, which would result in mice attracted to the food damaging the manuscripts. In this context, the Mishnah mentions: "The Sadducees tell the Pharisees, 'We complain against you, for you assert that holy Scripture renders the hands impure, whereas the writings of Homer do not!'"

The Sadducees could not understand how the sacred writings of *Tanach* could confer impurity while secular writings do not. Although the Sadducees rejected the Oral Torah, even they conceded to the authenticity of the Written Torah, whereas this decree seemed to place secular writings on a higher level than holy ones.

The Mishnah continues by recording the question that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai posed to them: the bones of a donkey do not confer impurity to persons and objects beneath the same roofing, yet the bones of Yochanan Kohen Gadol do! Evidently, the impurity

that an item imparts is a function of its elevated status and spiritual eminence. As the Mishnah concludes, “The impurity of sacred manuscripts is a function of their preciousness, whereas Homer’s writings, which are not precious, do not render the hands impure.”

This Mishnah fits perfectly with the Maharal’s novel approach that some types of impurity are a consequence of their source’s elevated status rather than its lowliness. The Sadducees thought that impurity always arises from its source’s degenerate nature, as in the cases of a *metzora*, a *zav*, and a *zavah*, whose impurity is due to their shortcomings. To this, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai retorted that since human bones confer impurity while animal bones do not, we must conclude that it is actually a deceased human’s exalted status that necessitates separating the living from that which lies beyond their grasp, lest such contact upset their mental and spiritual equilibrium. Similarly, sacred manuscripts do not confer impurity because of any deficiency of theirs, but rather precisely because they “contain Divine wisdom, from which a person is divided and separated,” as the Maharal writes.

☛ A Dead Body Confers Impurity but Is Not Impure Itself

ACCORDING TO THE Maharal, impurity can be contracted by coming into contact either with some degenerate item that is itself impure or with something that spiritually dazzles and blinds a person precisely on account of its sublime level, such as sacred manuscripts or a deceased human. Although sacred manuscripts impart impurity so that people keep *terumah* away from them, the manuscripts themselves are not impure. Neither is a dead body impure in and of itself. We should note that a dead body’s halachic status is referred to as “the source of sources of impurity.” While it is clear that a source of impurity is so called because it imparts impurity to whatever has contact with it, what does the term “source of sources” mean? What can possibly precede a primary source?

We must conclude that whereas a “source” is itself impure and thus imparts impurity further to that with which it has contact, which then imparts a secondary level, etc., the term “source of sources” implies only that that with which it has contact is transformed into a source of impurity, thus becoming impure itself, whereas the “source of sources,” while it creates “sources,” is not itself impure.

☛ A Dead Individual Who Remains Attached to Life Doesn't Impart Impurity

ACCORDING TO THE Maharal's approach, the Torah imposes impurity in association with a dead body because of the need to separate the living from the dead, who have progressed to a higher and more sublime realm of existence. It follows that a deceased individual who is not detached from the living, and thus perceiving him doesn't endanger other people's clear sight and spiritual balance, ought not to confer impurity upon those with whom it comes into contact. This explains why the burial places of the righteous do not confer impurity, for there are certain righteous individuals who are known to have managed to maintain a connection with realm of the living even after their deaths. This is noted by the Ramban (in his commentary to *Bereishis* 49:33) in connection with Chazal's teaching that “Yaakov Avinu did not die,” where he writes that “The souls of the righteous are bound in the bundle of life.”

We find similarly in *maseches Shabbos* (152b) the report of an exchange that took place between gravediggers and Rav Achai bar Yoshia following the latter's death. In *Kesuvos* (103a), we even find that following his death, Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi would arrive at his home every Friday night to recite Kiddush. In his notes on that passage in the Gemara, Rabbi Akiva Eiger cites the comment of the *Sefer Chassidim* (1129) that Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi was unlike other deceased individuals who are absolved from any obligation to fulfill mitzvos, for the righteous continue living even after their physical

demise and can exempt living people with their Kiddush. That deceased individuals such as these clearly do not confer impurity fully accords with the Maharal's approach.

We have seen that impurity represents a state in which a person doesn't perceive Divine illumination, which can happen either because darkness obscures his vision or because he has encountered something blindingly bright.

There are two possible ways of understanding why a deceased individual confers impurity: either because with the soul's departure, all that remains is the deceased's degenerate, physical component, or because upon the body's expiration, the soul, with its release from its physical shackles, can radiate powerful illumination.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* regards a dead body as a sullied, filthy entity and explains accordingly that its impurity arises from the obscurity prevailing in the Valley of Death.

By contrast, the Maharal regards a deceased individual as having been released from the shackles of physicality and now consisting of a radiant, entirely spiritual soul, the associated impurity being a consequence of the brilliance of its light.

Balak

The Significance of the Three *Regalim*

☛ A Nation That Celebrates Three *Regalim* Cannot Be Destroyed

WHEN HASHEM ENABLED Bilam's donkey to communicate, she rebuked Bilam for having struck her on three occasions. The Torah writes, "Hashem opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Bilam, 'What have I done to you that you have beaten me on these *shalosh regalim* (three occasions)?" (*Bamidbar* 22:28).

Why did the donkey use the expression "*shalosh regalim*" rather than the simpler "*shalosh pe'amim* (three times)?"

Rashi explains, "He (i.e., *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*) hinted to him, 'You are trying to uproot a nation that celebrates *shalosh regalim* (three pilgrimage festivals) in the course of the year.'"

What is special about the merit of the mitzvah of ascending to Yerushalayim for the three pilgrimage festivals that protects the Jewish nation from destruction? Why not attribute this protection to the merit of other fundamental mitzvos such as Torah study, Shabbos observance, or *bris milah*?

☛ The Three Pilgrimage Festivals Are Components of a Single Process

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 46), the Maharal points out that the seasons when the three pilgrimage festivals are celebrated are connected,

rendering the festivals a single, comprehensive unit. He writes: “Scripture joins them together, and they are called ‘three *regalim*’ (e.g., in *Shemos* 23:14). From the fact that the Torah has joined these three pilgrimage festivals together — excluding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur — we know that these three pilgrimage festivals are related to each other.”

How are the festivals interrelated? We know that each of them commemorates its own specific event. How are Sukkos and Shavuos more connected than Yom Kippur and Shavuos? On Shavuos, the first *luchos* were given, and on Yom Kippur, the second *luchos* were given, yet this doesn’t render them a single unit, whereas the Torah regards Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos as three parts of a whole. In what sense?

☛ The Festivals’ Agricultural Link

THE TORAH SPECIFIES that the seasons of the three festivals correspond to three consecutive stages in the growth and development of the grain crop. We are told that Pesach is to be celebrated “at the appointed time of the month of Aviv (ripening)” (ibid. *pasuk* 15), i.e., when the grain starts ripening.

Shavuos is at the time of the harvest: “And [you shall observe] the harvest festival, [the time of bringing] the first fruits of your labors that you sow in the field” (ibid. *pasuk* 16).

Sukkos is at the time of the ingathering, when the produce is gathered in and brought into the houses, as the *pasuk* (ibid.) says, “and the ingathering festival at the end of the year, when you gather in your produce from the field.”

The festivals thus correspond to the ripening, harvesting, and ingathering of the produce.

This is puzzling, because it is clear from the Torah itself and from Chazal that although they coincide with these agricultural milestones, the festivals do not mark them; Pesach is celebrated in commemoration of our departure from Egypt, Shavuos marks the

giving of the Torah, and the reason for Sukkos is because “I settled the Children of Israel in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt” (*Vayikra* 23:43).

The Maharal thus asks, “This matter requires study; what is the festivals’ connection to produce?”

☛ The Three Festivals Symbolize Our Nation’s Endurance throughout the Time Continuum

IN *GUR ARYEH* (on *parshas Balak*), the Maharal explains that the donkey’s reference to Yisrael’s virtue in celebrating three pilgrimage festivals doesn’t relate to their merit for fulfilling the mitzvah of ascent to Yerushalyim for their celebration. Rather, it relates to the essence of the mitzvah of celebrating the festivals, which symbolize the three divisions of the time continuum: past, present, and future. The donkey was pointing out to Bilam that the Jewish People have three national festivals, one of which corresponds to the future, conveying the message that it is impossible to destroy a nation that has a role to play in the world’s future.

In the Maharal’s words: “Rashi therefore says [that the animal’s message to Bilam was], ‘Do you want to destroy an entire nation that celebrates thrice yearly?’ indicating the nation’s eternal existence, for they have times of celebration at (i.e., corresponding to) the beginning of time, its middle, and its end.” How do the festivals correspond to the three epochs of history?

The Maharal interprets the festivals’ coincidence with the agricultural seasons to explain this:

Time has a beginning, a middle, and an end, “corresponding to which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave them three festivals.”

Pesach arrives in the spring, when the weather is beginning to warm up and is therefore called *aviv*, derived from the word *av* (father), i.e., the source from which everything starts and develops. In Hebrew, something that is in the very first stages of its development is said to be *b’ibo* (in its budding stage).

Shavuos is already close to summer.

The Torah refers to Sukkos as “*tekufas hashanah* (the [completion of the] year’s cycle)” (*Shemos* 34:22). The word *tekufah* is related to *hekef*, circuiting something, and thus denotes the completion of a circuit, i.e., the year’s end. Indeed, Sukkos marks the summer’s end and winter’s onset. However, as the Maharal points out, “The winter is not considered part of the time continuum,” because time is measured in terms of creation and yield, whereas winter “is [the season of] the disappearance and decay of plant growth.” Winter is the season of gestation and fostering potential, rather than its emergence into being. This is why the youthful years of life are commonly referred to in rabbinic writings as *yemei chorfi* (the “winter” of my life), i.e., the period when a person’s mature, adult identity is developing and takes shape. Winter’s role is secondary to that of the principal season of blossoming and growth — it is a means rather than an end.

The three festivals thus symbolize Yisrael’s existence throughout the time continuum. Any entity that is present throughout time, including its distant future, is linked to eternity and cannot be exterminated.

☞ The Three Festivals Represent the Three Stages of Our Nation’s Mission

IN *PACHAD YITZCHAK* (Rosh Hashanah, Essay 9), Rav Hutner delves deeper into this idea, affording us further insight into the Maharal’s comments regarding the correspondence of the Torah’s names for the three festivals with the three stages of the grain crop: the festivals of the *aviv*, harvest, and ingathering. Rav Hutner notes that “We extract from the Maharal’s comments regarding the message of these three names an expression of the Jewish People’s identity as a nation entrusted with a Divine mission — to sanctify *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s Name in the world. There are three points at which an emissary has contact with his dispatcher: (1) at the mission’s launch, with the emissary’s appointment by his dispatcher; (2) upon the mission’s

accomplishment, with emissary fulfilling his role; (3) upon the emissary's return to the dispatcher, when he informs the dispatcher, "I have fulfilled your mission" (this halachic concept is mentioned by the Gemara, *Gittin* 24a and 63b).

Accordingly, the essence of each of the three festivals [as representing one of these stages] now becomes apparent:

Pesach represents the creation of Kenesses Yisrael (i.e., its emergence as a nation) and its being entrusted with its mission that crystallizes upon its departure from Egypt. This is therefore the festival of *aviv*, marking the beginning of the cycle.

Shavuos is the time of the giving of the Torah, representing carrying out the Divine mission through "Kenesses Yisrael's service of Torah and mitzvos, which constitutes their mission's fulfillment. This is the festival of the harvest, denoting the work's completion, perfection being attained thereby."

Sukkos is the time when "Kenesses Yisrael restores its mission to its Dispatcher. This is the festival of the ingathering, denoting the restoration of property that has been in the open to its owner's house."

☛ The Annulment of the *Yetzer Hara* Is Referred to as "Dwelling in the *Sukkah*"

HOW ARE WE to understand the idea of a mission's restoration to its dispatcher and the emissary's declaration, "I have fulfilled your mission?"

In order to clarify this, Rav Hutner examines the Gemara's comments in *Arachin* 32b, explaining the *pasuk*, "The entire community, who were returning from captivity (i.e., the Babylonian exile) made *sukkos* and dwelled in the *sukkos*, for they had not done so (i.e., made *sukkos*) since the time of Yehoshua bin Nun, to that day..." (*Nechemiah* 8:17). The Gemara asks how it is possible that from the time of Yehoshua until the time of Ezra — some nine centuries — the Jewish nation had not fulfilled the mitzvah of *sukkah*.

That period included the reign of David Hamelech, and, wonders the Gemara, “Is it possible that David came and did not make *sukkos*, until the arrival of Ezra?” The Gemara answers that the *pasuk* doesn’t mean to imply that none of the intervening generations fulfilled the Torah’s command to dwell in the *sukkah*. Rather, this *pasuk* refers to the event described by the Gemara in *Yoma* (69b) when the *Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah* in Ezra’s time prayed that Heaven should annul the temptation to worship idols, which had been largely responsible for the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash, and their prayer was accepted. This new situation, in which people were safe from this sin because there was no longer any temptation to engage in idolatry, is likened in this *pasuk* to dwelling in the *sukkah*, as the *sukkah*’s role is to provide the shelter of Divine Providence to those inside it, protecting them from any outside harm.

☛ *Sukkos* and the *Yetzer Hara*’s Annulment Represent the Mission’s Return to the Dispatcher

EXPRESSING HIS WONDERMENT at the Gemara’s interpretation of the *pasuk*, Rav Hutner writes, “This is utterly inexplicable, for we often encounter instances of the merits of mitzvos and worthy deeds shielding and saving people from sin, yet these cases are mentioned by Chazal without any comparisons or parallels. Chazal do not liken such protection to a *sukkah* or to anything else. Why is protection from the sin of idolatry in particular spoken of by the *pasuk* in terms of fulfilling the mitzvah of *sukkah*?”

Rav Hutner explains that the annulment of this temptation was a one-time occurrence, unparalleled by any other event or incident that took place from man’s creation until man’s ultimate redemption at the End of Days. The phenomenon of the annulment of the *yetzer hara* is associated solely with the End of Days, as is clear from many prophecies.

Here, Rav Hutner adds that these prophetic visions of the *yetzer hara*’s annulment amount to prophecies of Kenesses Yisrael’s restoration

of its mission to the Dispatcher. Man is supposed to use his freedom to choose to withstand the temptation of the *yetzer hara*. His mission lasts only as long as he is subject to temptation, for as long as he has a mission, his *yetzer hara* will try to ensnare him. Upon his mission's completion, there is no longer any reason for the *yetzer hara* to exist. This is conveyed by the declaration, "I have fulfilled your mission."

Now we understand why the Gemara compares the annulment of the *yetzer hara* in Ezra's time to the fulfillment of the mitzvah of *sukkah*. "Because," says Rav Hutner, "the festival of Sukkos is imbued with the same holiness as will prevail at the time of the completion of Kenesses Yisrael's mission, as the Maharal has set down for us, [namely,] that this is the meaning of its name, 'festival of the ingathering.'"

In other words, Sukkos is a sublime season representing the annulment of the *yetzer hara* and our mission's restoration to our Dispatcher. After a person has become more spiritually attuned through the repentance of Yom Kippur, he leaves the comfort of his home and shelters inside a structure where his sole protection is his faith in G-d. As the Zohar says in *parshas Emor*, the *sukkah* provides *tzila d'meheimnusa*, the shade (i.e., protection) of faith. In this respect, Sukkos resembles the End of Days, when the *yetzer hara* will be annulled.

This is why the *haftarah* for Sukkos deals with the war between Gog and Magog that will take place in the End of Days. The *Tur (Orach Chaim, 490)* writes, "Thus said Rav Hai [Gaon]: 'I heard from sages that the revival of the dead will take place in Nissan and that victory over Gog and Magog will be in Tishrei. Therefore, in Nissan we read the *haftarah* of the vision of the dry bones (*Yechezkel 37:1-14*), and on Sukkos, "On the day of Gog's coming" (*ibid. 38:18*).'"

Indeed, Kenesses Yisrael's return at the End of Days to its Dispatcher — upon completion of the entire cycle of history — and its declaration to Him, "I have fulfilled Your mission" — is bound up with the festival of Sukkos and instilled into its essence.

☛ The Jewish Nation's Eternal Survival

A MISSION'S COMPLETION closes one epoch and ushers in a new reality.

Sukkos is the festival that symbolizes the Jewish nation's existence at the End of Days upon the completion of its mission and thus its survival throughout its mission's duration. Bilam's curse was therefore incapable of affecting the nation that celebrates three pilgrimage festivals and thereby has a foothold throughout the time continuum, up to and including the End of Days that leads into eternity.

We have seen how the three pilgrimage festivals together constitute a single unit symbolizing Kenesses Yisrael's acceptance, accomplishment, and ultimate completion of its mission upon the annulment of the *yetzer hara* — the basis for freedom of choice that exists in the world — at the End of Days. The festival of Sukkos, when a person leaves his material comfort zone to dwell solely “in the shade of the Dependable One,” symbolizes this mission's completion. The mission's completion is a feature of the future. A corollary of Kenesses Yisrael being entrusted with a mission whose accomplishment lies in the future is the impossibility of destroying them before that time.

Pinchas

Man's Fire Element Contrasted with His Earth Element

☛ How Are Zealotry and the Priesthood Linked?

PINCHAS DEMONSTRATED zeal for Heaven's honor, killing Zimri and the Midianite princess, for which he was rewarded with joining the priesthood.

The Torah tells us, "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the priest caused My anger to be withdrawn from upon Bnei Yisrael by acting zealously among them with the zealous anger that was [fitting] for Me [to show], and I [therefore] did not wipe out Bnei Yisrael in My zealous anger. Therefore, tell him that I am hereby granting him My covenant of peace. And it shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of everlasting priesthood in return for his zealotry on behalf of his G-d and [having] atoned for Bnei Yisrael" (*Bamidbar* 25:11–13).

What connection is there between Pinchas's zealous act and his reward of priesthood? In accordance with the principle of *midah keneged midah* (measure for measure), we expect there to be some correlation between a worthy deed and its reward.

☛ Priesthood Represents Love and Kindness, Not the Death Penalty

THE DIFFICULTY IS compounded by the Zohar's observation (Vol. III, p. 303a), that whereas a Levi is charged with showing firmness and

upholding law, the *kohen's* role is to exemplify the trait of kindness. The Mishnah (*Avos* 1:12) indeed characterizes Aharon as having been “a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, loving people, and drawing them close to Torah.”

Why then was Pinchas rewarded for having acted zealously by being instated as a *kohen*, a role that typically furthers love and kindness? These two roles seem altogether contradictory.

A similar question is raised by the Zohar on this *parshah* (p. 114a), which asks how Pinchas could have been granted the priesthood for killing another person if the Gemara (*Berachos* 32b) rules: “Any *kohen* who kills another person must not raise his hands [to deliver the priestly blessing].” In other words, whereas the priesthood represents kindness, killing is a manifestation of judgment, and the two qualities are contradictory. In his zeal to defend Heaven’s honor, Pinchas killed a sinner, yet inexplicably, he received priesthood as a reward.

☛ A *Kohen* — Kindness or Anger

THE ABOVE LINKAGE of the priesthood with love and kindness needs to be better understood in light of the Gemara’s statement (*Bava Basra* 160b), that *kohanim* are prone to irascibility and anger. The Gemara gives this as the reason for the institution of a special kind of bill of divorce (referred to as a “knotted *get*”) to be drawn up when a *kohen* divorces his wife. This kind of *get* has to be prepared in a particular way that takes much longer than a regular *get* does, in the hope that before it is ready, reconciliation between husband and wife can be achieved. The Gemara explains that this measure was enacted because due to their short tempers, *kohanim* are liable to divorce their wives in a fit of anger and afterwards be unable to remarry them, as it is forbidden for a *kohen* to marry a divorcee, even his own. This observation as to the *kohen's* character is echoed by the Gemara in *Kiddushin* (70b) that says, “Rabbi Elazar said, ‘If you encounter brazenness in a *kohen*, don’t entertain doubts regarding

his pedigree, for it says, “And Your people are like the quarrels of a *kohen*” (*Hoshe’a* 4:4).”

How can the *kohen*’s tendency to hot-temperedness be reconciled with his trait of kindness?

☛ Alacrity Was the Essence of Pinchas’s Action

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Hazerizus*, Chap. 2), the Maharal points out that beyond zealousness, the salient trait apparent in Pinchas’s deed was alacrity. Although everyone who witnessed Zimri’s immoral deed felt the same way as Pinchas, everyone was immobilized by despair, whereas Pinchas responded immediately and took action.

In this connection, the Maharal cites the comments of the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:24) that when Yisrael fell prey to the sin of licentiousness at the Plains of Moav, Moshe and the other righteous men of the generation were powerless to respond and wept. Due to Moshe’s failure to take action, says the Midrash, the location of his grave remains unknown. Contrasting this with Pinchas, who responded with alacrity and received his fitting reward, the Midrash concludes, “to teach you that a person should be brazen as a tiger, nimble as an eagle, fleet as a deer, and mighty as a lion in fulfilling his Owner’s wishes.”

☛ Inaction Is the Consequence of a Sin of Physicality

THE MIDRASH’S COMMENTS seem difficult. How can the Midrash possibly attribute Moshe’s inaction to laziness? Granted, a person drags his feet and is slow to act when something is of no consequence to him, but Moshe’s anguish over the people’s sinful, immoral conduct cannot be doubted. Chazal point out that he and the other righteous men were standing there weeping!

If he was pained, though, why indeed didn’t he react? And how are we to understand Moshe’s immobility when his strength and

resoluteness were the foremost features of his leadership? After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe stood up to the entire nation. Why was his response so different on this occasion? The Maharal answers this question by differentiating between two types of sin: physical and intellectual.

Physical sin strengthens the pull of physicality on a person. Its effect is to render him coarser and more sluggish, for the body craves rest. By contrast, an intellectual, spiritual failing doesn't have this effect; on the contrary, his passion drives him to fervor and eagerness.

The sin of the Golden Calf, which involved idolatry, was an intellectual, not physical failing. No general atmosphere of inaction was created, so Moshe's opposition to the sinners was forceful and swift. On the Plains of Moav, the people's sin was lustful, the type of failing that empowers man's physical component and weakens his vigor. As the people's leader, Moshe was influenced by this tendency. His vigor ebbed, rendering him immobile. Only Pinchas, who was not the leader and thus remained unaffected by the people's failing, retained his alacrity.

The essence of Pinchas's deed was thus the vigor he showed; his spirit was unhindered by the heightened pull of physicality and his fervor was undimmed.

☛ Alacrity Is an Antagonist to Man's Earth Element

THE MAHARAL EXPANDS upon the connection between material desire and physical sluggishness.

At first glance, this connection is counterintuitive, for when a person's passions are aroused, he is eager to indulge them and is swift to sin. One of the failings we confess on Yom Kippur is "the sin we have sinned before You with feet running to do evil." When a person is motivated by desire, rather than hindering him, his *yetzer hara* impels him forward. However, all this is the result of the body being drawn downward to its source. When a person's spiritual level drops, he therefore deteriorates very quickly, his downward spiral facilitated

by the pull of his earthly origin, just as a runner finds it easier to run down a slope. By contrast, when a person tries to break away from the natural pull of his physicality, he has to fight his earthly element and finds it difficult to move upward. He finds himself sinking downwards and feels heavy and sluggish.

In *Mesilas Yesharim* (Chap. 6), we thus find the Ramchal writing, “Man’s nature is very onerous, for the earthliness of physicality is bulky. A person therefore balks at hardship and work. Whoever desires to serve the Creator must overcome his own nature and become industrious, for if he remains under the power of his inertia, he will certainly not succeed. This is the *Tanna’s* message: ‘Be brazen as a tiger, nimble as an eagle, fleet as a deer, and mighty as a lion in fulfilling the wishes of your Father in Heaven...’ (*Avos* 5:20) — for a person who wants to transform his nature into the opposite requires a great deal of empowerment.”

Alacrity is thus the antagonist of man’s physical nature. In *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 60), the Maharal notes that “When the body is strong, it can bear a huge burden, but it cannot move quickly. On the other hand, you will encounter the person who is highly agile but cannot carry a heavy burden. This shows that a heavy burden relates to the body, while swift movement relates to the soul.”

☛ Physical Desire and Holiness — Sluggishness and Alacrity

HOLINESS IS SYNONYMOUS with spiritual fervor, which leads to alacrity. By contrast, physical desire relates to man’s earthly element, which is the source of melancholy, depression, and laziness. In *Sha’arei Kedushah* (Vol. I, *Sha’ar* 2), Rav Chaim Vital explains the four elements that are present in every person, their differing proportions determining an individual’s personality:

1. The Fire Element is the source of a person’s ardor, from which arises pride, which is termed “coarseness of spirit,” anger, particularity, and hatred of others.”

2. The Spirit Element is the basis for the type of speech termed “idle chatter,” flattery, lies, *lashon hara*, and all other forms of forbidden speech.
3. The Water Element leads to coveting and jealousy.
4. The Earth Element is the source of sadness and laziness.

Pinchas’s alacrity was evidence of the holy ardor that inspired him, leading him to act swiftly (the Fire Element), which is the polar opposite of physical desire (the Earth Element), which represents submission to the body’s pull towards decadence and sluggishness.

Holiness is thus the antagonist of the physical desire for immorality, as is expressed by Chazal with the principle, “Wherever you encounter a protective guard against immorality, you find holiness” (*Toras Kohanim, parshas Kedoshim*). The section following the list of forbidden relations therefore begins with the command to Bnei Yisrael, “You shall be holy” (*Vayikra* 19:2). Similarly, the Torah prefaces the command to the *kohanim*, “They must not marry an immoral or a profaned woman” (*ibid.* 21:7) with the injunction, “They shall be sanctified for their G-d” (*pasuk* 6). The Maharal thus explains that “Because Pinchas showed zeal in response to an immoral act, it was fitting that he should take the holiness of the priesthood.”

☛ Priesthood Is an Expression of Holy Ardor

IN *MASECHES CHULLIN* (123b), the Gemara states, “*Kohanim* are conscientious,” meaning vigorous and swift in executing their duties. The characteristic typical of a *kohen* is his fervor. This can lead to irritability and swiftness to anger, which are all consequences of a preponderance of the Fire Element in the *kohen*’s personality. In *Chiddushei Aggados (Sanhedrin* 113a), the Maharal uses this idea to explain the Gemara’s statement that Eliyahu Hanavi was given to pedantry: “because he was a *kohen*, and Chazal say in *maseches Bava Basra* 160b that *kohanim* are pedantic, because the *kohanim* are holy, and every holy individual is fire, as they said in the Gemara in *Taanis* 4a in regard to Torah scholars — ‘If you see a Torah scholar

smoldering, it is the Torah smoldering within him.’ Therefore, *kohanim* are quick tempered.”

☛ Rather than Indiscriminate Acceptance of the Other Person, Kindness Involves Concern for His Welfare

HOW CAN THIS approach be reconciled with the Zohar’s portrayal of the *kohen*’s role as exemplifying the trait of kindness?

The answer is that kindness is not merely a matter of the placid acceptance of another person as he is; its true definition is to show concern for the other person’s welfare. If the person he encounters is swept away by his desires, the *kohen*’s holy ardor prompts him to adopt an oppositional stance precisely because of his concern for the other person’s welfare. The *kohen*’s ardor urges him to act firmly and decisively.

The greatest favor one person can do for another is to inspire him with holy fervor and enable him to overcome his desires and urges.

☛ Holy Fervor Repeals Heavenly Judgment

THERE ARE TWO ways to quash raging physical desires: either an outpouring of Heavenly wrath that inflicts punishment or inner ardor and the fire of inner holiness. Chazal say (*Midrash Tanchuma, Mishpatim* 5), “If there is judgment down below, there is no judgment Above. Only when there is no judgment down below is there judgment Above. How so? If they practice judgment down below, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* says, ‘I shall not judge My world.’”

Pinchas brought about the withdrawal of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s anger from Bnei Yisrael by inspiring Bnei Yisrael with holy fervor that overpowers the element of physical desire within man.

Because Pinchas acted as he did, no further Divine wrath was necessary in order to extinguish the rampant physical desires.

We have seen that the priesthood represents an inner holy fire. Pinchas merited priesthood as a reward for his deed because the

fervor he demonstrated was typical of the priesthood. His inner fire saved Bnei Yisrael from Heavenly judgment; thus, Pinchas's deed was essentially not an act of zealotry but of kindness, as it says in *Tehillim* (106:30–1): “Pinchas arose and judged and the plague stopped. It was reckoned as righteousness for him for subsequent generations, forever.”

Matos

“I Believe with Perfect Faith in the Veracity of Moshe Rabbeinu’s Prophecy”

How Did Moshe Rabbeinu’s Prophecy Differ from That of Other Prophets?

THE OPENING *PASUK* of *parshas Matos* contains Moshe’s delivery of the laws of vows, which he opened with the expression, “*Zeh hadavar* (This is the matter)...”

The Torah writes, “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael saying, ‘This is the matter that Hashem has commanded’” (*Bamidbar* 30:2).

Rashi notes Chazal’s remark (in the *Sifri*) that other prophets introduced their prophecies with the expression, “*Koh amar Hashem* (Thus said Hashem).” One example is Yirmeyahu’s prophecy, “Thus said Hashem, ‘I recall for you the kindness of your youth...’” (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). Although Moshe also sometimes introduced a prophecy this way — as in “Thus said Hashem, ‘Around midnight...’” (*Shemos* 11:4) — Moshe advanced still higher and used the expression, “This is the matter...”

The difference between these two expressions is clear. Whereas “Thus says Hashem...” conveys the content of a prophecy in more general terms, “This...” denotes the greater precision available to a person viewing something close up, enabling him to identify it with certainty.

A prophecy prefaced by the expression “This is the matter...” thus

introduces a wholly accurate report of Hashem’s utterance, quoted word for word, without modification or interpretation. Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi explains that the reason why Moshe was also able to preface his prophecies with “This...” is because “He prophesied *b’aspaklaria hame’irah* (through a ‘transparent glass’)” — as the Gemara (*Yevamos* 49b) refers to Moshe’s prophecy — whereas other prophets prophesied *b’aspaklaria she’einah me’irah* (through a ‘non-transparent glass’). Moshe was able to preface his prophecies with an expression denoting greater clarity because he perceived them with greater precision and illumination.

☛ Why the Lack of Consistency in Prefacing Moshe’s Prophecies?

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal raises a fundamental difficulty with this approach. If the difference between these two introductory expressions is a function of the quality and clarity of the individual prophet’s perception, why do we find Moshe sometimes prefacing a prophecy with, “Thus said Hashem”? Was Moshe’s perception of those prophecies any less clear than that of the prophecies he began with “This...”?

☛ What Is a “Transparent Glass?”

THE GEMARA IN *Yevamos* (ibid.) discusses an apparent contradiction between the prophecies of Moshe and of Yeshayah.

Despite Hashem having told Moshe, “For no person can see Me and [still] live” (*Shemos* 33:20), Yeshayah said, “I saw the L-rd sitting on a lofty, elevated Throne” (*Yeshayah* 6:1). The Gemara asks how this is possible, for surely Yeshayah cannot have been greater than Moshe, of whom the Torah tells us, “Now, no [other] prophet ever again arose among Yisrael like Moshe, whom Hashem knew face to face” (*Devarim* 34:10).

The Gemara answers: “All the other prophets perceived [their prophecies] through *aspaklaria she’einah me’irah* (a ‘non-transparent glass’), whereas Moshe perceived [his] through *aspaklaria hame’irah* (a ‘transparent glass’).”

In other words, a person who looks directly at the sun sees nothing, and therefore, Hashem told Moshe that no human can see Him and go on living. On the other hand, a person who looks at the sun through several screens is liable to believe that he has seen the sun, when all he has actually seen is the impression of the sun on the screens. Here too, a person whose perception is unhindered understands that he hasn't seen Hashem, whereas the person whose view is hindered by screens, such as Yeshayah, believes that he has seen Him.

From this Gemara it emerges that Moshe's prophecy was characterized by the directness of his perception. *Aspaklaria hame'irah* should thus be understood as a clear, transparent screen, which can be seen through without any hindrance whatsoever.

In the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:14), we find a disagreement over whether the difference between Moshe's prophecy and that of the other prophets was quantitative or qualitative. In other words, was the diminished clarity of the other prophets due to the greater number of screens through which they perceived their prophetic visions or to their screen's greater opacity?

In Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai's opinion, "The [other] prophets perceived through nine *aspaklariyos* (screens), whereas Moshe perceived through just one." In the Sages' view, however, "All the other prophets perceived through a soiled *aspaklaria*, whereas Moshe saw through a clear one."

How are we to understand this? While we understand what a physical screen is, how are we to apply this concept to the abstract, intellectual process of Divine communication, to the point where one opinion speaks in terms of a number of screens?

☞ Understanding the Concept of Screens in Relation to Spiritual Perception

IN HIS ETHICAL treatise *Shemonah Perakim*, which serves as the introduction to his commentary on *maseches Avos* (Chap. 7), the Rambam

explains that in order for a person to grasp G-d's word, he must first refine himself both intellectually and morally. In the Rambam's words, "Virtues can be either intellectual or fine character traits. Shortcomings may similarly be intellectual, such as foolishness, stupidity, or difficulty in understanding, or may involve character traits, such as desire, pride, anger, jealousy, brazenness, love of money, etc." The Rambam explains that all these shortcomings constitute "barriers separating a person from G-d," as the prophet Yeshayah wrote, "If your sins divided between you and your G-d" (*Yeshayah* 59:2). The barriers (screens) intervening between a person and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* are thus the person's ethical shortcomings, which prevent him from refining himself and apprehending G-d's word, which is pure and refined.

However, it is not necessary for a person to become completely perfect and to remove all the barriers in order to attain prophecy. The Rambam notes: "It is not a precondition for [attaining] prophecy that a person must attain every virtue of character to the point where his character is not marred by any shortcoming whatsoever." To this end, he cites the examples of Shmuel Hanavi, who was afraid of Shaul, and of Yaakov Avinu, who was afraid before his encounter with Esav. However, although prophecy is attainable even before all the barriers have been removed, a person's ethical shortcomings will affect the quality of his prophecy.

The Rambam explains that every trait that a prophet succeeds in rectifying and refining removes a further barrier between him and his Maker and that "Moshe Rabbeinu had no remaining barriers that he had not torn away, for every trait of both character and intellect of his were perfected."

Moshe therefore sought to perceive Hashem and requested, "Please show me Your glory" (*Shemos* 33:18), for all the barriers had been removed. Hashem responded that despite having refined all his material coarseness, Moshe nonetheless remained a physical being. This was conveyed in Hashem's response, "For no *person* can see Me and [still] live" (*ibid. pasuk* 20).

Moshe's advantage over other prophets was thus a function of his higher degree of intellectual and character refinement that he had attained.

External Consequences of the Differing Levels of Prophecy

IN *HILCHOS YESODAI HATORAH* (7:6), the Rambam explains that Moshe's elevation over other prophets led to four external differences in the manner in which they perceived their respective prophecies:

1. Whereas other prophets prophesied while dreaming or seeing a vision, Moshe prophesied while awake and standing.
2. Whereas other prophets received their prophecy from a *malach*, who heard Hashem's words and conveyed them to the prophet — “which is why,” says the Rambam, “they see what they see in the form of a parable or riddle” — it is written about Moshe, “I speak to him face to face” (*Bamidbar* 12:8). Therefore, says the Rambam, “There is no parable; rather, he sees the matter clearly, without any riddle or parable.”
3. Whereas other prophets experienced fear and alarm while receiving their prophecies, Moshe spoke with Hashem “just as a man speaks with his friend” (*Shemos* 33:11). In the Rambam's words, “Just as a person is not frightened to hear his friend speak, Moshe's mind had the resilience to understand the words of prophecy while he was standing, fully aware.”
4. Whereas other prophets could not prophesy at will, whenever they wanted, and they needed to focus (i.e., to align their mood to receiving prophecy), Moshe didn't need to focus his mind in order to prophesy and was constantly in a state of readiness for prophecy. Prophetic inspiration therefore rested upon him whenever he wanted, “for he was focused, prepared and ready, like the *malachim* who serve.” Therefore,

says the Rambam, “Whereas when their prophetic inspiration leaves them, other prophets return to their homes and their bodily needs like other people, Moshe separated permanently from marital relations and from all physical pursuits, for his mind was attached to the Rock of the worlds, and this glory never left him; the skin of his face was radiant, and he was sanctified like the *malachim*.”

☛ Essential Consequences of the Differing Levels of Prophecy

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal delves deeper into these differences, explaining that the superior level of Moshe’s prophecy over that of the other prophets also affects the essence and content of their respective prophecies, not just the outward manner of their attainment.

The Maharal distinguishes between two types of prophecy: prophecy bearing a message relevant to a particular moment in time (such as those relating to the approaching destruction of the Beis Hamikdash) and prophecies whose message is eternal. These latter prophecies express Hashem’s wishes regarding the overall framework of how He desires the world to operate. This second type of prophecy is part of G-d’s Torah, for such prophecies relate to the principles that He imprinted upon the world for all time. Stated in other words, this idea amounts to the Zohar’s teaching in *parshas Terumah* (p. 161a): “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the Torah and created the world [accordingly].”

Whereas other prophets related to events that were confined to a particular moment, Moshe’s prophecy constitutes Torah. Torah does not come into being as a response to or in anticipation of this or that event. Torah preceded any event. It constitutes the framework that creates those events. It is the draft for everything that happens in the world, an overarching program of eternal relevance in every situation and in every epoch and age. Torah was conveyed to us via Moshe’s prophecy. His prophecy is thus unique in being the only one that

doesn't relate to specific events, but rather to that which is of eternal relevance.

In the Maharal's words: "Prophecies fall into one of two categories. One is the manner in which all the other prophets prophesied, in regard to Hashem's actions and His orchestration of everything that happens in the world. While Moshe's level included the above, it also includes prophesying about the mitzvos and the Torah that Hashem commanded him. This level differs from the first one, for whereas the first one is [limited to] new events occurring in the world, Moshe Rabbeinu's level is Torah, which Hashem desires should operate in the world constantly, without any change; it constitutes a comprehensive pattern within the world."

☛ Viewing through a Transparent Glass Enables Comprehensive Perception

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that it is to this quality of Moshe's prophecy that Chazal refer when saying that he prophesied "*b'aspaklaria hame'irah* (through a transparent glass)." The refinement of his physical being that Moshe achieved made possible a more abstract level of prophetic attainment that constituted Torah and that is thus eternal. "You will find this evident among all the prophets," writes the Maharal, "[namely,] that they only prophesied about matters that Hashem was wreaking, performing, and changing. Moshe Rabbeinu, however, conveyed a comprehensive and eternal Torah, nothing of which will change; this is called a comprehensive entity."

In contrast to other prophets, who perceived isolated details, Moshe perceived the overall picture. Whereas they saw individual branches, Moshe saw the entire tree, including its trunk, roots, and the flow of nutrients that sustains it.

Although Moshe, too, perceived individual branches and was sometimes sent to deliver a prophecy relating to a particular event that was tied to a particular moment, he also saw the overall scheme and the elements that had eternal relevance. Such prophecy is Torah.

☛ Moshe's Prophecy Is Truth

THIS SEEMS TO be the message conveyed by the seventh of the Rambam's principles of faith: "I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, *a"b*, was true and that he is the master of other prophets, both those who preceded him and those who came after him." The sixth principle establishes "that all the words of the prophets are true." What sets Moshe's prophecy apart to the extent that it is the subject of a separate declaration?

The difference must be that whereas the words of other prophets related to specific events and were thus true in regard to their specific time, Moshe's words relate to the broad sweep, which is eternal and constitutes Torah. Torah's truth is the source of all that occurs, of every world event major or minor. It is the genuine truth that endures permanently in the world. The truth of Moshe's prophecy is thus the foundation of every other prophecy. This is the meaning of the statement, "and that he is the master of other prophets, both those who preceded him and those who came after him."

☛ The Profound Difference between Prophecies Introduced by "This" and "Thus"

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the difference between a prophecy's introduction with the term "Thus said Hashem" and its introduction with "This is the matter..." is not limited to a difference in its degree of precision and clarity. It expresses an essential difference in content between a prophecy that relates to a specific event and one that relates to the root that encompasses all events. A person seeking guidance as to how to act in a particular situation, without needing to understand its underlying causes, can make do with more general terms and forego deeper explanation of the whys and wherefores. However, a person seeking to grasp the inner workings must attain a level of abstraction at which his perception is clearer and more refined. Hashem's Torah and mitzvos are His utterance in relation to

the root of everything, and as such necessitate profound understanding, which is encountered only in Moshe's prophecy.

As the Maharal writes, "Moshe prophesied using the expression 'This is the matter...' which demonstrates prophecy *b'aspaklaria hame'irah*, which is the term coined for [conveying] the mitzvah that Hashem gave to Yisrael, for the Torah's mitzvos are comprehensive matters."

By contrast, "Thus said Hashem..." refers to some message that is not a constant mitzvah and accordingly doesn't express Hashem's overarching desire and the underlying principles of His workings.

☛ When Did Moshe Use "This" and When Did He Use "Thus"?

IN LIGHT OF the above ideas, the Maharal explains that Moshe varied the expression he used, sometimes introducing a prophecy with "Thus" and sometimes with "This" despite there being no change in the level of his prophecy. The difference lies in the particular prophecy's essence and content. When prophesying about a specific event lacking ramifications for future generations but responding to an event of momentary relevance, he introduced his prophecy with the words, "Thus says Hashem..." By contrast, when prophesying about matters relating to the root and essence of events, to Torah and mitzvos which have eternal relevance, he used the term "This is the matter..."

Thus, when he came to warn Pharaoh about the smiting of the firstborns, Moshe prefaced his prophetic utterance with the words, "Thus said Hashem, 'Around midnight...'" (*Shemos* 11:4). Similarly, when addressing the Levi'im following the sin of the Golden Calf and instructing them to put the sinners to death, Moshe said, "Thus said Hashem, '...go back and forth...'" (*ibid.* 32:27) — "because," says the Maharal, "this mitzvah was not one of the eternal mitzvos, but rather was only [in force] for a specific time." It represented Hashem's desire in light of the incident that had just taken place. As such, it

was appropriate to use the expression “Thus said Hashem...” By contrast, those of Moshe’s utterances that constituted Torah, such as the laws of vows and oaths at the beginning of *parshas Matos*, are introduced with the words, “This is the matter...”

We have seen that the barriers or screens intervening between man and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* are man’s ethical shortcomings, which prevent him from attaining the necessary refinement for acting as a receptacle for Hashem’s utterances, which are pure and refined. Having refined his traits, Moshe perceived through an *aspa-klaria hame’irah*. Refining his physical coarseness enabled Moshe to access more abstract prophetic attainments that constituted Torah and that were therefore eternal. Whereas other prophets perceived isolated details, Moshe perceived the comprehensive, overall picture. At times, though, Moshe was also sent to deliver a prophecy relating to a specific event taking place at a specific moment, and on those occasions, he used the words, “Thus said Hashem...” However, Moshe perceived the overarching vision, that which is of eternal relevance; such prophecy constitutes Torah. On those occasions when he perceived eternity and was a receptacle for it, he expressed the clarity and precision of a close-up view and prefaced his words with, “This is the matter that Hashem has commanded.”

Masei

The Interrelationship between a Person and His Domicile

☛ What Was Special about the Cities of Refuge and the Cities of the Levi'im?

A PERSON WHO murders unintentionally is exiled to one of the cities of refuge to escape being killed by his victim's "blood redeemer" (i.e., avenger). The Torah writes, "You shall designate cities for yourselves that shall be refuge cities for you to where a murderer who killed someone inadvertently may escape" (*Bamidbar* 35:11). How are we to understand this seemingly paradoxical injunction? If an unintentional murderer deserves death, the avenger ought to be able to kill him wherever he is. If the murderer doesn't deserve to die, it should be forbidden to kill him wherever he is. How can his fate depend upon where he happens to be — he may not be killed inside a city of refuge but can be killed if he is anywhere else? What role does his location play?

Furthermore, an unintentional murderer can also escape to one of the forty-two cities inhabited by Levi'im, as it says, "And these are the cities that you shall give to the Levi'im: the six refuge cities that you shall establish, to where the murderer may escape, and in addition to them, you shall give another forty-two cities" (*ibid. pasuk* 6). Why does a city inhabited by Levi'im automatically become a city

of refuge? If more cities of refuge are necessary, why not designate additional cities specifically as such? What connection exists between a city's Levite inhabitants and its function as a city of refuge?

☛ Why Were There Three Cities of Refuge on the Other Side of the Jordan River?

THERE WERE SIX cities of refuge: three inside Eretz Yisrael proper and three on the other side of the Jordan River, as it says, “Three of the cities you shall establish across the Jordan River, and three of the cities you shall establish in the Land of Canaan, and they will serve as refuge cities” (ibid. *pasuk* 14).

Rashi raises the difficulty of this seemingly incongruent division. There were nine and a half tribes living in Eretz Yisrael, while only two and a half tribes lived on the eastern side of the Jordan. How is it possible that both these areas were apportioned the same number of cities of refuge? Rashi's answer is that there were numerous murderers on the eastern side of the Jordan, as it says, “Gilad (a city on the Jordan's eastern bank) is a town of criminals, trodden with blood” (*Hoshe'a* 6:8).

The Ramban questions the relevance of a preponderance of intentional murderers on the Jordan's eastern bank. After all, the cities of refuge were meant only for unintentional murderers, not those who murdered intentionally. The incidence of unintentional murder would seem to be a function of the size of a region's population rather than that population's criminal character or lack thereof.

☛ The Influence of Location

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal offers two approaches to resolving the Ramban's question. One approach is that in a society that numbers many murderers among its members, human life is generally undervalued. In an environment where life is not assigned its true, supreme value, there will also be more instances of unintentional murder.

The rationale for such an argument is obvious. Anything that is not considered important goes unnoticed and becomes a victim of carelessness.

The Maharal's second answer is that the eastern side of the Jordan needed more cities of refuge in relation to its population because *the region* exerted a negative effect upon its inhabitants, whose value for human life diminished. In the same way that the character of the region led to there being more premeditated murders, it also led to there being more unintentional murders.

In the Maharal's words, "The preponderance of murderers there was certainly due to the effect of the place, which gave rise to murderers who murder other people; by the same token, it was predisposed to raise people who kill unintentionally."

The Maharal explains that unintentional murder is a consequence of a person having a warm temperament and a hasty nature, "for there are people who [by nature] are more prone to a particular thing" and thus, "the place cultivated people with murderous inclinations, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally — this is clear."

The attribution of tendencies to certain places explains how there can be places that are particularly liable for misfortune. One such example is the city of Shechem, which the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 102a) asserts was just such a place, having been "marked for misfortune: in Shechem, Dinah was abused; in Shechem, Yosef's brothers sold him; and in Shechem, the kingdom of the Davidic dynasty was split."

☛ Why Does a Place Adversely Affect Members of a Society, Who Remain Unaffected Elsewhere?

WHAT IS THE connection between a place and the characteristics of its inhabitants? The inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael and the eastern bank of the Jordan were members of the same nation who all observed the same Torah and spoke the same language.

Moreover, the tribe of Menashe was divided into two parts, one

in Eretz Yisrael proper and the other on the other side of the Jordan. Is it possible that the characteristics of the two parts' families should diverge depending upon which side of the Jordan they inhabited? The physical distance between the two banks of the Jordan is very small. What changed the Jews who inhabited the far side of the Jordan?

Now, it is usual to explain that people's physical characteristics reflect the vistas of their birthplaces, with different places exerting differing influences upon their inhabitants. We thus find in the *Midrash Rabbah* in *parshas Shelach* (16:12) that Moshe instructed the spies to note the nature of the terrain they would be passing through because "While one land produces strong people, another produces weaklings." However, in regard to personality traits and moral profile, it is generally understood that a person is influenced socially only by a place's inhabitants, not by the place itself. The Rambam thus writes (*Hilchos Dei'os* 6:1): "Man is made such that in his views and deeds he is drawn after his peers and friends, and he conducts himself like the people of his country." While the surrounding society indeed exerts an influence upon the individual, his domicile, in and of itself, is not expected to do so. If a social group moves from one place to another as a community, will they change?

The Maharal's answer is: yes!

According to the Maharal, a place changes a person, even in the absence of any social pressure whatsoever. Here are several examples of this idea that we encounter throughout the Maharal's writings.

☛ Beis El: A Place Predisposed to Prophecy

YAAKOV PROPHESED UPON returning to Eretz Yisrael from his sojourn in Lavan's home, following which the Torah tells us, "G-d's presence left him, at the place where He had spoken with him" (*Bereishis* 35:13). On the words, "at the place where He had spoken with him," Rashi comments, "I do not know what this teaches us."

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal expresses his astonishment at this,

writing, “Why doesn’t he know what this teaches us? It implies that the place was auspicious for the *Shechinah*’s Presence, for Yaakov named the place where Hashem spoke to him, ‘El Beis El’ (ibid. *pasuk* 7), and you will not find this anywhere; even though Hashem spoke to Avraham and Yitzchak, they didn’t give a name to that place; only Yaakov gave a name to the place. This proves that the place was responsible, for Yaakov was aware of the place’s holiness. It therefore says, ‘at the place where He had spoken with him,’ to convey that the place was responsible. Therefore, we know very well what it is teaching us.”

In other words, Yaakov merited prophecy at this particular place because a place exerts an effect on a person.

☛ The Effect of Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval

WHEN AVRAHAM AVINU arrived in Eretz Yisrael from Charan, the Torah tells us, “Avram crossed into the land, traveling as far as the site of Shechem, as far as Elon, the plain of Moreh” (ibid. 13:6). Rashi explains, “Elon Moreh is Shechem: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* showed him Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval, where Yisrael accepted the oath of the Torah.” The Maharal asks in *Gur Aryeh*, “Should you ask, why did He show him Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval more than any other places? It appears that He showed Avraham the virtue of the land he had come to, for there are places in Eretz Yisrael that are attached to the furthest extent, both of blessing and of curse. He showed him Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval, where they accepted the Torah with blessing and curse and [showed him] how these places were attached to the Divine power up above.”

The Maharal explains that in addition to Eretz Yisrael’s special character, Avraham prophesied about what would later happen at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval, because “The place exerts an influence, for having come to a place where all these great events would take place in the future, he automatically received a prophecy about all these events.”

In other words, Avraham prophesied about what would happen in this place in the future, for the influence of the place caused them to happen. The place's predisposition that led those events to happen also made Avraham aware of them in advance thorough prophecy.

☛ Shittim: A Location That Predisposed to Sin

BNEI YISRAEL SINNED with the daughters of Moav, and the Torah notes that this took place when “Yisrael were living in Shittim” (*Bamidbar* 25:1). The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (106a) comments, “Rabbi Eliezer said, ‘Shittim was the place’s name;’ Rabbi Yehoshua said, ‘Because they were occupied with *divrei shtus* (foolish matters).’” Rabbi Eliezer’s comment seems hard to understand, for why note that the name of the place where they sinned was Shittim? Surely nothing is written in the Torah needlessly, yet it is hard to see what this conveys.

In *Chiddushei Aggados* (*ibid.*), the Maharal explains that according to Rabbi Eliezer, the Torah is teaching us that the place was called Shittim “because the place is responsible; there can be a place that predisposes to sin to a greater extent. The place was therefore called Shittim, because they committed a foolish, immoral deed there.”

The place’s name thus provides important information about the event, because the place predisposed Bnei Yisrael to sin.

☛ A Person’s Deeds Affect the Place Where They Are Performed

WHAT LEADS TO the deterioration of a particular place to the point where the spirit of folly and sin with which it is suffused affects its inhabitants?

Commenting further in regard to Shittim, the Maharal writes that the place was polluted and predisposed to the sin of immorality because “It was in the land of Moav, for Moav was born as a result of a father (Lot) having relations with his daughter. Therefore, the Moabite women were predisposed towards this. This is the meaning

of the *pasuk*, “The people began to act immorally with the daughters of Moav’ (ibid.)” Having been influenced by its inhabitants, the place had absorbed an impure spirit that affected others, even if they were only passing through.

☛ A Person’s Characteristics Extend into His Belongings

THIS PRINCIPLE THAT the Maharal lays down sheds light on the comments of Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (*Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 205): “Chazal enacted several measures to prevent a Yisrael living together with a non-Jew [as we find in *maseches Avodah Zarah* 36b and *maseches Erwin* 62a], because the extension of a person’s character can be encountered within his living quarters and domicile. This is known from the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.” A person’s characteristics spread from him to his belongings and property. A person’s sins thus infiltrate his place and defile it, and this impurity is liable to affect another person who comes to live there. Therefore, if a Jew lives in close proximity to a non-Jew, “There is concern that foreign thoughts may enter his heart.” In other words, even though the non-Jew may have no effect upon the Jew socially, for they have nothing in common and have no contact whatsoever, the Jew could still be influenced by the non-Jew, because the very nature of the place can lead to deterioration in the Jew’s level and cause him to sin.

Rav Tzadok continues, noting that he heard from his own teacher (the author of *Mei Hashilo’ach*) that “The air of the gentile countries introduces the evil characteristics of the gentile nations into a person’s heart, and conversely, the air of Eretz Yisrael instills wisdom (*Bava Basra* 158b). Hashem fixed the nations’ borders, giving each nation that has a particular characteristic a special territory, and the air of the place where that nation resides can instill something of that characteristic into the hearts of Bnei Yisrael as well, *chas v’shalom*.” There is thus a symbiotic relationship between a place and its inhabitants; the place is suffused with the prevailing spirit of the

people who live there. The air absorbs their deeds and then goes on to influence its inhabitants with the spirit that it has absorbed.

☛ The Special Character of the Cities of Refuge and of the Levite Cities

IN LIGHT OF the Maharal's comments, we can explain that an unintentional murderer can achieve correction of the spiritual shortcomings that led him to commit such a deed simply by residing in a city of refuge, for the places designated for these cities are predisposed to having this effect. The Torah's designation of six places to serve as cities of refuge accords them the holiness and the ambience capable of rectifying an unintentional murderer, thus obviating any need to further punish him. This explanation enables us to understand the Gemara's statement (*Makkos* 10b) that a city of refuge in which no elders reside cannot take in an unintentional murderer, for the place needs to have an atmosphere of Torah and of holiness in order to have the desired correctional effect upon its inhabitants. This is also the key to understanding the Gemara's statement (*ibid.* 12a) that the altar in the Beis Hamikdash also provided unintentional murderers with refuge, acting in the same way as a city of refuge. The holiness of the deeds performed in a particular location is indeed absorbed by the place, which then exerts an influence upon its inhabitants, improving and mending their ways.

This also explains why the cities of the Levi'im acted as cities of refuge. These places were influenced by their inhabitants, absorbing the holiness of the Levi'im who lived there, and were therefore able to have the necessary correctional effect upon the soul of an unintentional murderer. We thus find in the *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 408): "The root of this mitzvah is known, for the tribe of Levi is the choicest of all the tribes and is suited for performing the service of Hashem's House; they have no portion among Yisrael in the possession of fields and vineyards, but they at least need cities in which they, their children, infants, and livestock can reside. Due to

their great elevation, virtuous deeds, and precious quality, their lands were chosen over those of the other tribes to take in all unintentional murderers, in the hope that their land, which is sanctified with their holiness, would atone for them.”

We have shown that a person is influenced by his surroundings — not only by the surrounding society, but also by the effect of the place itself upon its inhabitants. There exists reciprocity between a person and his location. A great person suffuses his place with holiness and spiritual elevation, creating an ambience that will have a positive, elevating effect upon all who come to live there. Conversely, evil, sinful people exert an influence upon the atmosphere of their domicile, and others who dwell there will be adversely affected thereby. A wise person will accordingly act discerningly and choose both worthy company and a good place.

Devarim

“He Has Elevated Us above All Languages and Has Sanctified Us”

☛ What Is Sick about a “Sick Language”?

THE BOOK OF *DEVARIM* records the teachings that Moshe conveyed to Bnei Yisrael in the weeks before he died, as the very first *pasuk* tells us: “These are the things that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael on the opposite side of the Jordan” (*Devarim* 1:1). However, we have already been informed that Moshe was not a natural orator and that he in fact had a speech impediment. When originally sent by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, Moshe said about himself, “I am not a man of words” (*Shemos* 4:10). How had he now become a man of words?

Addressing this point, Chazal tell us (*Devarim Rabbah* 1:1) that once Moshe learned Torah, his speech impediment healed, and he became a man of words. As the Midrash says: “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said, ‘See how precious Torah’s language is, for it cures speech.’” However, the Midrash continues, beyond effecting a cure for physical speech impediments, Torah also has a curative effect on the medium of speech — on language itself — leading Chazal to conclude that *sifrei Torah* may therefore be written in other languages.

Evidently, without having been made aware of Torah’s curative property, we would have assumed that *sifrei Torah* cannot be written in other languages due to some “sickness” from which other

languages suffer. The Midrash equates this “sickness” with a physical speech impediment like that from which Moshe suffered, and only because “The speech of scholars is healing” (*Kesubos* 103a) is it permitted to write the Torah in another language.

From what “sickness” do foreign languages suffer that necessitates their healing through Torah’s teachings? What quality sets *lashon hakodesh* (the holy tongue, i.e., biblical Hebrew), fundamentally apart from other languages?

☛ A Language Conveys a Nation’s Soul

IN THE PART of his address to Bnei Yisrael recorded in this *parshah*, Moshe recounts the episode of the spies. He told Bnei Yisrael, “All of you then approached me and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us, and they shall spy out the land for us and report back to us *davar* (a matter), the way via which we shall go up and the cities that we shall enter” (ibid. *pasuk* 22). Rashi explains that *davar* here denotes *dibur*, speech, with the spies being asked to find out “which language they (i.e., the Canaanite peoples) speak.”

In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal wonders what the significance of this piece of knowledge was to Bnei Yisrael. He answers that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* assigned each nation a language of its own corresponding to its character. In the Maharal’s words, “In keeping with its [national] character, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* assigned it its language.” For example, *lashon hakodesh* was given to the Holy Nation, the language corresponding to its speakers’ spiritual configuration. It was therefore important that the spies ascertain what language the nations living in Eretz Yisrael spoke in order to ascertain their nature, “because the language [they speak] is the measure of a nation.”

☛ No Language, No Character

BY THE SAME token, a nation without a language of its own therefore also lacks a character of its own, indicating its abject, contemptible

status. Accordingly, we find *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* admonishing Bnei Yisrael, “They provoked Me with something that has no divine power; they angered Me with their vanities, and I shall provoke them with a non-nation” (ibid. 32:21). Rashi explains that “a non-nation” refers to Esav’s descendants, the nation of Edom, of whom it is said, “You are highly contemptible” (*Ovadiab* 1:2). The Gemara (*Megillah* 13b) explains that Edom’s contemptibility — on account of which it is referred to as a non-nation — arises from the fact that “They have neither an alphabet nor a language.” In *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal explains that “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave each and every nation a distinct language, but Edom was not included.”

If a nation’s language is an expression of its national soul, our conclusion about the nature of a nation that has no language of its own should be obvious.

☛ Language Is the Key to a Nation’s Heart

IN *YOMA* (36B), the Gemara relates that when Pharaoh appointed Yosef as his viceroy, his advisors asked him, “Do you intend to put a slave whose master bought him for twenty pieces of silver in charge of us?” Pharaoh told them, “I see he exhibits royal mannerisms.” They told him, “If so, he ought to know seventy languages.” The *malach* Gavriel came and taught Yosef all seventy languages. The following day, in whichever language Pharaoh addressed Yosef, Yosef replied in that language. However, when Yosef addressed Pharaoh in *lashon hakodesh*, Pharaoh didn’t understand him. Pharaoh asked Yosef to teach him Hebrew, but when Yosef tried teaching it to him, Pharaoh was unable to grasp it. Pharaoh asked Yosef to swear to him that he wouldn’t reveal to anyone that there was an extra language he knew that Pharaoh didn’t know.

What is the significance of a king’s knowledge of all seventy languages, and why was it important to Pharaoh that Yosef should guard the secret of his knowledge of an additional language that Pharaoh didn’t know?

In *Gur Aryeh* (*Bereishis* 50:6), the Maharal explains that in order to dominate other people, a ruler must have insight into his subjects' souls and be able to touch their hearts. It is therefore impossible to dominate another nation without knowing its language. If language was nothing more than a medium for communication, the services of a translator would be sufficient, but since a nation's language affords insight into its essence — as the Sages put it, language is “the quill (i.e., the means) of [expressing what lies within] the heart” (*Shelah, Sha'ar Ha'osiyos*, beg. *Os kaf*, quoting Chazal; *Chovos Halevavos, Sha'ar Habechinah*, Chap. 5) — a ruler must actually get to know the language spoken by those over whom he seeks to rule.

The Maharal explains further that Pharaoh was able to rule over many nations thanks to his knowledge of every language, with the exception of *lashon hakodesh*, which he didn't know and was unable to understand, because he couldn't fathom the holy character of the Jewish nation. Although he could enslave them, he was thus unable to totally control and dominate them.

☛ Why Is Our Language Known as *Lashon Hakodesh*?

IN *MOREH NEVUCHIM* (Part III, Chap. 8), the Rambam offers a practical explanation of why our language is known as *lashon hakodesh*. He writes that it contains no words for the reproductive organs, the reproductive act, or for the various issues of the body. These things are always referred to using borrowed terms, by employing parables, or with words from other languages.

The Ramban (in his commentary to *Shemos* 30:13) takes issue with this explanation. He writes, “There is no need to advance this reason, for it is clear that that the language is holy of holies.” What does the Ramban mean?

In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Hatzeniyus*, Chap. 3), the Maharal explains: “It is unlikely that our language should be called *lashon*

hakodesh [simply] because it contains no unseemly words, for that would not render the language itself inherently holy. Rather, the reason this language is known as a holy language is because language is the product and the yield of a person, which issues from his lips.”

In other words, by virtue of the Jewish nation being a holy nation, its speech is clean. The fact that no words exist for the reproductive organs is not what renders the language holy. It is the other way around — since language gives expression to a nation’s essence, and the members of our nation are holy, it is because they do not speak directly about such matters that no words for the reproductive organs exist. The lack of any such words is merely an indication of the language’s holiness, not the reason for it. Our language is holy because language is the pen of the heart, and the Jewish People’s collective heart is holy.

☛ The World Was Created through Words of *Lashon Hakodesh*

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS further that *lashon hakodesh* was awarded to the Holy Nation because the speech of a person who occupies himself with spiritual pursuits is endowed with creative power, *lashon hakodesh* being the language through which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world. By properly guarding his speech and avoiding all harmful or derogatory talk, a person can transform *nega* (plague) into *oneg* (pleasure) — (both words are composed of the same three letters: *gimel*, *nun*, and *ayin*). In other words, the plague of *tzara’as* that Chazal tell us is inflicted on a person who speaks *lashon hara* can be rectified and transformed into a positive experience by learning to use speech positively.

Words are invested with creative and transformative power, for the world was created through words, as the Mishnah (*Avos* 5:1) tells us: “The world was created with ten utterances,” as the Torah records at the beginning of *parshas Bereishis*. *Sefer Yetzirah* (4:12) refers to letters, from which words are built, as *avanim* (stones or building

blocks), and to words as *batim* (houses), because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* built the world with His utterances, and the letters and words of those utterances served as the building blocks for the world's creation.

In a similar vein, Chazal tell us that because the world was created with *lashon hakodesh*, Torah was also given in *lashon hakodesh*. The *Shitah Mekubetzes* (*Berachos* 13b) notes that the mitzvah of *v'hagisa bo yomam valailah*, the obligation to be constantly occupied with Torah study, can be fulfilled only in *lashon hakodesh*. Commenting on the *pasuk* in *Bereishis* 2:23, "This one will be called *ishah* (a woman), for this one was taken from *ish* (a man)," Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 18:4) ask in what other language we encounter the male and female nouns differing from one another by just one letter, as they do in *lashon hakodesh*, rather than being two entirely different words. This, they conclude, proves that the Torah was given in *lashon hakodesh*, and by the same token, that the world was created in *lashon hakodesh*.

"This is why," explains the Maharal, "this language (i.e., *lashon hakodesh*) was given to the holy part of mankind (i.e., the Jewish People), and this is why the Torah and the rest of the holy writings are written in *lashon hakodesh* in particular."

☞ Hebrew Words Convey an Item's Essence

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that whereas other languages serve solely as a medium of communication between one person and another, since *lashon hakodesh* is the language in which the world was created, its very words also express an item's definition and essence, every thing's name being the means through which it was brought into existence. This is the idea behind the *Shelah's* remark (*Pesachim, Matzah Ashirah*): "The letters of our holy *alef-beis* are not the product of a consensus, as are other nations' alphabets, which are mere symbols [whose users have agreed should represent certain sounds]; rather, they are intrinsically holy, having been hewn from Above."

This is also the rationale behind the *Kuzari's* comments on this topic: “There are languages and scripts that possess no advantage over one another. In some languages, the nouns express the nature of the item they describe to a greater extent, while in others, they do so to a lesser extent. [However,] the Divine language, which G-d has taught man, is undoubtedly the most perfect of all languages and the one that most accurately reflects the meaning of the words to which it alludes, as is written ‘Whatever man would call each living being, that would be its name’ (ibid. 2:19).”

☛ The Impact of Hebrew Speech, Even When It Is Not Understood by the Speaker

THIS DISTINCTION BETWEEN other languages, which serve solely as a means of communication, and *lashon hakodesh*, whose words express the essence of the thing they describe, enables us to understand a halachic principle that has practical ramifications.

Certain texts or blessings whose recital is mandatory at specific times or in specific situations may be said in any language. One such example is *keriyas Shema*, which can be said “in any language that you hear (i.e., understand)” (*Berachos* 13a; *Mishnah Berurah* 62:3). However, a person can discharge his obligation by reciting *Shema* in *lashon hakodesh* even without understanding the language.

The rationale behind this distinction is straightforward. A recital in a language that serves solely as a means of communication is meaningless if the speaker doesn't understand what he is saying, for understanding is the basis of communication. By contrast, simply uttering words of *lashon hakodesh* is effective even if the speaker doesn't understand them, because the words themselves express their meaning and are intrinsically holy. The halachah therefore is that reciting *Shema* in *lashon hakodesh*, whose words express their meaning independently of whether or not the speaker is communicating, is effective even without him understanding what he is saying.

Other Languages' "Sickness" and Their Cure

HAVING ESTABLISHED THAT the language in which a nation's members communicate with one another expresses their national character and essence, we must now return to the Midrash that we quoted earlier and explain how Torah serves to cure other nations' languages. In what sense are those languages sick, and what is their cure?

In *Shem Mishemuel* (*parshas Devarim* 5679), Rav Shmuel Borenstein, the Admor of Sochatchov, explains that each of the seventy nations suffers from a specific shortcoming that is particular to it, corresponding to its national character and inner spiritual configuration. Since a nation's language expresses its members' particular character and emotional configuration, anyone speaking it will be influenced by it and will become attached to the particular shortcoming that typifies its speakers. A language's detrimental effect upon others who speak it is referred to as its "sickness." Accordingly, the *Shem Mishemuel* notes the *Chiddushei Harim* of Ger's remark that the French language draws its speakers to immoral conduct "Because they (i.e., the French) are particularly contaminated with this [failing], as is known, and thus their language, within which their essence is concealed, exerts a particular pull towards it." The *Shem Mishemuel* explains that "Torah conversation in a foreign language transforms the evil within the language to good. This happens because the Torah needs that language as a means of explaining it (i.e., Torah) to the listener; the language thereby becomes attached to purity, the evil within it is repelled, and a pure spirit enters it; this constitutes the language's cure." In other words, using another language as a vehicle for imparting comprehension of Torah attaches its speakers to Torah. Its use for a pure purpose neutralizes any negative influence that it previously exerted.

The *Shem Mishemuel* uses this idea to explain why, in his commentaries to the Chumash and the Gemara, Rashi often cites French words in the course of his explanations. Surely, he points out, no

dearth of Hebrew words for explaining can have rendered this necessary. Rather, he explains, Rashi did this intentionally to benefit speakers of that language by providing it with a degree of healing through using it as a means of elucidating Torah, whereas prior to this, it may have exerted an even greater pull towards evil.

Torah is thus a remedy for the soul and speech of speakers of foreign languages.

We have explained that language serves as “the quill of the heart,” expressing the collective soul and character of the nation speaking it and therefore influencing other people who speak it. *Lashon hakodesh*, on the other hand, is an intrinsically holy language, which doesn’t just serve as a way of communicating, but also expresses the essence of the items and actions to which it refers, for it is the language which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* used for creating the world, its letters thus serving as the tools for the creation of these items and actions. Other languages can be exalted if they are used for holy purposes, as a means of imparting comprehension of Torah teachings. This is why we praise Hashem, “Who has chosen us from other nations and has exalted us above every language.”

Va'eschanan

“*Shamor* and *Zachor* in a Single Utterance — the Single G-d Declared to Us; G-d Is One and His Name Is One”

☛ Why Were *Shamor* and *Zachor* Uttered Together?

THE *ASERES HADIBROS* are repeated in *parshas Va'eschanan*, where the command about Shabbos appears as: “*Shamor* (always guard) the Shabbos day so as to sanctify it, just as Hashem, your G-d, commanded you” (*Devarim* 5:12).

Earlier, in *parshas Yisro* where the *aseres hadibros* are first mentioned, the Torah writes, “*Zachor* (constantly remember) the Shabbos day so as to sanctify it” (*Shemos* 20:8).

In one place the Torah writes “Remember,” and in the other, “Guard” — despite the *aseres hadibros* being communicated to Bnei Yisrael on only one occasion.

Addressing this point, the Gemara in *maseches Rosh Hashanah* (27a) notes, “*Zachor* and *shamor* were said in a single utterance, which no [human] mouth can utter and no [human] ear can hear.” At Har Sinai, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* thus uttered the words *zachor* and *shamor* together, in unison.

The positive command, *zachor*, to remember Shabbos and sanctify it, serves as the source of the mitzvah to mark Shabbos as holy by making Kiddush. The negative command, *shamor*, is an injunction against profaning Shabbos by performing any forbidden *melachah*. From the fact that both commands were uttered simultaneously,

Chazal (*Shevuos* 20b) derive that although women are generally exempt from time-bound positive commandments, they are nevertheless obligated in *zachor* because they are obligated in its twin commandment, the negative *shamor*.

The Maharal raises a fundamental question in this regard. Why was it necessary for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to miraculously utter both commands simultaneously when the same end could apparently have been served by conveying these two commandments in succession, writing, “Remember and guard the Shabbos day...”? Placing them side by side would also have allowed us to derive that anyone obligated in *shamor* is equally obligated in *zachor*.

☛ How Do *Zachor* and *Shamor* Differ from Other Discrepancies between the Texts of the *Dibros*?

THE MAHARAL ASKS further: why do Chazal resolve this particular discrepancy between the texts of the *aseres hadibros* in *parshas Yisro* and *parshas Va'eschanan* by saying that both versions were uttered simultaneously but not offer this explanation for the numerous other differences between the two texts?

For example, the *aseres hadibros* in *parshas Yisro* give the following reason for the mitzvah of Shabbos; “The seventh day is Shabbos ... you must not do any work ... for in six days, Hashem made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything that is within them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore, Hashem blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (*Shemos* 20:10–11). Shabbos is thus in commemoration of the world’s creation, following which He rested on the seventh day. In the *dibros* of *parshas Va'eschanan*, however, an entirely different reason is given: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, but Hashem, your G-d, brought you out of there with mighty force and extended power, and therefore, Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to observe the Shabbos day” (*Devarim* 5:15).

Why are only *zachor* and *shamor* said to have been “uttered in a single utterance?”

☛ Shabbos's Special Character Is a Blend of Both *Zachor* and *Shamor*

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that Shabbos's character results from the combination of *zachor* and *shamor*. Only their observance together creates Shabbos; neither can do so on its own.

In other words, Shabbos will not receive its desired character by the observance of *shamor* alone (refraining from *melachah*) without marking the day's sanctity in any positive way, because there can be numerous reasons why a person happens to refrain from labor. He may lack the strength or the resolve to work, or he may have no work to do, or he may have someone else to do his work for him. Merely not working doesn't show that the day is Shabbos. Similarly, simply marking Shabbos as a special, holy day cannot give Shabbos its unique character, for what purpose is served by reciting Kiddush and declaring the day's holiness if at the same time a person treats it like an ordinary weekday? Performing *melachah* on Shabbos renders meaningless any declaration of the day's holiness.

Zachor and *shamor* thus represent two sides of the same coin. Shabbos's special character becomes apparent only when both aspects of the day are blended. "This," says the Maharal, "is the reason that *zachor* and *shamor* were said in a single utterance."

While this conclusion certainly explains the necessity for both *zachor* and *shamor*, it doesn't explain why writing, "*Zachor v'shamor es yom ha'Shabbos...* (Remember and guard the Shabbos day)" wouldn't have sufficed. Why did they need to be uttered simultaneously? In order to answer this question, we must examine a further aspect of *zachor* and *shamor* that goes to the heart of our topic and is beautifully elucidated by the Maharal.

☛ The Esoteric Significance of *Zachor* and *Shamor*

IN HIS COMMENTARY on the *pasuk*, "Remember the Shabbos day so as to sanctify it," the Ramban cites the Midrash of Rabbi Nechuniah

ben Hakaneh from *Sefer Habahir* (182), which notes that there is “a major, concealed teaching in *zachor v’shamor*,” namely, that whereas *zachor* relates to that aspect of Shabbos (the daylight hours) that denotes Divine love and kindness, *shamor* relates to Shabbos’s other aspect (the nighttime hours) that denotes judgment and awe.

In Kabbalistic teachings, kindness is a manifestation of bestowal upon others and is therefore characterized as male, whereas judgment is associated with containment and is therefore characterized as female. This is why on Friday night we welcome Shabbos with the words, “*Bo’i kallah, bo’i kallah* (Enter, bride; enter, bride)” referring to Shabbos as female. Similarly, in the *Amidah* of Friday night we say, “*v’yanuchu bah* (they shall rest on it),” again using the feminine form of “it” (*bah*) to refer to Shabbos. On Shabbos morning, however, we say “*v’yanuchu bo*,” using the masculine form of “it” (*bo*).

While rooted in esoteric teachings, these ideas have a parallel explanation in revealed terms which is cited by the Ramban, as we shall soon see.

☞ *Zachor* and *Shamor* Signify Love and Awe

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN *zachor* and *shamor* amounts to the fundamental difference between positive (*zachor*) and negative (*shamor*) commandments.*

Heeding a negative mitzvah is a function of fear of G-d, Who has commanded it. Fear has a deterring and paralyzing effect. Fulfilling positive mitzvos, on the other hand, is prompted by love for the Commander, which spurs a person to action. Positive mitzvos thus bring a person closer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, while negative mitzvos prevent him from distancing himself from Him.

* It should be noted that although at first glance, *shamor* (guard) also seems to be a positive command, the Gemara points out that any injunction to guard against doing a particular action — in this case, forbidden *melachah* on Shabbos — amounts to a negative command and is reckoned as such.

The Ramban (*Yisro*, *ibid.*) therefore writes that the nature of *zachor*, which is a positive command, “is a consequence of the attribute of love and relates to mercy, for a person who fulfills his master’s commands is beloved by him, and his master has mercy upon him, whereas the nature of *shamor*, a negative command, relates to the attribute of judgment and is a consequence of fear, because a person who refrains from doing that which his master considers evil fears his master.”

Thus, in a single utterance, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* conveyed a command that calls for both fearing and loving Him. This is no straightforward matter, as we shall see.

☛ Fear and Love as Contradictory Traits

IN *GUR ARYEH* (*Devarim* 10:12), the Maharal discusses the stark difference in the emotions aroused by loving and fearing.

A person who loves experiences a desire for attachment to the object of his love and for closeness with it. Awe, on the other hand, inspires the wish to recoil from the feared object and maintain distance from it. These emotions are thus not only contradictory but mutually exclusive; awe is sustained by a feeling of distance and holding back, but when love grows, distance vanishes and fear disappears. A person who sees a king, for example, and feels love towards him will seek to get closer to him, his love displacing his former awe.

In *maseches Sanhedrin* (52b), the Gemara tells us that an ignoramus initially regards a Torah scholar as akin to a golden vessel, before whose magnificence the ignoramus stands in awe. However, if the difference in rank between them is not maintained, this respectful attitude will disappear. The Gemara points out that if the scholar stops to chat with the ignoramus, the latter now views him as akin to a silver vessel — which is not so out of his league. Once the scholar derives some benefit from the ignoramus, he is regarded by the latter as nothing more than a commonplace earthenware jug.

In the *Yerushalmi* (*Berachos* 9:5), we find the following exhortation:

“Serve Hashem in love and serve Him in fear. Fulfill mitzvos out of love so that if you come to hate Him [as happens when one person lives in fear of another], you will remain aware that you love Him — and a lover does not hate. Serve Hashem in fear, so that if you come to reject Him [as can happen in consequence of overfamiliarity and overstepping boundaries], realize that you fear Him — and a person who is in awe does not reject.”

Unbridled love of G-d can thus lead to scornfully rejecting Him. Maintaining fear is thus always important in order to preserve the correct distance and, consequently, the appropriate respect.

Love and fear are evidently contradictory and opposing emotions that cannot coexist.

☞ How Can *Zachor* and *Shamor* Exist Simultaneously?

WE HAVE SEEN that *zachor* expresses love, while *shamor* expresses fear and awe. We have also shown the mutually exclusive nature of these two traits. The combination of these two commands in a single utterance, therefore, wasn't only a matter of conveying two commands — one positive and the other negative — representing two different and complementary aspects of the mitzvah of Shabbos. Rather, it was including two contradictory and mutually exclusive emotions within a single instruction. How is it possible to demand the arousal of both these emotions at once?

We are forced to conclude that Shabbos is a special mitzvah whose essence indeed encompasses both approaches together.

Appreciating this mitzvah's comprehensive nature and its embrace of disparate approaches enables us to accommodate both its elements — love and awe — together, without feeling any contradiction between them.

In practical terms, though, how is a person to resolve the opposing natures of these emotions?

☞ Love and Awe Are No Contradiction in Man's Relationship with G-d

THE ONE REALM in which man is able to resolve the contradiction between love and fear is in his relationship with his G-d.

Chazal (*Sifri, parshas Vá'eschanan* 32) tell us, "You will not encounter love alongside awe nor awe alongside love anywhere else besides *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* attributes." *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wields judgment and mercy, and we believe that "Hashem (the Name associated with His attribute of mercy), *Elokeinu* (our G-d, the Name associated with His attribute of judgment) is One."

How are we to understand this?

There is a saying, "The Admor's personal attendant is not numbered among his followers," meaning that a person who is constantly in his teacher's company and is exposed to his foibles and frailties ceases to venerate him. The attendant of an extraordinarily great teacher, however, will become his mentor's most ardent admirer, because the more he gets to know his teacher, the more of his greatness he gets to witness. Man can adore G-d without ceasing to venerate Him, because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is so holy and sublime that the distance between Him and His servants will always be maintained.

Moreover, even the manifestation of Divine justice doesn't diminish a person's love for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, because he understands that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is at one and the same moment both *Avinu* (our Father) and *Malkeinu* (our King). He will continue yearning for G-d — even after having been struck with Divine judgment — in the knowledge that "All we have to rely on is our Father in Heaven."

A person thus fears *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, his King, to avoid Whose judgment he will flee — directly into the embrace of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Who at the same time is also our Father and Creator.

The Rambam thus writes (in his Commentary to the Mishnah, *Rosh Hashanah* 4:6) that "*Hallel* was not said on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, because they are days of submission and awe *and of fleeing and escaping to Him.*" In his attempt to escape from the

attribute of Divine justice, a person flees... into the warm and accepting embrace of the one and same G-d, Who is a gracious and merciful Father. Rav Shlomo Ibn Gabirol writes similarly (in his famous poem *Keser Malchus*), “Therefore, if You kill me — I shall long for You; and if You seek my sin — I shall flee from You, to You.”

☛ “Rejoice amid Trembling”

THE GEMARA IN *Berachos* (30b) explains the *pasuk*’s instruction, “Rejoice amid trembling” (*Tehillim* 2:11) as a command to unite both approaches in serving Hashem and that “While rejoicing, there should be trembling.” How can this be attained? Surely, when a person is happy, he is not quaking in fear, and when he quakes in fear, he doesn’t feel happy? How can one experience rejoicing and trembling at the same moment?

In his commentary on the Rif (*Berachos*, 21a in the Rif’s pages), Rabbeinu Yonah explains: “Although for human beings, awe and joy are opposites — for when one person fears another, he withdraws and worries — it is different in relation to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. In fact, when a person contemplates His greatness and is in awe of Him, he is happy and rejoices in that very fear, because it rouses him to fulfill the mitzvos, and he feels joy and delight in fulfilling Torah knowing that his reward is at hand and that his payment awaits him.”

In relation to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, man *can* accommodate two contradictory emotions simultaneously, for each of them is but one aspect of a Unity that encompasses both judgment and mercy, enabling a person to experience fear and yet to rejoice in that very feeling.

☛ Shabbos Represents the World to Come in Miniature

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Shabbos* 10b), the Maharal explains the Gemara’s statement: “A person giving his friend a gift must inform him.” The Gemara says that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Moshe, “I have a fine gift in My treasure house, and Shabbos is its name, and I

would like to give it to Yisrael. Go and inform them.” The Gemara explains that in the case of certain presents (such as the radiance emanating from Moshe’s face [*Shemos* 34:29], of which he had no advance knowledge), the recipient doesn’t need to be informed, since eventually he will anyway discover the gift. The reward for observing Shabbos, however, is not something of which its recipients are aware. The Maharal explains that “With Shabbos, the gift itself is the World to Come.” In this world, a person cannot fully appreciate Shabbos’s essence, because Shabbos is an encapsulation of the World to Come, which itself is termed “a day that is entirely Shabbos.”

☛ The World to Come — Closeness to Hashem

IN WHAT SENSE does Shabbos encapsulate the World to Come? As is the case in the World to Come, Shabbos is a day of special closeness to Hashem. Shabbos is a Divine amalgam of moments of judgment and moments of mercy whose climax arrives as the day wanes, when we enjoy special, exalted moments when the judgment that is usually dominant at the time of Minchah is transformed and sublimated into ultimate mercy, known as *ra'ava d'ra'avin* (the desire of desires, i.e., the supreme, overarching Divine desire).

☛ Closeness to Hashem Negates the Distinction between Judgment and Kindness

IN *MASECHES TAANIS* (31a), the Gemara states, “In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will form a circle for the righteous, and He will sit among them in Gan Eden, and each of them will point his finger, as it says, ‘[Yisrael] will say on that day, “Lo, this is our G-d; we hoped for Him to save us; this is Hashem for whom we hoped, we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation”’ (*Yeshayah* 25:9).” In other words, in the World to Come, every person will see the suffering he endured in this world as a salvation worthy of rejoicing over.

In *maseches Pesachim* (50b), the Gemara says, “The World to

Come is unlike this world. In this world, the blessing, ‘Blessed are You, Hashem... Who is good and bestows good’ is recited over good tidings, while the blessing ‘Blessed are You, Hashem... the True Judge’ is made on unfortunate tidings. In the World to Come, though, everything will be [acknowledged as emanating from the single Source] ‘...Who is good and bestows good.’”

From both these sources, it is evident that the closer people are to Hashem — as will be the case with the future redemption and as is the case in the World to Come — the more the apparent contradiction between G-d’s attributes of judgment and of kindness recedes. Man will be able to accept Divine judgment and acknowledge the kindness it ultimately represents. The closeness to Hashem that we experience on Shabbos which, as we have seen, is an encapsulation of the World to Come, offering a “taste” of the closeness experienced there, enables us to embrace both Heaven’s judgment and Heaven’s kindness at once. This is the greatness of the Shabbos we experience every week in this world, Hashem’s special creation that He gifted to us alone.

☞ Shabbos Attests to the Creator’s Unity

BASED UPON THE above, the Maharal explains that *zachor* and *shamor* couldn’t have been conveyed in two separate, consecutive utterances — “Remember and guard the Shabbos day” — because by nature they are contradictory. One is rooted in love and the other in fear. Their delivery in a single utterance conveys the special, sublime quality with which Hashem endows the day, rendering it a day of closeness to Him in which state a person is able to embrace both of these contradictory emotions at once.

We should indeed note that the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 27a) states that *zachor* and *shamor* were said by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in a single utterance, “Something which no [human] mouth can utter and no [human] ear can hear.” This doesn’t refer merely to the technical miracle of two things being both uttered and heard simultaneously; it refers to the inherently contradictory nature of the two injunctions,

and a person's inability to encompass two conflicting emotions at once. Only through attachment and drawing close to the Creator's unity, which unites varied powers and attributes, can both emotions coexist in man.

☞ Shabbos Attests That *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Is One

IN *MASECHES CHAGIGAH* (3b), Tosafos cite Chazal's statement: "Three entities testify about each other: Yisrael, Shabbos, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Yisrael and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* testify that Shabbos is a day of rest; *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and Shabbos testify that Yisrael is unique among the nations; and Yisrael and Shabbos testify that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is One."

While we find sources that mention that the Jewish nation attests to the Creator's unity, where do we find that Shabbos also attests to this?

The only explanation can be that the single, simultaneous Divine utterance of *zachor* and *shamor* that reveals so much about Shabbos's special, Divine character demonstrates the Creator's unity.

In light of the above, the words composed by the great scholar of Kabbalah, Rav Shlomo Alkabetz, in *Lecha Dodi*, which is sung throughout the Jewish world as Shabbos is welcomed, glow with new light: "*Shamor* and *zachor* in a single utterance, the single G-d declared to us; G-d is One and His Name is One."

We have noted the apparently contradictory nature of the commands *zachor* and *shamor*, which call for serving Hashem amid both love and fear, emotions that a person cannot usually experience simultaneously. In the context of his relationship with G-d, however, these two emotions can be held concomitantly. Shabbos represents the World to Come in miniature, being endowed with special closeness to Hashem, and attests to the unity of the Creator, Who implements His attributes of judgment and of kindness simultaneously. *Zachor* and *shamor* were therefore proclaimed by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in a single utterance, for they thereby attest to His uniqueness and unity.

Eikev

What Constitutes “Fear of G-d’s Exaltedness”?

☛ Is Fear of Heaven Inconsequential?

MOSHE TELLS BNEI YISRAEL, “Yet now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, request of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d” (*Devarim* 10:12). The Torah’s presentation of fear as Hashem’s sole request of us prompts the Gemara (*Berachos* 33b) to comment, “Everything is predetermined by Heaven except for a person’s fear of Heaven.”

In other words, each person is free to choose how he will act, without any Heavenly coercion. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* thus asks from us that we freely choose to conduct ourselves in fear of Him.

However, at the same time, the Gemara finds major difficulty with the *pasuk*’s wording, which implies that Moshe was playing down the consequence of Hashem’s request, as if to say, “How much is already being demanded of you?” Is fear of Heaven really such a minor, inconsequential matter, the Gemara asks?

The Gemara responds that from Moshe’s vantage point, it was indeed minor, because fear of Heaven was easy for him to attain.

However, the Maharal points out, Moshe wasn’t speaking here to himself but was addressing Bnei Yisrael. Of what relevance was the ease with which Moshe was personally able to attain fear of Heaven if his listeners would find it difficult to attain? Is a wealthy man

entitled to ask a poor man, “Come on, how hard can it be for you to donate a large sum of money?”

☛ Why Does Something Sublime and Exalted Inspire Awe?

THE ZOHAR (VOL. I, 11b) lists several different levels of awareness that can motivate a person to fear his Creator:

Some people fear Heaven because they are afraid of being punished with physical suffering or financial loss. The overriding consideration of such a person is not *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, but his own safety and wellbeing.

Others fear Heaven out of fear of punishment in the World to Come. Although this motivation reflects greater spiritual awareness, the uppermost consideration of such a person is still “saving his own skin” rather than *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Then, says the Zohar, there is “[the] fear that is optimal, where a person fears his Owner because of His greatness and His dominion.” The foremost consideration for such a person is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He is not concerned about what the future might hold for him; he esteems his Creator here and now because of His greatness. This is termed “*yiras haromemus*,” fear of [Heaven’s] exaltedness.

In *Mesilas Yesharim* (Chap. 24), the Ramchal explains that “Fear of [Heaven’s] exaltedness means that a person keeps away from sins and doesn’t do them because of the great respect due to Him, may His Name be blessed, for how can a person be lenient or how can it be enjoyable for lowly, contemptible flesh and blood to act contrary to the wish of the Creator, may His Name be blessed and exalted?” The Ramchal adds that experiencing this fear leads a person to “feel embarrassed and quake when standing before his Owner in prayer or in offering any other act of service.”

This explanation still isn’t entirely clear, though, because feeling respect and experiencing fear and awe are two distinct and separate emotions. The term “fear of Heaven” implies that a person

experiences actual fear, but why should he feel fear — as opposed to just respect — before a sublime and exalted entity that he is not worried will harm him? We can understand why a person who worries about what awaits him in the future should feel afraid, but what place does fear have in contemplating an entity that is solely perceived as sublime, not threatening?

☛ Why Is a Person in Awe of His Parents?

THIS DISTINCTION BETWEEN respect and awe is apparent in the Gemara's explanation (*Kiddushin* 31b) of the difference between the mitzvos, "Honor your father and your mother" (*Shemos* 20:12) and "[Every] man shall fear his mother and father" (*Vayikra* 19:3). "What constitutes fear and what constitutes honor?" asks the Gemara. "Awe is shown by not standing in a parent's place, not sitting in a parent's place, and not contradicting them; honor is shown by serving them food and drink, dressing and covering them, and by accompanying them in and out." This clearly implies that showing honor or respect is not the same as being in awe.

But here, too, a similar question presents itself: why should a person be in awe of his parents? We can understand why a person feels respect towards his parents, but why should he fear them — need he be concerned about what they might do to him?

☛ A Person Need Not Feel Awe towards Every Relative Whom He Must Honor

THE OBLIGATION TO feel awe towards one's parents doesn't apply to other relatives to whom a person must accord honor and respect.

For example, we find in *maseches Kesubos* (103a) that the Torah obligation to honor parents also extends to stepparents and to an older brother. Chazal learn this from an extra letter *vav* and an extra word *es* in the command, "*Kabeid es avicha ve'es imecha* (Honor your father and your mother)." However, this *pasuk* contains no parallel

source that extends the command to be in awe of parents to these family members. A person therefore need not be in awe of his stepfather, his stepmother or his older brother.

We find similarly in *Midrash Tehillim* (7) that “A person is obligated to honor his father-in-law as he honors his father.” However, there is no corresponding duty to fear a father-in-law in the manner that one must fear a father.

Evidently, then, an obligation to honor or show respect to a particular person doesn’t automatically confer an obligation to be in awe of them. What then is the source of the obligation to fear parents and to fear *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*?

☛ Fear of the Exalted Springs from a Sensation of Powerlessness

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Yiras Hashem*, Chap. 1), the Maharal establishes that the idea of awe, in the above sense of “awe of [Heaven’s] exaltedness,” is a consequence of the powerlessness a person experiences when confronting the Source of his existence. This is the inherent feeling of insignificance experienced by a branch gazing upon the roots from which it grew and realizing that this is “where you came from” (*Avos* 3:1).

In general, a person goes through life with an abiding sense of self, feeling that his existence is a given and that he has an unshakeable right to exist that cannot be called into question. Upon encountering the “rock from which he was hewn,” however, he is forced to acknowledge that a different reality — of which he was not part — preceded his existence. He thereby realizes his insignificance in the larger scheme, for before he made his appearance the world was managing very nicely without him.

The awe engendered by this realization is unconnected with any fear of what the future holds. It springs from realizing that his presence is not a given and that he is a mere detail in a much larger system that existed before his time, a time when he was nothing at all.

This is the origin of a person's awe before his parents, who are "the quarry from which he was hewn" and the root of his entire existence, that is clearly not applicable to a stepparent, parent-in-law, or older brother. Certainly, one must accord the latter great honor and respect, but awe is reserved for an encounter with the root and source of a person's own existence, which brings him face to face with his own insignificance.

☛ Fear of Exaltedness Results from Encountering One's Source

THIS EXPLANATION ENABLES us to understand how fear of Heaven translates, in its most sublime form, into fear of Heaven's exaltedness. Exaltedness in and of itself indeed engenders respect, not awe, but the existence of this exalted Entity forces a person to confront his own insignificance — his utter insignificance before the infinity of the Eternal, the sublime Creator of the entire world and of each and every person in it. Contemplating one's own relatively confined existence against the boundless power of the Eternal inspires a person with dread. The sense of insignificance gives rise to the awe he feels before his Source.

☛ Why Is Only Fearing Heaven Not Controlled by Heaven?

THE MAHARAL'S EXPLANATION enhances our understanding of the Gemara in *Berachos* that we quoted earlier: "Everything is predetermined by Heaven except for a person's fear of Heaven."

On the surface, the Gemara's statement is self-evident. There is no compulsion to fear Heaven so as to preserve a person's free will, without which he would be a mere puppet whose actions have no significance whatsoever. However, reading the *pasuk* that prompts the Gemara's comment in its entirety yields a question: "Yet now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, request of you? Only to fear Hashem,

your G-d, *to follow all His ways, to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your G-d, with your whole heart and your entire being.*” Why is love of G-d not also mentioned as not being under Heaven’s control, as would seem from its inclusion here among the areas of service that Moshe tells Yisrael are requested of them? Surely, any profession of love that a person is coerced to express is not love at all. For love to be genuine, it must arise willingly.

To this, the Maharal responds that indeed, practically speaking, none of a person’s actions or emotions are dictated by Heaven. The person alone determines them by exercising his free will. In this sense, fearing Heaven is no different than any other realm of serving Hashem, such as loving Him. However, whereas other emotions can at least in principle be instilled by external influence — which doesn’t negate the reality of the emotion being experienced — fear of Heaven by definition cannot be imposed by Heaven. As we have explained, this fear arises from a person’s awareness of his own powerlessness and insignificance upon encountering the entity that preceded his existence. Compelling a person to fear his Creator thus implies that he is an independent entity whom it is necessary to coerce into submission, and if so, there is no acknowledgment of his insignificance at all. By definition, then, there can be no compulsion to fear Heaven.

☛ Fear of Heaven’s Exaltedness as a Basic Demand

USING THIS IDEA, the Maharal explains how Moshe was able to tell Yisrael that fear of Heaven is a simple thing. Fearing Heaven is indeed no straightforward matter, but a person’s feeling of powerlessness when confronting the Creator’s sublimity is very straightforward indeed! It is not unreasonable to demand this of a person. When confronting sublimity, a person almost instinctively experiences a shrinking feeling. A person’s sense of self lies at the core of his personality and asserts itself automatically, yet to the same extent, his sense of insignificance is also an automatic consequence of his very simple and natural contemplation of his origins.

☛ Why Is Prayer Referred to as Fearing Heaven?

WE FIND PRAYER being referred to as *yirah*, fear. The Gemara in *maseches Berachos* (9b) mentions the custom of the people known as *vasikin* who pray Shacharis at sunrise, a practice that derives from the *pasuk*, “They shall fear You with the sun[’s appearance]” (*Tehillim* 72:5). Fearing Heaven is thus equated by Chazal to prayer. We find similarly (*ibid.* 10b) that a person should never refrain from praying for and seeking his Creator’s mercy, even if his impending death has been revealed to him in a dream. This is derived from the *pasuk*, “For even with the abundance of dreams, falsehoods, and many words, nevertheless fear G-d” (*Kobeles* 5:6). Here again, an exhortation to fear G-d is interpreted as an exhortation to pray. A third such source is the statement (*ibid.* 6b), “Any person who regularly attends the *beis hakenesses* [for prayer] and who one day doesn’t come — *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* inquires after him, as it says, ‘Who among you fears Hashem and listens to the voice of His servant...?’ (*Yeshayah* 50:10).” Once again, fearing Hashem is being understood as a reference to prayer. Why is this?

☛ Prayer Involves Acknowledging Man’s Insignificance before Heaven

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 23), the Maharal quotes the Gemara (*ibid.* 30b) that says, “One should stand up to pray only when in a serious frame of mind, as it says, ‘Serve Hashem in awe’ (*Tehillim* 2:11).” He explains that prayer must be embarked upon in fear of G-d because a person praying to Hashem stands before his Creator in acknowledgement of his powerlessness and of his need for Hashem to supply him with all his needs.

The Maharal explains similarly in *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha’avodah*, Chap. 3) that prayer is nevertheless a form of serving Hashem, even though it takes the form of a person requesting his own personal needs, because when praying, he stands before G-d entirely divested

of his sense of independent self. His realization of powerlessness and of his utter insignificance before G-d, in whose Hand rests every life and every person's spirit, finds expression in turning to Hashem and asking for his needs.

Simply by engaging in the act of prayer, a person demonstrates his awareness that it is in Heaven's power to bestow life, healing, success, respect, tranquility, and repose as well as (*chalilah*) death, illness, deprivation, and pain, and all in all, man is simply a speck inspired with Divine spirit that determines his fate for better or for worse.

Man indeed has freedom to choose and as such is the crown of creation and its ultimate purpose; he is invested with tremendous potential. But his success is solely a function of the Heavenly assistance he merits, and if *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* abandons him for a moment, he loses everything. In a single moment, the most successful person can lose his health, life, those dearest to him, or the source of his success and sustenance. All his expectations then vanish instantly, and he is "comparable to a broken potsherd, to a dried blossom, to floating dust, to a disappearing cloud and to a vanishing dream" (*U'nesaneh Tokef*, Musaf, Yamim Nora'im).

Genuine fear of Heaven is thus the fear of Heaven's exaltedness that arises from the sensation of man's powerlessness in the face of the sublimity and infinity of the Divine. We accordingly understand why prayer is referred to as "awe," for it too is an expression of man's faith in G-d, which prompts him to stand before G-d and pray in acknowledgment of his insignificance and his ongoing need for Divine assistance in every single aspect of his life.

Re'eh

The Wholeness of Both the Individual and the Nation Are a Function of the Creator's Unity

☞ “Do Not Slash Yourselves” — the Urge to Do So and Why It Is Prohibited

IN *PARSHAS RE'EH*, the Torah states, “You are children of Hashem, your G-d; *lo sigdodedu* (you must not slash yourselves) or make a bald patch between your eyes over a dead person” (*Devarim* 14:1). The word *gedidah*, derived from *gode*, cutting or hacking, thus here denotes self-mutilation.

Rashi explains: “Don't slash or slit your flesh in mourning over a dead relative, as the Emorites do.” This is an admonition to a mourner not to injure himself as a display of pain over his loss, with the *pasuk's* introductory words — “You are children of Hashem, your G-d” — providing the reason for this prohibition.

There are two explanations offered by the *Rishonim* for these opening words' relevance to the Torah's ban on this practice. The explanation offered by Rashi is: “Since you are children of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, it is appropriate that you should have a pleasant appearance and not be slashed or scalped.”

Rav Ovadiah Seforno explains as follows: “For it is inappropriate to show extreme pain and distress over a dead relative while there still remains a more eminent relative from whom there are superior expectations. Therefore, it is inappropriate for you, who are children

of Hashem — [Who is] your Father, Who exists forever — to show extreme distress and mourning over any deceased relative.” In other words, the feelings of loneliness, uncertainty, and anxiety that afflict any bereaved individual should not be experienced overly intensely by a Jew, who always still has a Heavenly Father Who is constantly concerned with his welfare.

However, we still haven't explained what drives a person to self-mutilation when mourning a loss. Is the mourner assailed by some destructive urge? If so, even the most logical rationale may be ineffective in discouraging it.

☛ The Prohibition against a Community Splintering into Factions

IN *MASECHES YEVIAMOS* (14a), Chazal present a completely different interpretation of this prohibition. They understand *lo siggodedu* as being derived from *gedud*, a band or brigade, and accordingly interpret this an injunction against a community dividing into different factions or groups: “For example, [having two] courts in the same city, one of whom rules like Beis Shammai and the other like Beis Hillel.”

The Rambam rules accordingly (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 12:14): “Included in this prohibition is that there shouldn't be two *batei din* in one city, one of them ruling in accordance with this opinion and the other ruling in accordance with a divergent opinion, for this situation leads to great dissension, as it says, ‘*lo siggodedu*, do not splinter into factions.’”

The Gemara (*ibid.*) notes that two *batei din* are allowed to rule differently if they are situated in two different cities. Evidently, then, the thrust of this injunction is not the overriding importance of maintaining uniformity, for there is nothing wrong with different communities following the rulings of different *batei din*. Dissension is forbidden only among people living together in the same city, all of whom ought to follow the same ruling in order to prevent the community's fragmentation into factions.

Now, this halachah requires further explanation, for in fact, halachic debate and dissension not only are not forbidden, but are commonplace! This is actually the very manner in which Torah flourishes, constantly broadening and expanding due to diverging opinions among its scholars who engage in brainstorming and even ferocious debate. We thus encounter, in *maseches Bava Metzia* (84a), Rabbi Yochanan's profound distress upon the death of Reish Lakish, his disciple and study partner who, the Gemara tells us, would pose twenty-four difficulties on every teaching Rabbi Yochanan conveyed to him, eliciting from the latter twenty-four responses, thereby "automatically broadening the topic."

Torah scholars' propensity for engaging in heated argument is also noted by the Gemara in *Kiddushin* (30b), which identifies them with the "enemies at the gates" mentioned in *Tehillim* (127:5): "They shall not be ashamed when they speak to the enemies at the gates." "Even a father and son, or a teacher and his disciple," notes the Gemara, "who are engaged in Torah study at the same gate become each other's enemies." Although this sparring ultimately doesn't endure, for the disputants "do not move from there until each is beloved by the other," the study process unquestionably involves fierce disputation. How does the situation in which the Torah prohibits *lo sigdodu* differ from the regular pattern of Torah discussion?

☛ How Can One *Pasuk* Serve as the Source of Two Different Prohibitions?

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal asks a further question. How and why do Chazal learn two apparently unconnected laws from the same *pasuk*: the prohibition against a mourner in pain mutilating himself and a community's fragmentation into separate groups? In the Maharal's words, "Nowhere in the Torah will you find two unrelated things being learned from the same source." There must therefore be some common factor between these two injunctions.

☛ *Lo Sisgodedu* — Don't Fracture That Which Is Whole

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that a mourner is driven to self-mutilation by a sense of identification with his deceased relative. The external injury he inflicts upon himself expresses his inner sense that something inside him has broken, as though a limb of his has been hacked off. He feels broken, split — no longer whole. The similarity to the injunction against a community's fragmentation now becomes clear; these are not two unrelated items derived from a single *pasuk*, but two related injunctions issuing from the same source. This, says the Maharal, is because when "a city's *beis din* is divided, with half its members ruling like Beis Hillel and half like Beis Shammai, it is like a human body that is divided." A community is akin to a single organism, whose members ordinarily identify with one another as parts of a whole. Dissension among community members destroys the group's solidarity, fracturing the unified communal entity and leading to its ruin.

By contrast, although arguments in halachah are desirable in the context of the study process, care must be taken to ensure that divergent opinions never cross the line leading to personal discord. When divergent approaches to halachah emerge within a *beis din*, a clear resolution must ultimately be imposed by a unified leadership. It is vital that the disputants reconcile — even if they still espouse their divergent views — in order to maintain the community's integrity and preserve its members' identification as parts of a whole.

☛ Infighting Leads to the Nation's Demise and to Its Destruction

IN *NESIVOS OLAM* (*Nesiv Hashalom*, Chap. 1), the Maharal explains further that just as death results from some irreparable damage within a person, discord within a group also denotes some fatal breakage and leads to its demise, for a nation's wholeness is its breath

of life and the property that sustains it and keeps it alive. “Without a doubt,” writes the Maharal, “a vessel that is whole is difficult to break, because of its wholeness. However, once a crack appears and it starts to break, it is vulnerable to further breakage, because deficiency has now become part of it.”

☞ “You Are Children of Hashem” — and Children Inherit Their Father’s Characteristics

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS the Torah’s preface to *lo sigodedu*, “You are children of Hashem” accordingly.

Addressing Yisrael as *banim* (sons) indicates their descent from a specific source. Just as the sons of one father exhibit their father’s characteristics, sons of Hashem exhibit His characteristics, so to speak. This idea is echoed in the Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 1:12) that comments on the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (115:8), “Like them (i.e., like idols) shall be their makers, all who trust in them” — “If those who serve idols are like them, certainly those who serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* are like Him.”

☞ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Is a Single, Unified Entity

HAKADOSH BARUCH HU created and sustains the upper and lower worlds; He is a single entity, unmarred by any fracture, crack, split, or division. As the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 1:7), “This G-d is one and not two or more than two, rather He is one, whose unity is unmatched by any other single entity in the world; [He is] not a unit comprising many sub-units (e.g., a collective organism), nor [is His unity] like the unity of a [single] body that is [nonetheless] divided into departments (i.e., systems) and extremities (i.e., different limbs and organs); rather, [the quality of His] unity [is] unparalleled by any other [single] unit in the world.”

In *Derech Hashem* (Part I, Chap. 1), the Ramchal provides further insight into this idea, writing similarly, “You ought to be aware that

Hashem's existence is uniform, not at all of a composite or multiple nature, and that every type of perfection is within Him in a straightforward sense. This means that whereas the [human] psyche contains numerous and varied faculties, each of which operates on its own — for example, memory is one faculty; will is a different faculty; imagination is a different faculty — none of them encroaching in any way upon [the operation of] any of the others, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, by contrast, doesn't possess separate faculties. [This is true] even though there actually are within Him faculties that within us are separate — for He wills, He is wise, He is [all] capable, and He is perfect in every way.”

☞ Unity Yields Wholeness That Is Irreconcilable with Fragmentation

AS CHILDREN OF Hashem who model His characteristics, the Jewish nation thus also possesses something of the quality of the Creator's unity.

On the individual level, this unity is irreconcilable with a living person identifying so strongly with a deceased relative that he is cast to the depths of despair and experiences inner rupture. The Torah thus commands “*lo sigodedu*,” prohibiting self-mutilation as an expression of extreme mourning and despair.

On the communal and national level, this unity is similarly irreconcilable with inner strife that fractures the nation's wholeness and undermines the foundation of its eternal existence. The Torah thus commands, “*lo sigodedu*,” prohibiting fragmentation into warring groups that split the nation's unity.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu's unity thus mandates His children's attachment to the Source of eternal life, which provides a person with the strength to gather together the shattered pieces that remain after death and bereavement and to continue living. This unity is also the source of the nation's wholeness, which mandates a common identity and brotherly relations between its members so that they remain a single entity despite the differences of opinion that emerge between them.

Shoftim

Scheming Witnesses: A Person's Curse Ultimately Devolves upon Himself

☛ As They Intended to Do, Not as They Did

A FALSE WITNESS who schemes to harm another person by testifying falsely receives the same punishment that he intended for his victim. [The Torah considers witnesses schemers with certainty only when two others come and testify that at the time the former claim to have witnessed the crime, they were actually in their company elsewhere and therefore could not have witnessed it. Otherwise, if two pairs of witnesses contradict each other in any other way, we do not believe one more than the other.]

The Torah writes, “The judges shall thoroughly investigate, and if the witnesses are indeed false witnesses, having testified falsely against their brother, you shall do to them as they intended to do to their brother and eradicate evil from among you” (*Devarim* 19:18–19).

The Gemara (*Makkos* 5b) explains that since the Torah writes, “as they intended to do” rather than “as they did,” the scheming witnesses are punished in this way only if the court has ruled on the basis of their testimony, but the sentence has not yet been carried out. Once it has been carried out, they are no longer subject to that fate. As the Gemara puts it, “So long as they have not killed (i.e.,

their victim's sentence has not yet been carried out), they are killed; if they have killed, they are not killed."

The Gemara expresses wonderment at why scheming witnesses are no longer killed once the sentence has been carried out. If they are liable to suffer what "they intended to do" when all they managed to do was scheme and their plan did not succeed, they should certainly receive this punishment if they were successful! The Gemara responds to this question by citing the principle that *kal vachomer* reasoning — such as the Gemara employs in its question — is insufficient for enforcing punishment; an explicit source must be found.

☛ Why Do the Witnesses' Intentions Become Irrelevant Once the Sentence Has Been Carried Out?

THIS HALACHAH — that witnesses whose schemes remain theoretical are punished with what they wanted to inflict, but they are exempt if their scheme came to fruition — raises a fundamental difficulty. Granted, in order to impose punishment, an explicit source is needed, and the Torah does not extend the penalty of "as they plotted, so shall be done to them" to cases where the verdict has already been carried out. However, we are not seeking to punish them for what "they did," i.e., their scheme's success, but for what "they intended to do" i.e., for having plotted to harm another person. Why are they any less deserving of punishment for having plotted simply because their plot has since become reality? Their success does not take away the fact that they plotted.

Furthermore, the sentence's execution never involves the witnesses. The witnesses merely inform the court of the facts, and the court then deliberates, reaches its conclusion, and punishes the indicted defendant.

In regard to presenting false testimony to the court, there is no difference between a case where the court has already punished the defendant and a case when it has not yet done so — either way, the

false witness has done his evil deed. Why should he escape punishment for what “he intended” merely because another party — the court — has made it happen?

How are we to understand the underlying logic of this law? How can it be that someone who not only schemed, but also actually brought about misfortune should not be subject to the above punishment? This question leads the Maharal to write (*Be'er Hagolah*, *Be'er* 2), “[The difficulty of] this matter is pointed to and is said to be ‘like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes’ (*Mishlei* 10:26) — [namely,] being stricter with someone who achieved no harm than with someone who did.”

☞ “For Judgment Is in Heaven’s Hands”

THE RAMBAN (*DEVARIM* *ibid.*) resolves this difficulty, writing: “When two witnesses come and testify that Reuven murdered someone, and [then] two others come and charge them with having schemed in testifying, Scripture commands that [the schemers] be killed, because this development came about in Reuven’s merit, as he is innocent and righteous. Were he wicked and deserving of death, Hashem would not have saved him from the *beis din*, as He has said, ‘For I will not acquit a guilty person’ (*Shemos* 23:7). However, if Reuven was killed, we must conclude that everything the first witnesses testified about him was true, for he died on account of his sin, and had he been righteous, Hashem would not have left him in their power and would not have convicted him in his judgment (see *Tehillim* 37:33). Furthermore, Hashem would not have allowed the righteous judges who are in His Presence to shed innocent blood, ‘because judgment is in Heaven’s Hands’ (*Devarim* 1:17) and ‘He judges among the [members of the] court’ (*Tehillim* 82:1).”

In other words, although a judge is a human being who in and of himself lacks any authority to judge his fellow man, [when judging according to the Torah’s laws] he is acting as a Divine emissary. Thus, “Judgment is in Heaven’s Hands,” and an earthly court can

do nothing unless the Heavenly court has so decreed. Therefore, if the accused is utterly blameless, *beis din* will not be party to such a mishap of his wrongful execution, and his execution will not come about. As the Ramban explains, it is the operation of this principle that reveals the witnesses as schemers.

However, if the accused was killed by *beis din*, this indicates that Heaven sought retribution for his sin and that he was an evildoer who deserved to die — if not for this sin, then apparently for some other sin. His execution in and of itself demonstrates that the witnesses did not scheme to kill an innocent person, for he was wicked, and they are thus not liable for “what they intended to do.”

However, the Ramban’s explanation raises a major problem. According to his approach, what ought to happen if witnesses are revealed as schemers and their scheme does not come to fruition, but immediately afterwards two genuine witnesses come forward and testify about an earlier crime committed by the accused as a result of which he was killed for that crime? Would we dream of saying that the schemers should not be condemned to death for their scheming because the accused actually turns out to be an evildoer deserving of death?

☛ The Schemers Suffer “What They Intended” in Order to Eradicate Evil Still at Work in Man

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains that the Torah communicates the significance of the schemers suffering “what they intended” in the *pasuk’s* concluding words, “And you shall eradicate evil from among you,” i.e., eradicate the evil that exists within the scheming witnesses. Evil must be eradicated when we are confronted by it in its unadulterated form smoldering within a person. Evil is at its most potent while it is still confined to the realm of thought and planning. As the Gemara expresses it (*Yoma* 29a), “[Entertaining] sinful thoughts is more damaging than sin itself.” Evil loses its sting and the fire dies down once the sinful desire has been indulged.

Eradicating evil is necessary while it is still at work within a person, not once has it become part of his past. A person who is bent on exacting revenge is consumed by this craving, which gives him no rest. However, once he has done the deed, the buildup of pus in the festering wound has been released, and his desire has dissipated. Of course, he did a terrible thing, but it is now part of his history; he is now spent and is emotionally ready to mend his ways. The Torah's way of dealing with scheming witnesses is not intended to punish a past misdeed, but rather to eradicate the evil still within them. Once their scheme has succeeded, the witnesses have moved beyond the stage of harboring active evil.

☛ A Stone Thrown at a Wall Will Rebound upon the Thrower — So Long as the Wall Still Stands

THE MAHARAL DEEPENS this idea by explaining that the words the Torah chooses — “as they intended to do” — indicate that rather than punishment, the witnesses' fate actually represents the “rebound” of their evil intentions onto themselves. He cites two examples to illustrate this. He likens the situation to that of a boat sailing at high speed on its way to ram into another boat and sink it. If the second boat is made of stronger material than the first, the boat rushing forward toward collision is in reality on its way to sink itself. The evil plotted by a schemer becomes reality — but he himself is its victim. However, in the event that the second boat sinks, we can no longer regard the first boat's charge as an evil scheme destined to devolve upon itself. Once the scheme has become reality, it is gone and can no longer affect its perpetrator.

This is similar to a person who throws a stone at a sturdy wall. If the stone neither penetrates the wall nor knocks it down, it will rebound in the direction of the person who threw it. “Similarly,” writes the Maharal, “if a person wants to bring something [harmful] upon another person, since it is unjustified, it will end up rebounding upon him. However, once the deed has already been done, it can no longer

be said that his plan will end up affecting him, because once it is over and done with, how can it rebound upon him?”

☛ Evil Intent That Cannot Come To Fruition Returns to Its Source

EXTENDING THIS LINE of reasoning, the Maharal cites and explains the Gemara’s statement (*Sanhedrin* 49a), “A person should always rather be on the receiving end of a curse than be the deliverer of a curse.” If a person curses when this is unjustified, he is indeed doing something wrong, yet the rule is that “an unjustified curse will not be fulfilled.” His evil intent will therefore devolve upon himself, just like a stone bounces off the wall at which it was thrown. This idea is also the key to understanding the Gemara’s statement (*Shabbos* 97a), “Whoever [wrongly] suspects the innocent will endure physical suffering.” Groundless suspicion harbored by one person towards another cannot affect the suspect, because the suspicion is false, but the negative energy generated thereby does not disappear and will ultimately devolve upon the accuser himself. The person who throws a stone at the wall only to then have it land on him has not been punished by the wall — he has brought the stone upon his own head. This is not an extraneous punishment; in trying to harm others who are blameless and undeserving, the perpetrator settles his own fate and pronounces the verdict upon himself.

☛ Paying for an Intended Loss Is Like Paying Damages

THIS IDEA IS reinforced by one of the *halachos* governing the payment for attempting to cause financial loss by testifying falsely — the scheming witnesses are required to pay their victim whatever loss they tried to inflict on him.

Halachah recognizes two distinct general categories of payment for misdemeanors. The first category covers payments for damages,

robbery, etc. whose purpose is to reimburse the owner of the damaged/stolen item and make good his losses. This type of payment is referred to as *mammon* (lit. money) and serves as restitution. The other type of payment requires that the offender pay more than the loss he caused and is known as *knas* (a penalty). It is intended as a corrective measure to reform the offender. So, for example, when a thief pays his victim double the value of the stolen article, as the Torah requires, the value of the stolen item is *mammon*, while the excess amount is a *knas*.

In which category does payment exacted from scheming witnesses belong? It would seem at first glance that since a scheming witness is required to pay only if his victim has not been harmed or suffered any loss, his obligation must be a *knas*, because by definition it cannot be restitution for loss. However, the Gemara posits in *Bava Kama* (4b) that, according to Rabbi Chiya, this obligation is in the category of *mammon*. How are we to understand this?

The explanation is provided by Rav Elchanan Wasserman (*Koveitz Shiurim, Kesuvos* 108), who writes, “The obligation of scheming witnesses does not originate with them (i.e., in reprisal for their misdeed); rather, whatever verdict was issued for their victim now devolves upon them.” In other words, this is not a new punishment that *beis din* levels on them as a result of their wrongdoing. They now assume the actual verdict to which they wanted to subject their victim. Since the payment that he would have had to make was *mammon*, they now become subject to the very same liability.

☛ The Victim’s Liability Now Becomes the Schemers’ Liability

IN *KOVEITZ BIURIM* (*Makkos* 5), Rav Wasserman employs this principle to elucidate a passage of Gemara in *Makkos* (2b). The halachah is that a thief who cannot repay what he stole is sold as a servant in order to pay. What will the halachah be in the following case: Scheming witnesses testify falsely that someone stole money. The defendant does not

have the money to pay — he can't give back what he didn't steal — so their testimony ought to result in him being sold as a servant in order to raise money for payment. The witnesses are then shown to have schemed and are now slated to suffer the punishment that they tried to inflict. The witnesses, however, have money, and the rule is that if they can afford to pay what they wanted to make the defendant pay, they are not sold as servants. Why should this suffice, though, when this is not what they intended to cause? They schemed that he should be sold as a servant, not just that he should pay.

The only possible explanation is that the fate of the scheming witnesses is not punishment, and there therefore need not be perfect congruity between their act and its effect. Whatever liability the defendant was to receive is now transferred *in toto* to the schemers. Just as he would have been able to pay and avoid being sold, the witnesses have the same possibility of paying rather than being sold. They are subject to whatever they intended he should contend with, but its application depends on their individual circumstances.

As we have explained, this is because the fate the Torah decrees for them is neither retribution nor some extraneous punishment penalizing their misdeed. Rather, the verdict that their victim received now passes over to them, since the negative energy they generated has not dissipated but instead rebounds onto its source — the scheming witnesses.

The Maharal has afforded us profound insight into the principle that schemers are dealt with “as they intended,” thereby illuminating all the details of this law. The schemers' evil intentions devolve upon them, just as a stone thrown at a wall rebounds upon the thrower. The wall has not punished him; he has brought the stone upon himself. The more forceful his throw, the more forceful the blow.

Ki Seitzei

Refining the Body's Coarseness Also Refines the Soul

☛ The Torah Mandates Forty Lashes, but Chazal Say Thirty-Nine

THE TORAH DETERMINES that a person who willfully transgresses one of the negative commandments receives lashes. It writes: "...The judge shall have him bend over and beat him on his front according to his wickedness *a number [of lashes]*. *Forty* he shall beat him, he must not add [to this number], lest he add much more than these, and your brother be degraded before your eyes" (*Devarim* 25:2–3). Despite the Torah's specification that the number of lashes should be forty, Chazal limit them to just thirty-nine. The Gemara (*Makkos* 22b) explains that had the Torah placed the amount "forty" before the word "number," writing, "He shall beat him, forty [lashes] in number," we would indeed conclude that the maximum number of lashes is forty. However, since the non-specific "number" is written before "forty," the Torah's meaning is "a number that amounts to and rounds up to forty," i.e., thirty-nine.

Rashi (*Devarim* *ibid.*) explains that this is derived from the fact that the *beis*, the first letter of the word *b'mispar* (in number), is vowelled with a *sheva* (denoting *a* number) rather than a *pasach* (denoting *the* number). In *Be'er Hagolah* (*Be'er* 1), the Maharal explains: "Had it written *bamispar* with a *pasach*, we would have

understood it to refer to a known, specified number, namely, [as the Torah continues] ‘Forty he shall beat him.’ However, since it is written with a *sheva*, it means *a* number that amounts to and rounds up to forty.”

☛ Chazal’s Ability to Creatively Expound *Pesukim*

RASHI AND THE Maharal explain how, despite the Torah specifying the number forty, Chazal’s understanding is implicit in the wording. This is an example of Chazal’s ability to take an apparently explicit *pasuk* and conclude that its meaning is different — though forty lashes are specified, in fact there are only thirty-nine. In the Gemara, Rava (*Makkos* 22b) indeed observes, “How foolish most people are; they will stand up in honor of a *sefer Torah*, but not in honor of a Torah scholar, though the latter wields greater power than Scripture [itself]. For in the *sefer Torah* it is written, ‘He shall beat him, forty...’ yet the Sages came and reduced this number by one.” In elucidating Scripture, Chazal are thus not limited to the literal meaning of the words, but are authorized to extract novel *halachos* through creative interpretation.

☛ If Thirty-Nine, Why Write Forty?

ALTHOUGH WE HAVE clarified Chazal’s authority to interpret the *pasuk* in this way and the basis for their interpretation, the Maharal (*Gur Aryeh, Devarim* *ibid.*) still seeks to understand another, fundamental point: if the Torah wanted to specify that only thirty-nine lashes should be given, why not write this number?

What is the underlying logic in writing forty but meaning thirty-nine, the number that rounds up to forty? While the aforementioned indications that this is the Torah’s intention show what prompted Chazal’s interpretation, they don’t explain why there needs to be any discrepancy to begin with between the words’ plain meaning and their true message.

☛ Forty Lashes Correspond to the First Forty Days of the Fetus's Formation

IN EXPLAINING THE deeper significance of this discrepancy, the Maharal first notes that the number forty is encountered elsewhere, in connection with Divine retribution. When informing Noach about the imminent flood, Hashem told him, “I am bringing rain upon the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I shall wipe out all beings that I made from upon the face of the earth” (*Bereishis* 7:4). Rashi (*ibid.*) explains that the forty-day period of rainfall corresponds to the forty days of a fetus's formation. Forty days pass from the time of conception until a fetus assumes human form such that subsequently, its limbs and organs merely continue growing and maturing. The forty lashes deserved by a sinner thus correspond to the forty days of fetal formation. As the Maharal explains, when a person sins, the sin's cause and source, namely, his physical body that led him to sin and that was formed over a forty-day period, deserves a beating.

☛ Hashem Doesn't Unleash His Full Wrath

THE MISHNAH (*MAKKOS* 22B) tells us that while the lashes are being administered, the *beis din* reads out the *pasuk*, “And He who is merciful will forgive sin and will not destroy and will greatly rein in His anger and will not unleash His full wrath” (*Tehillim* 78:38). The Maharal explains that the words, “and [He] will not unleash His full wrath” indicate that the sinner doesn't receive the full complement of forty lashes. In other words, the Torah writes, “Forty he shall beat him” because this is the punishment deserved by a physical being that was formed over a forty-day period. Chazal determined, however, that thirty-nine lashes are sufficient, because Hashem does not “unleash His full wrath” and doesn't impose the full extent of the punishment demanded by His judgment.

We find similarly that the Ramchal writes (*Mesilas Yesharim*,

Chap. 4) that Hashem's trait of mercy doesn't cancel His trait of judgment altogether; rather, it tempers judgment, meaning that Hashem gives the sinner the opportunity to repent despite having already sinned. And even when He does punish, "The punishment itself is not to the point of destruction."

☛ How Are Thirty-Nine Lashes Sufficient to Rectify the Sinner?

WHILE THIS INSIGHT gives us a fuller understanding, we need to deal with a further difficulty. The punishments imposed by the Torah are not meant as reprisals against the sinner, but rather to rectify him and atone for his sin. Thus, the Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 43b) tells us that prior to receiving the death penalty, the condemned sinner "is told, 'Confess, for the way of all who are put to death is to confess, because whoever confesses has a portion in the World to Come.' If he doesn't know how to confess, they tell him, 'Say, "May my death be atonement for all my sins."'"

Similarly, Chazal tell us (*Makkos* 23a), "Those who have incurred the *kareis* penalty and receive lashes are absolved of their *kareis*, for it says, 'Your brother be degraded before your eyes' — once he has been beaten, he is your brother (i.e., his sin has been atoned for)."

Since the purpose of the lashes is to refine the sinner's physical aspect, for which his punishment corresponds to the forty days of a fetus's formation, if a single lash is withheld, the refining effect is incomplete, and some remnant maintains its rebellion. How can the fortieth lash, whose effect the person needs, be dispensed with? The Maharal answers that after receiving thirty-nine lashes, the sinner has undergone full rectification. How so?

☛ Forty Days for the Formation of Body and Soul

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS (*Gur Aryeh, Devarim* *ibid.*): "On the last day, which is the fortieth day, the fetus receives its soul, whereas the

first thirty-nine days are for the formation of the body.” Not all the forty days are identical. The fetus is imbued with its spiritual essence only following the formation of its physical component. The body is formed during the first thirty-nine days, and the soul is implanted on the fortieth day. Thirty-nine lashes thus fully rectify the sinner’s body, without any remnant. What then rectifies the soul that joins the body on the fortieth day?

☛ When Physicality Overwhelms the Spirit, the Spirit Is Sullied

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS (*ibid.*): “The sin is associated with the body, where the evil inclination resides, but the soul sins along with it, because ‘Whatever is attached to the impure is like it,’ while it remains together with the body.” In other words, the sin is obviously carried out by the body, not the soul, but forty lashes are still in order because the soul is swept after the body, and when the body sins, the soul is also tainted and needs rectification.

This is explained by the Ramchal (*Derech Hashem* 1:3): “Divine wisdom decreed that man should be composed of two opposites, namely, an intellectual, pure soul and a coarse, earthly body, each of which pulls [him] in its direction: the body towards physicality and the soul towards intellectuality. These two opposing forces are at war such that if the soul is victorious, it is elevated, and it elevates the body with it, while if a person allows his physicality to get the better of him, he degrades his body, and his soul is degraded with it.” In other words, when a person’s physicality overcomes his soul, the soul too becomes tainted.

☛ With the Body’s Refinement, the Soul Is Refined as Well

ACCORDINGLY, THE MAHARAL explains (*ibid.*): “The Torah therefore says, ‘Forty he shall beat him,’ because the soul that is together with

the body has also incurred [the penalty of] lashes, since for the duration of the soul's sojourn with the sinning body, it is the same as the body." The "forty" lashes are thus not uniform. Thirty-nine serve to rectify the physical body, while the fortieth is to rectify the soul. However, in the same way that the soul is pulled after the body when the body sins, it is also refined as the body becomes refined. The Maharal therefore explains, "When he receives thirty-nine lashes, the body again becomes clear of sin, and the soul automatically becomes pure, for it has no inherent shortcoming beyond [what is conferred by virtue of] being attached to the sinning body, and when the body is clean of sin, there is no shortcoming or sin in the soul, and he doesn't need any further beating."

☛ The Purpose of Forty Lashes Is Achieved with Only Thirty-Nine

ARMED WITH THIS insight, we can understand that while the Torah sets out the means to attain the ultimate goal of refining both body and soul, Chazal clarify how this goal is to be achieved in practice. The purpose of the lashes is to rectify the sinner *in toto*, both his physical and spiritual components. The Torah therefore states "Forty he shall beat him" to teach us that the soul implanted in man on the fortieth day of his formation has become sullied as a result of the dominance of man's physicality and requires rectification. In practice, though, once the sinner receives thirty-nine lashes and his body has been cleansed, his soul that is pulled after the body has also been rectified.

Chazal thus teach us that after just thirty-nine lashes, the soul that became man's on the fortieth day of his formation has also been rectified, and the desired goal has been achieved in its entirety.

We have learned a valuable lesson in understanding Chazal's interpretation of Scripture. The forty lashes prescribed by the Torah contain a profound message. They are not mere punishment, but rather serve to rectify both body and soul that are formed in the

first forty days following conception. That is the message the “forty” lashes convey and the purpose they serve. With their profound perception, Chazal conclude that since the goal is man’s rectification, and with the body’s refinement, the soul’s cleansing follows automatically, the fortieth lash is unnecessary. Chazal’s interpretations thus do not arise from the linguistic technicalities themselves, but from Chazal’s profound insight into the deeper meaning of the topic, as reflected in the Torah’s precise wording.

Ki Savo

The Permanence of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Covenant with Yisrael

☛ *Parshas Ki Savo* Contains Double the Number of Curses as *Parshas Bechukosai*

IN *PARSHAS KI Savo*, ninety-eight curses are foretold for the Jewish People if they do not fulfill the Torah. This is in contrast to the similar section in *parshas Bechukosai* warning Yisrael of the dire consequences of failure to keep the Torah, which lists just forty-nine curses. Why is the number of curses in *Devarim* precisely double that in *Vayikra*? In his customary manner, the Maharal explains this difference in the number of the curses.

☛ Moshe Rabbeinu Himself Delivered the Curses in *Parshas Ki Savo*

DESPITE THEIR NUMERICAL superiority, the curses in *parshas Ki Savo* are in one respect less severe than those in *Vayikra*. From the Gemara (*Megillah* 31a), it is clear that during the communal Torah reading “There should be no interruption in the curses,” i.e. they should be read straight through from beginning to end. Thus, two people are not called up for the section of the curses, for this would necessitate stopping in the middle to call up the second person.

However, the Gemara (ibid. 31b) then brings Abayei's statement that this rule applies only to the curses in *Vayikra*, whereas there is no problem whatsoever in interrupting the reading of the curses in *Devarim*. The Gemara explains that this is because the curses in *parshas Bechukosai* "were uttered by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and are expressed collectively (i.e., in the second person plural)" [and are thus more severe,] whereas those in *parshas Ki Savo* "were said by Moshe himself and directed at individuals (i.e., in the second person singular)."

How are we to understand Moshe having delivered these curses on his own? Did Moshe ever convey anything that he had not heard from Hashem?

☛ In *Parshas Ki Savo*, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Is Referred to in the Third Person

RASHI (*DEVARIM* 28:23) EXPLAINS Chazal's statement that Moshe uttered the curses in our *parshah* as follows:

The curses in *parshas Bechukosai* were said precisely as Moshe Rabbeinu heard them. Hashem said, "If you do not listen to Me" (*Vayikra* 26:14); "And if you follow Me only in a casual way" (ibid. *pasuk* 21), and Moshe conveyed them exactly as he heard them. In *parshas Ki Savo*, however, Moshe refers to Hashem in the third person: "To the voice of Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim* 28:15); "Hashem will attach pestilence to you" (ibid. *pasuk* 21); "Hashem will smite you" (ibid. *pasuk* 22).

All these differences still leave us with the question of why Moshe saw fit to change the manner of the curses' delivery and their number when addressing Bnei Yisrael in *Devarim*.

☛ The Curses' Purpose Is to Ensure the Covenant's Fulfillment

A *PASUK* IN our *parshah* reveals the purpose of the curses foretold for Bnei Yisrael should they fail to fulfill the Torah: "These are the

words of the covenant that Hashem commanded Moshe to establish with Bnei Yisrael in the land of Mo'av, besides the covenant that He established with them at Chorev" (ibid. *pasuk* 69). Rashi explains that on Bnei Yisrael's part, this second covenant required "that they accept the Torah upon themselves with curse and oath" and that the first covenant was "the curses in *Toras Kohanim* (i.e., *Vayikra*) that were said at Sinai."

The curses are not simply threats of punishment for Yisrael's sins; they are a consequence of abrogating their covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. We find a similar description of the curses in *Vayikra*, where the Torah writes, "I will bring the sword against you, avenging the vengeance of the [broken] covenant" (*Vayikra* 26:25).

How do these curses give expression to the covenant?

☛ The Essence of a Covenant

A COVENANT REPRESENTS an understanding between two parties that is supposed to endure forever, despite changing circumstances. The Maharal points out that Onkelos always translates the word *bris* (covenant) as *kayama*, something permanent that endures for eternity.

The Hebrew term for forming a covenant is *kerisas bris*, despite the fact that *kerisah* means cutting or severing, whereas a covenant denotes the merging of the involved parties. The Vilna Gaon in his commentary to *Sefer Yetzirah* (1:8) explains that this is because forming a covenant involves a person excising and taking part of his essence and giving it to his partner, such that they henceforth become a single, inseparable unit. The Gaon writes, "I will tell you what a covenant represents: when a person has a friend whom he loves like himself and from whom he never wants to part, though he cannot be in his constant company, he gives him something [of his] that is the object of his greatest interest and desire, through which they become connected. The expression 'covenant' denotes a guarantee, for through that item, he (i.e. the friend) will certainly not be parted from him. This is the

relevance of the term *kerisah* (excising), because he severs from himself something that is attached to him and gives it to his friend.”

The Ramban adds that the word *bris* is derived from *beriah* (creation), because the establishment of a covenant creates a merger between two entities that become a single unit through the covenant. A new, indivisible entity thereby comes into existence.

☛ The Sword and the Book Are Situated on Either Side of the Covenant

IN LINE WITH this approach, the curses' apparent purpose is to create a reality in which the Jewish People have no practical possibility of separating or detaching themselves from their G-d. The curses are intended to prevent the covenant ever being broken — this reality, whereby abandoning the Torah results in harsh consequences, compels them to remain loyal to their G-d. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 97b) tells us, “Rabbi Eliezer says, ‘If Yisrael repent, they will be redeemed, but if not, they will not be redeemed.’ Rabbi Yehoshua told him, ‘If they don’t repent, they won’t be redeemed?! [Of course they will be redeemed, however,] in that eventuality, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will subject them to a king whose decrees are as harsh as those of Haman and they will repent, and He will bring them back to the path of good.”

In the Midrash, too (*Devarim Rabbah*, *Re’eh* 4:2), we find: “The sword and the book came down from Heaven intertwined. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Yisrael, ‘If you fulfill what is written in this book, you will be spared from this sword, but if you don’t do what is written in this book, you will be killed with this sword.’”

The sword’s purpose is not to punish and eliminate the party abrogating the covenant, but to restore it to following the book.

☛ Suffering Cleanses the Effect of Sin

THE MIDRASH *TANCHUMA* tells us that the opening words of *parshas Nitzavim*, “You are standing” (*Devarim* 29:9), immediately follow the curses in the previous *parshah* of *Ki Savo* “because Yisrael heard

ninety-eight curses, and their faces immediately fell. They said, ‘Who can withstand all of these?’ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told them, ‘It is actually the curses that will allow you to survive, as it says, ‘in order to ... test you and ultimately benefit you’ (ibid. 8:16).”

When Moshe Rabbeinu told Yisrael, “You are standing,” he thus meant, “You will remain standing firmly and will endure precisely on account of the curses.” In other words, they will serve as the guarantee of your survival. How does this happen?

The Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael*, Chap. 14) explains: “A person may imagine that the purpose of [the Jewish People’s] suffering is to destroy them, whereas the truth is the opposite. Their suffering serves to purify and clean away the filth left by their sins. This is similar to gold that contains impurities. If a person refines it in fire, it becomes pure and endures. Thus, when suffering befalls Yisrael, it refines them from sin and attaches them to Hashem.”

☛ Punishment Is Incremental, So as Not to Destroy the Sinner

THE MAHARAL (IBID.) further explains that since the purpose of the Jewish People’s suffering is not to destroy them but to facilitate their survival, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brings suffering upon them only in a way that doesn’t wipe them out. This enables us to understand the *pasuk* that appears among the curses of *parshas Bechukosai*, “I will further afflict you in seven ways for your sins” (*Vayikra* 26:18). This cannot mean that Yisrael will suffer seven-fold for their sins, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not afflict a sinner in excess of his sins. It therefore must mean that the punishment due will be delivered in seven stages, for were it to be inflicted all at once, the sinner would be unable to endure it. We find in *maseches Avodah Zarah* (4a): “This is comparable to a person who is owed money by two people, one of whom he likes and the other whom he dislikes. From the one he likes, he will exact payment in increments, while from the one he dislikes, he will exact payment all at once.”

☞ A Covenant's Two Aspects

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (Chap. 43), the Maharal explains that the Gemara's intention (*Megillah* *ibid.*) in noting that the curses in *Devarim* were said by Moshe himself is not to imply that Moshe said anything — even so much as a single letter — on his own.

The Torah that Hashem gave to Yisrael established a covenant between Him and them; we therefore find the term *bris* associated with Torah. The *luchos* are called the *luchos habris*, and the *aron* in which they were placed is called the *aron habris*.

There are two parties to each covenant, each of whom is obligated to both the covenant and to his partner. Obligation to the covenant means being bound to its goal and terms, e.g., not to go to war against one another. There is also an obligation to the other partner in the covenant. On one side of Yisrael's covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* stands the Giver of the Torah, and on the other side are Yisrael, the recipients of the Torah. The first four books of the Torah reflect the standpoint of the Giver of the Torah, while the fifth, the book of *Devarim*, reflects the standpoint of the Torah's recipients, as it says, "Moshe began to explain this Torah" (*Devarim* 1:5), because the recipient requires further explanation and elucidation. *Devarim* is therefore also known as *Mishneh Torah*, meaning a repetition or doubling of the Torah. In other words, there is nothing new in *Devarim*. It is the very same Torah, all of whose mitzvos were already given at Har Sinai. However, it is a mirror image, as it were, written from the standpoint of the Torah's recipients. This idea can be found in Tosafos (*Gittin* 2a, s.v. *hameivi get*), who write that *Mishneh Torah* "just reviews and repeats that which was said above."

☞ The Curses of *Vayikra* and Those of *Devarim*

THIS ENABLES US to understand why the curses are mentioned again in *Devarim*, where they are presented in a different format. The curses in *Vayikra* give expression to the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People from the viewpoint of the Giver of the Torah,

whereas those in *Devarim* are their mirror image, reflecting the covenant as seen through the eyes of the Torah's recipients. In *Netzach Yisrael* (Chap. 14), the Maharal explains that for this very reason, Moshe doubled the number of the curses. "Moshe said the curses of *Mishneh Torah* himself, and because he said them himself, he added a further forty-nine curses until they are cursed from top to bottom; therefore, there are ninety-eight."

In other words, in *Vayikra*, the Giver of the Torah emphasizes that He will not allow His People to abandon the covenant, for if they attempt to do so, circumstances will force them to maintain their loyalty to it. In *Devarim*, though, Moshe Rabbeinu declares that the Jewish People redoubles its commitment to remain loyal to the covenant and that they will never, ever abandon it. Since Moshe was responding, as it were, on the part of the party being brought into the covenant, he sought to redouble and reinforce the people's commitment, so he doubled the number of curses.

The sections listing the curses are thus actually an expression of the covenant between the Jewish People and their G-d. A covenant merges its participants into a single entity, forever inseparable.

The curses' purpose is to create circumstances that will compel Yisrael to remain loyal to their G-d. There are two parties to the covenant; the first four books of the Torah express *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* standpoint, while *Devarim* expresses the recipients' standpoint. The Jewish People enters the covenant with redoubled commitment, and therefore, the number of curses is double.

But this doesn't imply extra suffering — it is similar to paying off a debt over time in small amounts that the borrower can withstand. Since the covenant is meant to endure forever, the Jewish People's suffering is intended not to destroy them, but to facilitate their endurance.

Nitzavim

The Covenant between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Jewish Nation's Collective Soul

☛ Why Renew the Covenant, and Why List Each Grouping of the People?

PARSHAS NITZAVIM BEGINS with the covenant that Hashem establishes with His nation: “You, all of you, are standing today before Hashem, your G-d: your leaders of your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every man of Yisrael; your young children, your wives, and the proselyte who is within your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water; for you to enter the covenant of Hashem, your G-d and His oath, which Hashem, your G-d is forming with you today; in order to establish you today as His people and that He be your G-d, just as He spoke to you, and just as He swore to your forefathers, to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov” (*Devarim* 9–12).

These *pesukim* give rise to two major questions:

Firstly, why was this additional covenant made? *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had already established a covenant with His nation when they stood at Har Sinai, and the section of the curses for not keeping the Torah, described in the previous *parshah*, *parshas Ki Savo*, concludes with the words, “These are the words of the covenant that Hashem

commanded Moshe to form with Bnei Yisrael in the land of Mo'av, *besides the covenant that He formed with them at Chorev*" (ibid. 28:69).

Secondly, why does the Torah enumerate the ten social groupings within the Jewish nation: "your leaders of your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every man of Yisrael; your young children, your wives, and the proselyte who is within your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water"? Why wouldn't a general term, telling us that the covenant was established with "all of you" suffice?

☛ How Does the Covenant Bind Future Generations?

THE TORAH CONTINUES, "And not with you alone am I forming this covenant and this oath, but rather with those who are standing here with us today before Hashem our G-d and with those who are not here with us today" (ibid. *pesukim* 13–14). Rashi explains that "those who are not here with us today" is intended to include "even generations that will live in the future."

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* ibid.) wonders, "Since they weren't alive at that time, how was it possible to make a covenant with them, when they weren't in the world?" In other words, how could a covenant entered into by Bnei Yisrael bind others, particularly people who were not yet alive at the time the covenant was made? In *Akeidas Yitzchak* (*Sha'ar* 99), Rav Yitzchak Arama underscores this difficulty in light of the rule (*Shevuos* 47a), "A person cannot transfer to his children or descendents an obligation conferred on him by a vow or an oath." Yet in regard to observing the Torah's mitzvos, the Gemara states the principle that a Jew is "bound by oath since [the Giving of the Torah at] Har Sinai," i.e., by the oath taken by Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai to fulfill the Torah, an oath which binds every single Jew in every generation. How are we to understand this?

In regard to any personal undertaking, a person is always given the opportunity to declare whether or not he is willing to assume

the responsibility. It is therefore unclear how a covenant that binds future generations can be effective if those not present have not reaffirmed their acceptance upon attaining maturity, either verbally or by silent acquiescence. The Maharal points out that neither can it be argued that an earlier generation's acceptance is itself binding on their offspring, for "A son will suffer no punishment for his father's deed, so how can he be apprehended for his father's word and ensnared by his [father's] utterance — all the more so, how can this continue until the end of all generations?"

☛ Why Is the Covenant Enforced with an Outpouring of Wrath on Those Who Apparently Weren't Parties to It?

THE ABARBANEL (*DEVARIM 29, Safeik Harishon*) mentions the principle, "A privilege may be acquired on a person's behalf only in his absence, but a liability may be incurred on his behalf in his presence." In other words, something from which a person gains may be done for him in his absence without his prior consent, for we can assume that he would want it, whereas something detrimental to him cannot be done without obtaining his agreement in advance. The Gemara similarly lays down the rule that "A person cannot leave an oath to his heirs (i.e., money that can be obtained only by taking an oath)" (*Shevuos 47a*).

The Abarbanel therefore notes that "The sages of our generation waged a mighty controversy with the Kingdom of Aragon over the meaning of this covenant. Who empowered the Generation of the Desert, who were physically present at Har Sinai, to bind those who would arise in their stead with their declaration that 'We shall fulfill and obey [the Torah],' [thereby] making them part of G-d's covenant? [Who empowered them] to take an oath that would be binding upon them (i.e., their descendants) that never becomes annulled, obligating them in all the requirements of the Torah and the covenant that they formed, punishing their descendants who follow them as we see from this *pasuk*... [this is a situation] that justice cannot countenance?"

The Abarbanel attempts to resolve this difficulty by citing the halachah that if a person leaves his heirs property, they are under obligation to settle his debts (*Kesubos* 91b). *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt and out of slavery, thereby acquiring them as His own. Their descendants and heirs are therefore bound by the terms of the covenant that their forbears entered into. However, this parallel between the covenant between G-d and His People and the debts that an heir must settle upon assuming ownership of an inheritance also raises a problem, because halachah stipulates that if the heir forgoes the inheritance, he is released from paying the debts. The prophet Yechezkel, however, declares that there is no way for an individual to cease being part of the Jewish nation and thereby dissociate himself from the covenant with G-d. The *navi* prophesies: “That which you contemplate shall never be — that which you say, ‘Let us be like the nations, the families of the lands, serving wood and stone.’ I swear, says Hashem, G-d, if I do not [establish My] rule over you with mighty power, an outstretched arm, and outpouring of wrath” (*Yechezkel* 20:32–3).

If the heirs have no choice whatsoever in the matter, we return to our original difficulty: by what authority does the covenant bind all future generations?

☛ What Is the Significance of Scripture’s Stance Regarding Violators of the Covenant?

THE *PESUKIM* DESCRIBING G-d’s covenant with Yisrael continue: “Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from Hashem, your G-d, [preferring] to go and serve the gods of those nations; perhaps there is among you a root sprouting gall and wormwood? And it will be that when he hears the words of this oath, he reassures himself in his heart, saying, ‘I will be fine, for I shall follow my heart’s will,’ so that [Hashem] will now add [his] unintentional sins to [his] blatant ones. Hashem will not wish to forgive him, for Hashem’s fury and His zealous anger

will smolder against that man, and the entire curse that is written in this book will be brought to bear against him, and Hashem will obliterate his name from beneath the heavens. Hashem will single him out from all the tribes of Yisrael for evil [punishment], according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this Book of the Torah.”

These *pesukim* require clarification — what was the individual who chose to abrogate the covenant thinking? Why did he reassure himself that no harm would befall him? What led him to believe that this would be the case? And why is it necessary to single him out from the rest of the Jewish People to receive his punishment — surely even without this he will receive his just deserts?

☛ The Covenant Is Forged with the Nation, Not with Individuals

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 11), the Maharal explains that the covenant *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* formed with Yisrael before they entered the land was not entered into with individuals, but with the nation as a whole, and as such is eternally binding. Since it was not drawn up with individuals, making it subject to each one’s consent (and the consent of those who later come in his stead), but rather with the entire nation as a single entity, it perforce fully devolves upon all future generations. The partner to the covenant on Yisrael’s side was the entity that can be termed “the national soul” — or, as Chazal refer to it, *Knesses Yisrael* — a deeply rooted chord common to every Jewish soul that nourishes a Jew spiritually and to whose conditions and obligations every Jew is thus subject from the moment of birth.

Rabbeinu Bachye’s comments here also convey this meaning: “A father is a root, and his offspring are branches that will sprout in the future from the potential contained in the root. The root [thus encompasses all its future derivatives and] is thus able to include future generations in the covenant into which it enters.”

In contrast to Heaven’s covenant with Noah (*Bereishis* 9:8–17),

which was made with him as an individual and which therefore does not devolve upon that portion of his descendants who did not inherit his characteristics, the covenant with our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov was made with the nation as a whole, as it says, “I shall give the Land to you *and to your descendants*” (ibid. 26:3).

“This is called ‘communal attachment’” says the Maharal, “meaning, [attachment] of the nation as a whole. No change takes place on the communal level; any change taking place is on the individual level. Therefore, even though attachment may [vary], growing stronger or weaker according to the [individual] recipients [of the covenant], the communal attachment itself remains unchanged.” While an individual can choose to differ from the rest of the community, the nation’s soul is a collective entity that never changes, and the covenant entered into with it is therefore everlasting.

☛ The Covenant Devolves on Future Generations That Are Part of Klal Yisrael

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS the *pesukim*, “And not with you alone am I forming this covenant ... but with those who are standing here with us today... and with those who are not here with us today” in keeping with this approach. The covenant binds future generations, even those individuals who are disloyal to it, because it was entered into with the nation’s unchanging root and is unaffected by the appearance of individual deviant branches.

“The matter is clear,” writes the Maharal, “because He made the covenant with Avraham in his role as progenitor of the nation as a whole, and with Yisrael, too. He said he was not entering into the covenant with them as individuals but as a national entity, meaning the [nation] named Yisrael. This included those who were present before Him then as well as those who were born later, to all of whom the title ‘the Israelite nation’ [equally] applies. Therefore, how is it possible to say that individuals who sinned can abrogate the covenant, which devolved upon the national entity as a whole?”

☛ Even an Eight-Day-Old Baby Can Become a Party to the Covenant

IN LINE WITH the Maharal's approach, we can understand the seeming conundrum of how an eight-day-old baby can be entered into the covenant, which at first glance seems impossible. Since there have to be two parties to a covenant, how can a covenant become binding on an eight-day-old child who understands nothing? This can happen only because every individual who is nourished by the Jewish nation's soul and whose own soul is bound to Klal Yisrael is already part of that entity. His special bond with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not contingent upon his deeds or his individual awareness, for it is anchored in the deepest levels of his soul. An eight-day-old child can therefore certainly be instated into the covenant from which he draws his very identity. The covenant isn't contingent upon his acquiescence; he is part of it because he is part of Klal Yisrael.

☛ A Member of Klal Yisrael Who Sins Remains Part of Klal Yisrael

SINCE EVERY JEW'S soul is bound at its deepest level to the eternal soul of the Jewish nation, it is self-evident that just as the Jewish nation itself is eternal, every succeeding generation — for all eternity — is imbued with the nation's holiness, as is each and every individual member thereof, irrespective of whether his conduct meets the standards demanded of him. This gives rise to the principle, "A[n individual] Yisrael who has sinned is nevertheless a [member of Klal] Yisrael." Even if he has sinned, a Jew's attachment to the covenant binding him to his G-d remains unbroken.

In *maseches Sanhedrin* (44a), the Gemara derives from the *pasuk*, "Yisrael have sinned" (*Yehoshua* 7:11) — identifying them by name rather than writing, "the people have sinned" — that despite having sinned, "The name denoting their holiness remains theirs." Even if a Jew has sinned, he remains part of Klal Yisrael.

The Gemara then cites Rabbi Abba's illustration of this principle: "This is the meaning of the saying, 'A myrtle among thistles remains a myrtle and is still called a myrtle.'"

☛ The Difference between a Righteous Convert and a Resident Convert

A RIGHTEOUS CONVERT (*ger tzedek*) is an individual whose soul has become attached to the Jewish nation's collective soul and has undertaken to fulfill the Torah and its *mitzvos*. The Maharal points out that he is thereby "sanctified, and all his descendants are sanctified with the holiness of Yisrael for every generation evermore." In contrast, an individual such as a resident convert (*ger toshav*), who is not spiritually nourished by the nation's collective soul — for though he believes in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and has renounced idolatry, he has not undertaken mitzvah observance and has not attached himself to Yisrael's holiness — "does not acquire this status for his descendants, unless they make the same undertaking anew."

In *Meshech Chochmah* (on *Vayikra* 18:5), Rav Meir Simchah Hakohen of Dvinsk (the *Ohr Samei'ach*) explains that this difference stems from the fact that a *ger toshav's* undertaking is his own private affair and as such does not obligate the next generation, whereas a *ger tzedek's* acceptance of the holiness of Yisrael is a collective event, involving and affecting the Jewish nation's collective soul, and therefore, its effect is eternal.

☛ All the Components of a Whole Are a Brotherhood

THIS CONCEPT OF the collective Jewish national soul is the source of Jewish solidarity, whereby the entire nation is akin to one body. The *pasuk* says, "Yisrael is a lamb separated [from the flock]" (*Yirmeyahu* 50:17), prompting Chazal to comment (*Vayikra Rabbah* 4:6), "Yisrael

are likened to a lamb — just as a lamb, when it receives a blow to its head or to another part of its body, every part of its body feels it, so it is with Yisrael.”

This transcends the realm of sensation — the feeling of solidarity among Jews, real as it is — and is actually reflected in halachah. The Ritva (*Rosh Hashanah* 29a) remarks that although a person may have already fulfilled any given mitzvah, he can still make a blessing on that mitzvah for his friend prior to the latter fulfilling it, because although the obligation to fulfill the mitzvos devolves upon each person individually, “*All of Yisrael are guarantors for one another and are like one collective body*; as though one of them is paying off another’s debt.”

☛ The Collective Covenant Renders Each Individual Responsible for Everyone Else’s Mitzvos and *Aveiros*

WERE HASHEM’S COVENANT with Yisrael a private matter between each individual and his G-d, this collective responsibility would be incomprehensible. Each person would live according to his own perception of faith and would be able to annul his own private covenant without impacting the stability of his colleagues’ covenant. In light of the Maharal’s explanation that the covenant exists between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Jewish nation as a whole, not with its individual components, however, we understand how “All of Yisrael are responsible for one another” and how an individual’s abrogation of the covenant places his colleagues in the same situation of being in breach of the covenant.

In the above Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 4:6), we find Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s statement, “This is comparable to people sitting together in a boat when one of them takes an awl and starts boring a hole beneath him in his cubicle. ‘What are you doing?’ his friends ask him. ‘What business is it of yours?’ he replies, ‘I am boring a hole under myself.’ They told him, ‘The water will enter and submerge the whole boat.’”

☛ An Individual Sinner Affects the Entire Collective Body

WE CAN NOW explain why the sinner imagines, “I will be fine” despite his plan to “follow my heart’s will.” The Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel explain that since the covenant is with the nation as a whole, he believes that an individual annulling it will not affect the position of the collective. He tells himself, “I shall live in the [merit of] the righteousness of the righteous, for they are the majority, and I am a lone sinner.”

The Torah therefore stresses, “Hashem will not wish to forgive him” to teach us that the opposite is true. Because the covenant is with the nation as a whole, of which each individual member is an inseparable part, his sins render the entire collective tantamount to having abrogated the covenant, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* regards the entire nation as a single entity. The Torah therefore tells us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will separate the sinner from the group and consider his case on its own, as though he was not part of the group at all. Because he thought that an individual’s actions have no influence upon the group as a whole, he will be judged as an individual, not as part of the group.

☛ “You Are Standing” — You All Bear Responsibility for One Another

THE MAHARAL’S UNDERSTANDING of this covenant as being between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the nation’s collective soul from which every individual Jewish soul in every generation draws spiritual sustenance and to which it remains deeply attached affords us insight into the covenant of *parshas Nitzavim*. As the *Ohr Hachaim* explains, “Moshe’s intention with this covenant was to render them responsible for one another, so that every person would attempt to ensure that his colleague would not transgress Hashem’s directives, with them being held accountable for each other.” The *Ohr Hachaim*

writes that the term *atem nitzavim* (you are standing) is thus similar in meaning to the term in *Megillas Rus* (2:6), “*hanitzav al hakotzrim* (who was standing over the reapers),” i.e., the one who was supervising them and who bore responsibility for them.

The Maharal’s disciple, the *Kli Yakar*, adds further that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted this to be a new covenant to replace the previous one that had been broken by the sin of the Golden Calf, which had come about because they were not held responsible for one another at that time, and each person was able to do as he liked. With the advent of a covenant with the nation as a whole that made them responsible for each other, each person’s actions impact everyone else. As an analogy, the guarantor of a loan who sees the borrower wasting his money will rebuke him for fear that he might end up having to pay the debt on his behalf. We thus also find that leaders are sometimes held accountable even for sins done by individuals in private, as was the case with the sin of Achan. The rationale behind this is that they did not previously exert their authority sufficiently and ignored wayward individuals.

☛ A Person Is Responsible for the Actions of Others over Whom He Wields Influence

THE COVENANT WAS addressed to each and every social grouping within the Jewish nation, from the water drawers to the leaders of the tribes. Each person has a responsibility to take action within the social circle in which he finds himself and within which he wields influence. As Chazal say (*Shabbos* 54b), “Whoever has the ability to influence the world is held responsible for the shortcomings of the entire world; whoever is able to influence his fellow townsfolk is held responsible for the failings of everyone in the town, while whoever can influence the members of his household is held responsible for their misdemeanors.”

The Maharal shows us that a Divine spark nestles within each and every Jew, along with a deeply entrenched root that draws spiritual

sustenance from the eternal, collective soul of the Jewish nation. This part of his soul remains firmly embedded there forever, irrespective of the type of behavior in which he engages.

It is by virtue of this bond to the Jewish nation's collective soul that the covenant binds every single Jew in every generation.

Uayeilech

When Being Stiff-Necked Is a Virtue

☛ Being Stiff Necked Is a Jewish Characteristic

MOSHE'S PARTING WORDS from the Jewish People include, "For I am aware of your rebelliousness and stubbornness. Even while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against Hashem — and certainly after my death" (*Devarim* 31:27). Moshe characterizes the people as being stubborn and stiff necked. Are Jews any different in this respect from other nations, and if so, what is its deeper significance? From where does this trait spring?

☛ Is Being Stiff Necked a Virtue or a Shortcoming?

FOLLOWING THE SIN of the Golden Calf, Hashem told Moshe to tell the people, "You are a stubborn people; if I am among you momentarily [and become angry at you], I will destroy you" (*Shemos* 33:5). This is evidently a trait that has the potential to lead to the Jewish People's destruction. Yet interestingly, when Moshe attempted to defend Yisrael for this very sin, he singled out this trait as a factor mitigating in their defense. Moshe told *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, "If you now regard me favorably, may Hashem please go among us, for this is a stubborn people, and may You forgive our transgressions and sins and make us Your possession" (*ibid.* 34:9).

How can the people's being stiff necked be used as an argument in their merit? How can something that could be responsible for their

destruction be a point in their favor? How can a trait that leads to punishment be the basis of requesting atonement and reconciliation?

☛ “Fortunate Are You” — Because You Fall So Low

THE GEMARA IN *Kesubos* (67b) relates, “Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai was riding on a donkey away from Yerushalayim, and his disciples were walking behind him. He saw a young woman picking grains of barley from among the dung of the Arabs’ animals. Upon seeing him, she approached him and said, “My teacher, sustain me.’

“He said to her, ‘My daughter, whose daughter are you?’

“She said, ‘I am the daughter of Nakdimon ben Gurion.’

“Rabban Yochanan told his disciples, ‘I remember when I signed on this woman’s *kesubah*. I read there that she was bringing a million golden *dinarim* [into the marriage] from her father’s house, besides what her father-in-law was giving.’ Rabban Yochanan wept and said, ‘Fortunate are you, Yisrael — when you fulfill G-d’s will, no other nation has power over you, but when you don’t do G-d’s will, you fall under the power of a degenerate nation — and moreover, under the power of that degenerate nation’s animals.’”

Apparently, some characteristic of the Jewish nation is responsible both for their climbing to the greatest heights as well as for their sinking to the lowest level, and on this account, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai declared, “Fortunate are you, Yisrael!” In *Netzach Yisrael* (Chap. 14), the Maharal expresses his amazement at Rabban Yochanan encouraging Yisrael to be glad even about falling under the power of animals belonging to a degenerate nation. Is this something to be glad about?

☛ A Blessing to Sink as Low as the Dust

A SIMILAR DIFFICULTY presents itself in the Gemara (*Megillah* 16a), which records that when Zeresh told Haman, “For you will collapse completely in front of him” (*Esther* 6:13), she foresaw a double

downfall for her husband, because when Yisrael ascend, they reach the very stars, and their enemies are utterly smitten before them. The Gemara tells us that Zeresh said, “This nation is compared to both the dust and the stars; if they sink, they descend all the way to the dust, whereas if they ascend, they rise all the way to the heavens.”

Now, Yisrael are compared to dust in the *pasuk*, “Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth” (*Bereishis* 28:14), but this was said to Yaakov Avinu as a blessing! How can the *pasuk*’s comparison of Yisrael to dust be understood in the way Zeresh understood it? How can sinking to the level of dust be considered any kind of blessing?

☛ Only the Jewish Nation Is Referred to as “Man”

IN *MASECHES YEVAMOS* (61a) we find, “Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, ‘Gentiles’ graves do not impart impurity, as it says, “And you are My flock, the flock I tend; you are *adam* (man)” (*Yechezkel* 34:31), [which means that] you are called *adam*, whereas the nations of the world are not called *adam*.” What does this statement mean? Are the nations of the world not human beings? Are the Jewish People the only ones called man?

In *Gur Aryeh* (*Bamidbar* 31:19), the Maharal explains this teaching. The difference between humans and animals is that whereas the latter are wholly physical, the former also possess a spiritual and intellectual aspect, which man can use in order to control his material desires and transcend his physicality.

In *Netzach Yisrael* (*ibid.*) the Maharal adds, “Yisrael are on a level whereat they are separate from physicality and do not wallow in it. It is as though a Jew’s physicality is insignificant in relation to his soul and merely serves the function of a bearer upon which the soul rides. A Jew’s physical aspect is secondary in importance to its rider, just like a donkey is insignificant in comparison to the person riding it.”

By contrast, the nations of the world, “even though they are [also] man, their soul is not separate from, but rather wallows in, physicality.” In other words, the nations’ spiritual aspect does not control

their physicality but is actually subservient to it and employed in its service. Therefore, they are not termed “*adam*.”

The nations also possess a spiritual aspect, for this is what makes every person human. However, whereas with Yisrael the soul is the principal and leads, the nations’ soul is interwoven with their physicality and is not dominant. As such, they are not truly deserving of the term *adam*, which denotes a being with a spiritual aspect that subdues its own physicality, not a being whose spiritual aspect serves its physicality.

☛ Physical Matter Can Assume a Different Form, but the Spirit Never Changes

IN *GUR ARYEH* (ibid.), the Maharal explains further that a fundamental difference between physical matter and a spiritual being is the former’s ability to change easily.

Physical matter is essentially amorphous and can change, losing its identity and assuming a new form. An abstract, spiritual being, however, with its weaker ties to matter, possesses a defined form that does not lend itself easily to change. Something that lacks substance and exists solely as a shape or form, such as a circle drawn on paper, can’t be made into a square. Earth, or even iron can be molded into different shapes, but fire, which lacks substance and therefore is more “spiritual,” cannot. Man, who possesses both a physical and a spiritual aspect, can much more easily change the former than the latter. For example, he can change his weight and with it his physical shape, but he finds it much harder to modify his personality.

☛ The Jewish Nation’s Spirituality Is the Source of Its Stubbornness

BY THE SAME token, the more spiritual a person is, the more definite his “form” and the less subject he is to change and alteration. A person who is more rooted in physicality is less “fixed” and thus more

liable to shift and move his direction; his life is like a weathervane, changing direction with every breeze that blows. Chazal indeed note that the wicked are filled with regrets, while the Gemara (*Ta'anis* 4a) tells us, “Any Torah scholar who is not as hard as iron is not a [true] Torah scholar, as it says [of G-d’s word, i.e., the Torah], ‘And like a hammer that smashes a rock’ (*Yirmeyahu* 23:29).” It thus follows that the Jewish nation, whose essence is spiritual and not rooted in physicality, exhibits greater stubbornness.

☛ The Drawback of Being Stiff Necked

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that this stubbornness sometimes leads to the nations having an advantage over Yisrael. He notes that the Torah berates the Jewish nation, “For you are a stiff-necked people” (*Devarim* 9:6), because “They persist in their deeds and resist change” and are thus not easily swayed to repent. Thanks to their stubbornness when they err, their error is deeply rooted, and it is hard to detach them from their wayward conduct.

The nations of the world, on the other hand, are closer to repentance. The Maharal quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Shemini* 9) that states, “The nations are close to repentance.” He explains, “Therefore, when Yonah was sent to prophesy about Nineveh’s impending destruction, he reasoned, ‘The nations are close to repentance and will repent, and the punishment will not befall them, and they will say that I am lying’ and he therefore didn’t want to prophesy.”

To explain the apparent paradox of the nations being closer to repentance than Yisrael, the Maharal points to the nations’ heightened physicality, which makes them prone to change. This virtue actually arises from their shortcoming of being deeply rooted in the physical.

☛ The Virtue of Being Stiff Necked

WHAT CHANGES EASILY changes back just as easily. Although the nations of the world have the capacity to change for the better,

when they do so, it is not lasting. In this respect, they are inferior to Yisrael, who might be stiff necked, but the lessons they absorb remain engraved upon their souls forever, and they will be prepared to make any sacrifice to uphold them.

This is how the Vilna Gaon (in his *Commentary to Mishlei*) explains the *pasuk*, “The evildoer’s heart is slight” (*Mishlei* 10:20). He writes, “Evildoers’ hearts are feeble — he retreats from his evil ways only temporarily and afterwards reverts to how he was before.” By contrast, writes the Gaon, the Torah scholar is hard as iron: “It is hard to make a hole in iron, but once a hole has been made, it doesn’t close, because it has been made in a hard material. By contrast, if a hole is made in a weak material, it closes up immediately and goes back to its original state. This is Yisrael’s virtue of being ‘a stiff-necked people.’”

☛ Spirit Ascends Heavenward

While Matter Descends to the Earth

THE MAHARAL (*Netzach Yisrael* *ibid.*) explains Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai’s declaration in the Gemara in *Kesubos* in line with this approach. As explained above, man has both a spiritual and a physical aspect. Among the Jewish nation, the physical aspect is secondary, while the spirit is ascendant. With their spiritual aspect dominant, Yisrael reach the very heavens and rule the entire world. If they accord their physical aspect dominance, though, they descend all the way to the earth, to rock bottom, for in regard to physicality, they are inferior to the nations.

☛ The Jewish People Has No Middle Path

THE MAHARAL (IBID.) explains further that when Yisrael fulfill the Creator’s will, no other nation can dominate them, because “Perfected form is always dominant over matter, not the other way around.”

However, when they don't fulfill G-d's will, they are dominated by a degenerate nation, "for that nation's degeneration demonstrates their excessive physicality, because matter is degenerate."

"Yisrael have no middle level whatsoever," the Maharal states in conclusion. "Either they are dominant over all else, or all the others dominate them." There can be no middle level, because "When [spiritual] form is not as it should be, it is tantamount to being absent altogether."

Yisrael's elevated level is due to the sublime souls within them and the fact that their physical aspect is insignificant relative to their soul. They can be compared to a person who owns a donkey (the body with its desires) and its rider (the soul, the intellectual and spiritual faculties), "And this physical aspect is secondary to its rider, in the same way that the donkey is secondary to whoever is riding it." Man's spiritual aspect is not amenable to change, and with the Jewish People's heightened spiritual propensity come their stubbornness and capacity for self-sacrifice. Although this resistance to change is a grave shortcoming in a person who has sinned, in and of itself it is a supreme virtue.

Ha'azinu

The Refrain of *Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso L'olam Va'ed*

☞ Responding with *Baruch Shem* after the Utterance of the Ineffable Name

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to the Song of *Ha'azinu*, Moshe says, “When I call out Hashem’s Name, ascribe greatness to our G-d” (*Devarim* 32:3). Rashi explains, “When I call out and proclaim G-d’s Name, you shall assign Him greatness and bless His Name — this is the source cited by the Sages for the practice of responding with ‘*Baruch Shem kevod malchuso...*’ to a blessing in the Temple.” In other words, when the *Kohen Gadol* uttered G-d’s Ineffable Name in the Beis Hamikdash, the *kohanim* and the people who were present would prostrate themselves on the ground and say, “*Baruch Shem kevod malchuso l’olam va’ed.*”

The Gemara in *maseches Ta’anis* (16b) explains that outside the Beis Hamikdash, the response to hearing G-d’s Name uttered is *amen*, and only inside did the listeners only responded with *Baruch Shem*. What is the reason for this difference?

In *Gur Aryeh* (*Devarim* *ibid.*), the Maharal answers this question as follows: “The reason for this is that it is written, ‘When I call out Hashem’s Name,’ which refers to the Ineffable Name. Only in the Beis Hamikdash is the Ineffable Name uttered aloud exactly as it is

written (*Yoma* 69b), and therefore, the specific response of *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso* is said.”

The question now becomes why the utterance of the Ineffable Name is met with the response of *Baruch Shem* rather than *amen*. Moreover, we too say *Baruch Shem*, albeit softly, every time we say the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael* despite not having mentioned the Ineffable Name.

☛ The Source for Saying *Baruch Shem* Softly

THE GEMARA IN *maseches Peaschim* (56a) describes Yaakov Avinu’s final moments with his sons. The Gemara relates: “Yaakov wanted to reveal to his sons [what would happen at] the End of Days, but the *Shechinah* departed from him [to prevent him from doing so]. He said, ‘Perhaps one of my children is unworthy, like Avraham from whom Yishmael issued and Yitzchak from whom Esav issued [and the *Shechinah* departed on his account]?’ His sons told him, ‘Hear, Yisrael (i.e., they addressed their father, Yisrael), Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One. [In other words, just as there is only one G-d in your heart, there is only one G-d in ours.]’ At that moment, Yaakov Avinu spoke up and said, ‘*Baruch Shem kevod malchuso l’olam va’ed*.’

“The Sages said, ‘How shall we conduct ourselves henceforth in regard to saying *Baruch Shem*? Shall we say it? Moshe Rabbeinu didn’t say it in *parshas Va’eschanan* after the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael*. Shall we not say it? But Yaakov said it.’” The Sages therefore settled on a compromise of sorts, whereby we say *Baruch Shem* “secretly” (i.e., softly), without raising our voices as we do for *Shema Yisrael*.

The Gemara then illustrates this with the parable of a princess who smelled a particularly aromatic but ordinary food that was not worthy of being served to royalty, but her appetite was aroused for it. Her servants were in a quandary. Should they serve it to her as she wanted, it would be a disgrace for her to be seen eating it. Should they withhold it from her, she would suffer. They therefore brought it to her in secret.

This passage of Gemara presents several difficulties:

1. Why did Yaakov respond to *Shema Yisrael* by saying *Baruch Shem*, whereas Moshe did not?
2. The parable likens saying *Baruch Shem* to a princess who smelled a food that was unworthy of her. What is unworthy about saying *Baruch Shem*?
3. In the parable, the solution of eating the simple food in secret clearly solves the problem of embarrassment, which results from her being seen and which eating in secret avoids. How does this correspond to saying *Baruch Shem* quietly? Whatever the problem is with saying it, we are still saying it!

☛ We Say *Baruch Shem* Softly Out of Concern for the *Malachim*

THE *TUR* (*ORACH CHAIM* 619) writes, “On Yom Kippur, the custom among Ashkenazi Jewry is to say *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso l’olam va’ed* out loud. There is support for this in the *Midrash Rabbah* in *parshas Va’eschanan*: ‘When Moshe ascended to Heaven, he heard the *malachim* who serve Hashem praising Him by saying *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso l’olam va’ed*, and he brought this praise down to Yisrael. To what is this comparable? To a man who stole a beautiful object from the king’s palace and gave it to his wife. He told her only to wear it privately, inside their home. Therefore, all year round we say it softly, whereas on Yom Kippur, we say it publicly because [on that day], we are akin to *malachim*.’”

Several points about this Midrash require clarification:

1. Why would the *malachim* mind if Yisrael also praise *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* by saying *Baruch Shem*?
2. In the parable of the stolen object, something is now missing from the royal palace. Are the *malachim* missing anything because we praise Hashem in this way?

3. How does saying *Baruch Shem* softly help? Is there a way of concealing anything from a *malach*?
4. Why are we unconcerned about the *malachim* when we say *Baruch Shem* out loud on Yom Kippur?
5. The greatest difficulty is that this Midrash ascribes saying *Baruch Shem* to Moshe Rabbeinu, but we saw earlier that Yaakov was the source for saying it, whereas Moshe didn't say it at all after saying *Shema Yisrael*. If Moshe instituted saying *Baruch Shem*, why didn't he say it himself when he taught Bnei Yisrael the section of *Shema Yisrael* in *parshas Va'eschanan*?

☛ Only a Holy Being Is Worthy of Blessing the Holy G-d

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS this topic in *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha'avodah*, Chap. 7), where he writes that *Baruch Shem* is only fitting to be said by a non-physical being, since Hashem Himself is pure intellect.

Any being that lacks holiness may therefore not praise Hashem's Name, it being irrelevant for such a being to praise Him and impossible for it to grasp any conception of Him, for a physical being cannot appreciate the spiritual and the sublime. This praise is therefore only fitting to be uttered by the *malachim* who, lacking any physical substance, are wholly spiritual. Among humans, this praise was fitting to be said only by Yaakov Avinu, who is termed holy, as it says, "the holy One of Yaakov" (*Yeshayah* 29:23). Similarly, due to the sanctity of the Beis Hamikdash, which permeated its entirety and transformed all who were inside into spiritual beings, *Baruch Shem* was a fitting response (*Berachos* 63a).

Thus, the Midrash in *Va'eschanan* likens *Baruch Shem* to an object stolen from the royal palace not to imply that it is henceforth missing from Heaven but in the sense that bringing it down to this world moves it, so to speak, beyond its rightful, wholly spiritual setting into the physical world to which it is ostensibly irrelevant.

☛ Moshe Did Not Say *Baruch Shem* Because He Addressed the Entire Jewish Nation

CONTINUING HIS EXPLANATION, the Maharal writes that when he conveyed the *parshah* of *Shema Yisrael*, Moshe did not include *Baruch Shem* because he was addressing all of Klal Yisrael and instructing them how to conduct themselves. Obviously, when speaking to the entire nation, one cannot assume that everyone is on a high level of holiness, for there are also coarse, materialistic individuals who cannot attain sublime spirituality. “Every member of Yisrael can say *Shema Yisrael*, but not everyone is able to say *Baruch Shem*,” the Maharal points out.

☛ Indecision over Saying *Baruch Shem*

THE MAHARAL PROCEEDS to explain Chazal’s uncertainty over whether *Baruch Shem* should be said. Every person consists of an elevated and holy component as well as a coarse, physical component. This dichotomy between these two systems that are at work within man is the source of Chazal’s doubt over whether *Baruch Shem* should be said — as did Yaakov, a sublimely holy individual who embodied the ultimate in holiness achievable by man — or not — as Moshe, whose audience included coarse and simple individuals, instructed.

This, he says is the reason for the reservation expressed by the Gemara: “If they say *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso*, it is a disgrace, for unholy man is unworthy of [uttering] this [praise], and it is appropriate only for a completely holy being to say *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso*.”

☛ Soft Speech Gives Expression to Man’s Spiritual Component

CHAZAL RESOLVED THEIR quandary by having *Baruch Shem* said softly. The Maharal explains, “They therefore instituted that it should be said quietly, for on the part of the holy, detached soul that resides

within man, *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso* ought to be said, because the soul renders man akin to a *malach*. It is only [the soul being bound to] the body that hinders this, though Yaakov, who was holy, was certainly able to say it. And in fact, if a person wouldn't say it at all, the soul would feel pain and deprivation, for as far as the soul is concerned, it should be said. They therefore enacted that it should be said privately, because inasmuch as man possesses a detached soul that dwells in concealment and is holy and detached from everything material, he is able to say *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso*. They therefore instituted that it should be said privately, in the same way that the soul, which is holy, dwells in private."

In other words, speech is an expression of thought which takes place in the mind, the seat of man's holy soul. There are two types of speech, however: loud speech and soft speech. Loud speech conveys a person's thoughts to his external environment by harnessing his physical faculties in order to communicate with other people and with the world around him. Loud speech transforms thought, which is spiritual, into a physical medium of communication.

The *pasuk* tells us that when Channah prayed, "Only her lips moved, and her voice could not be heard" (*Shmuel I*, 1:13). Chazal learn from here (*Berachos* 31a) that "When praying, a person's voice should not be audible." Commenting on this in *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha'avodah*, Chap. 2), the Maharal writes, "For when a person makes his voice heard, it is audible and revealed, and anything that is revealed is not attached to the highest level, for that which is sublime is concealed."

Soft speech is an inner conversation that a person has with his own soul. Lacking the external and physical aspect of loud speech, it preserves the purity of his thought and gives expression to his soul's holiness. With soft speech that expresses the soul's holiness, a person's "Yaakov" finds expression, and it is appropriate that he say *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso*.

This helps answer our earlier questions on the Midrash in *Va'eschanan* quoted by the *Tur*. Saying *Baruch Shem* softly is actually

not a way of concealing the fact that we are saying it from the *malachim*. Rather, it is a way in which we too can say *Baruch Shem* in holiness like the *malachim* do.

☛ On Yom Kippur, Man Has No Material Aspect

FOLLOWING THIS APPROACH, the Maharal explains why *Baruch Shem* can be said loudly on Yom Kippur. This is “a holy day, and Yisrael are all holy, for they are not involved in any physical pursuits — eating, drinking, washing, etc. So even an individual can certainly say *Baruch Shem kevod malchuso*, for [utterance of] this praise is relevant only for a holy entity, as we have said.”

A physical entity cannot contain sublime, spiritual content, and therefore, anything lacking holiness cannot bless *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Name by saying *Baruch Shem*. However, there is a sublime, holy component to each and every person as well as a coarse, physical component. It was therefore instituted that *Baruch Shem* should not be said aloud, because loud speech, which serves as a means of communicating thought to the surrounding material world, gives expression to man's physical aspect. By contrast, speaking softly enables a person to communicate with himself and give expression to his soul's holiness. On Yom Kippur, however, when everyone is completely holy and sheds their material aspect, *Baruch Shem* can be said out loud.

U'zos Haberachah

“A Fire-Law for Them”

☛ Black Fire upon White Fire

MOSHE BLESSED YISRAEL prior to his death, prefacing his blessings with praise for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who gave His nation the Torah: “Hashem came from Sinai and shone forth to them from Se’ir; He appeared to them from Mount Paran and came with some of the tens of thousands of holy [*malachim*]; from His right hand He gave them a fire-law” (*Devarim* 33:2).

Rashi (ibid.) explains the term *ish das* (fire-law): “For [while it resided in Heaven] with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the Torah was written in black fire upon white fire.” The source for this explanation is the *Yerushalmi* in *maseches Shekalim* (6:1). What does this mean?

In order to appreciate the message it conveys, we need to understand the following points:

1. How is Torah comparable to fire?
2. What do “white fire” and “black fire,” two opposing shades, represent? Does the Torah contain any opposing or contradictory teachings?
3. Chazal’s parable does not speak of a combination of white and black fire, jigsaw-puzzle style, but of “black fire *upon* white fire,” with white fire serving as the substrate for letters of black fire. What is the significance of this arrangement?

☞ Fire Denotes Abstract Reality

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (Chap. 20), the Maharal explains that Torah's comparison to fire relates to fire's nature as an abstract, ethereal entity that man is capable of apprehending with his physical senses. From the array of our physical experiences, "fire" is thus the concept that comes closest to expressing how we as physical beings apprehend spiritual entities.

In *138 Gateways to Wisdom*, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto offers a similar explanation for why the term *oros* (lights) is used to denote spiritual attainments such as comprehension, an elevated state of consciousness, spiritual elevation, and even the Kabbalistic concept of the *Sefiros*, the Divine Emanations that signify progressively diminishing levels of open Divine revelation starting from the Heavens until reaching this world. The Ramchal notes that indeed, there is no word that is able to denote the essential nature of the Divine, "for no name or word can be applied to the Divinity." Since, though, without employing words nothing can be explained, some name must be used, so Chazal chose the word that is least distant from that which it comes to describe. "Of all physical phenomena, light is the most ethereal (i.e., abstract), and therefore, it is less distant than others as a way of denoting the *Sefiros*. The *Sefiros* are not illuminations in the manner of physical light; they are called illuminations [merely] in order to give them some name."

☞ Torah's Purpose Is to Perfect the World under Heaven's Rule

ACCORDINGLY, THE MAHARAL explains that Torah is referred to as *eish das* "because fire lacks physical substance, and [the term 'fire'] is therefore used to denote any non-physical entity. In other words, the mitzvos of the Torah are [essentially] non-physical in nature." Torah is the Divine directive that constitutes the foundation of the existence of a spiritually perfect and worthy world; therefore, it is likened to fire.

The Torah stands in contrast to any and all human legal systems whose function is to impose the law and order that are essential if human society is to endure without “people swallowing one another alive” (*Avos* 3:2). The Torah is not merely an instrument for the imposition of order, but rather a system that imposes Divine justice and benefits man by raising him to sublime spiritual heights.

☛ The Torah Is Truth as Well as Kindness

IN *GUR ARYEH* (*Devarim* *ibid.*), the Maharal dwells on the apparently contradictory natures of white and black fire, noting that the explanation he is about to give is “a wondrous secret” that he is revealing. According to the Maharal, the terms “white” and “black” fire are evidence of the two contradictory descriptions of Torah that define its essence.

Torah is referred to as *chesed*, kindness, as it is written (*Mishlei* 31:26), “Torah of kindness is upon her lips.” It is also written, “Its ways are the ways of pleasantness” (*ibid.* 3:17).

On the other hand, Torah is also referred to as *emes*, truth, as it is written, “The Torah of truth was on his lips” (*Malachi* 2:6).

Kindness and truth are apparently contradictory, for kindness by definition implies giving something that the recipient does not deserve, whereas truth is restricted to that which is obligatory by law.

For example, repaying a loan is an act dictated by truth, not kindness. Rashi, too, explains *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s traits of being “*v’rav chesed ve’emes*, abundant in kindness and truth” (*Shemos* 34:6) in this way. He writes, “*Chesed* — for those who need kindness, who don’t have so many merits; *Ve’emes* — [He is truthful, i.e., faithful about] paying good reward to those who fulfill His will.” Thus, while truth denotes reward that is rightfully deserved, kindness refers to a gift whose bestowal goes beyond the demands of justice.

What is Torah’s essence: is it a Torah of limitless kindness or a Torah of strict justice?

☞ Torah's Purpose — Fostering Kindness and Beneficence

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (ibid.), the Maharal gives the following explanation of Torah's description as a Torah of kindness:

“Understand properly that Torah is called ‘a Torah of kindness,’ as it says, ‘Torah of kindness is upon her lips.’ Even though you will find death penalties and *kareis* penalties in the Torah, its purpose remains the establishment of good, that there should be no evil whatsoever. This is alluded to by the true Sages in *maseches Sotah* (14a): ‘Torah begins with kindness and concludes with kindness.’ It begins with kindness — ‘And...G-d made clothes of skin for man and his wife and thus He dressed them’ (*Bereishbis* 3:21), and it concludes with kindness, as it says, ‘He buried him in the valley’ (*Devarim* 34:6). Here, Chazal clarify a fundamental principle, namely, that Torah's entire purpose is to establish good in the world. It therefore begins with an act of kindness, of doing good for people, and Torah's purpose is absolute good.”

In other words, the purpose of the judgment that the Torah dispenses is not to wreak vengeance on evil, but to make kindness and beneficence part of the world, in keeping with the well-known statement made by the author of *Sefer Hamichtam*, “Instead of complaining about evil, the truly righteous increase justice; instead of complaining about ignorance, they increase wisdom; instead of complaining about denial, they increase faith” (*Arpelei Tohar*, p. 39).

The goal of the Torah's punishments is not to strike at the person who sinned, but to wipe out the existence of sin and evil, as Beruriah, wife of the *Tanna* Rabbi Meir, pointed out (*Berachos* 10a) — “It is written ‘May sins cease from the world’ (*Tehillim* 104:35); it doesn't say that sinners should cease but that sins should cease.” Judgment is not the goal in and of itself; it serves the higher goal of establishing and furthering good.

☛ Shades of Fire

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that these two shades of fire signify Torah's dual characterization as "kindness" and "truth."

White fire signifies Divine good and kindness, for "Whiteness indicates purity and good. This (i.e., the background of white fire) is because the Torah's entire purpose is to sustain Divine good. This is the foundation upon which everything is built — to sustain Divine good."

Black fire, by contrast, indicates truth. This is the shade that conveys the truth, the inevitable reality, recorded and carved out in the clearest possible manner. The more reality is compelled and the more absolute it is, the more apparent and unequivocal its outward expression.

☛ A Torah of Truth Is a Compelled Reality

IN *GUR ARYEH*, the Maharal explains further that although Torah's purpose is to benefit everything in existence, to elevate it and to implement the dominance of Divine good, at the same time, it also contains a dimension of compelled reality, for, as the Zohar states, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* "looked into the Torah and created the world."

Thus, for example, although the Torah's command to honor parents is essentially — and practically — a matter of performing unlimited good and kindness, it also reflects a manner of conduct that is compelled by truth. The reality that this mitzvah creates is not merely one that urges benevolence; it is also a reality that mandates that which is correct and proper. Therefore, writes the Maharal, "When you understand the mitzvah, you will find that it is true and correct, like honoring parents and observing Shabbos. [Granted,] it is good and pleasant, but when you understand and reflect on the matter, you will find that it is [also a] fitting and compelling [thing] to do. The mitzvah is thus principally [a matter of] good and kindness, as indicated by the white fire — for white indicates good and purity, like light which is good — whereas its inner essence is black fire, for

black indicates clear, explicit writing. So are the Torah's words clear and explicit."

☞ Abundant in Kindness and in Truth

THE TORAH'S SUBSTRATE is white fire upon which are imposed markings of black fire, for kindness is the ultimate goal for which we are striving. However, the way to achieve this goal is through the practice of true and just laws inscribed unambiguously in black lettering that convey a clear reality. Kindness nonetheless abides as its underlying foundation. The Torah begins and concludes with kindness, for this is its goal and the reality that it fosters. Justice serves this end, furthering the opportunities for practicing kindness, while the ultimate goal of truth that reality compels is to benefit and improve that reality.

While the purpose of earthly systems of law is to impose the law and order that are necessary for sustaining human society, the Torah's purpose is to impose Divine justice that improves man and elevates him to sublime spiritual heights. The Torah is the Divine mandate underlying the world's existence as a worthy and perfected place and driving its ongoing progress toward that goal. The mitzvos of the Torah create both a framework for beneficence (furthering kindness) as well as for correct and appropriate conduct (truth and justice). Torah is therefore compared to fire, an abstract entity that can be apprehended with the physical senses. This fire has two hues: white fire that conveys Divine kindness and beneficence, and black fire that conveys truth, inescapable reality, while the foundation of it all remains kindness.

Maharal
on the
Mo'adim

Rosh Hashanah

The Nature of the Judgment That Takes Place on Rosh Hashanah

☞ Day of Mystery

WHEN LISTING ALL the various festivals, this is how the Torah describes Rosh Hashanah:

“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Yisrael saying: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there shall be a cessation of work for you, a remembrance [through] wailing; it shall be designated for holiness’” (*Vayikra* 23:23–24).

There is no mention of Rosh Hashanah’s status as the beginning of a new year and the Day of Judgment nor of the requirement that the “wailing” sound be produced by blowing the shofar rather than the trumpets that were blown year round in the Beis Hamikdash.

This terse account indeed fits Rosh Hashanah’s description by the *pasuk* in *Tehillim*: “...on *the hidden day*, for our festival.” For the little about Rosh Hashanah that is revealed, much more is concealed.

Rabbenu Bachye (*Vayikra* *ibid.*) notes that “Scripture explains to us neither how the wailing sound is to be produced — whether by a shofar or by trumpets — nor the reason we are commanded to make this sound. Neither does it explain that this day is the Day of Judgment. Scripture makes do with these two simple words, “a remembrance [through] wailing,” and relies on the oral transmission [to supply the details], for Scripture leaves it to the Sages [to explain].”

Why, wonders Rabbenu Bachye, does the Torah use just two words — code words, as it were — which Chazal have to interpret? How does Rosh Hashanah differ from all the other festivals about whose laws and purpose the Torah writes in detail?

☛ Deeper Content, Greater Brevity

RABBENU BACHYE PROVIDES a surprising answer, explaining that “The more concealed and private a topic is, the more obscure it is, and the shorter the language and the fewer the words used in speaking about it.” Words cannot properly convey especially profound content, so the Torah suffices with several words in “code,” which Chazal explain more fully.

As an example, Rabbenu Bachye cites the mitzvah of *tefillin*, about which the Torah writes very little and very cryptically, such that without the Oral Torah, we wouldn’t know how to fulfill this mitzvah at all. How many and which sections of the Torah the *tefillin* must contain, in what order, where on the body we are to don them, etc. are all omitted from the Torah.

Like *tefillin*, says Rabbenu Bachye, Rosh Hashanah “contains hidden and concealed content that it is preferable that Scripture leaves obscure and closed, like other obscure topics in the Torah whose inaccessibility is in proportion to their great concealment.”

But what is so obscure about Rosh Hashanah and its role as the Day of Judgment that cannot be spelled out in words?

☛ How Can a New Year begin in the Seventh Month?

THE TORAH SPECIFIES that the date of Rosh Hashanah is “In the seventh month, on the first of the month.” Tishrei is the seventh month because the months are counted from Nisan, which the Torah declares is “the foremost of the months; it is to be for you the first of the months of the year” (*Shemos* 12:2).

How can the first of Tishrei mark the beginning of a new year if it falls in the middle of the year?

☛ What Is the Focus of the Judgment on Rosh Hashanah?

WE LEARN IN the second Mishnah in the first chapter of *Rosh Hashanah*:

“The world undergoes judgment at four times: on Pesach in regard to the grain crops; on Shavuot in regard to the fruit crops; on Rosh Hashanah, all the world’s inhabitants pass before Him like *bnei maron*, as it says, ‘He who made the heart of them all together, He who understands all their deeds’ (*Tehillim* 33:15); and on Sukkot, they are judged on rainfall.”

It’s clear why grain crops are judged on Pesach, for that is when they begin to ripen. It’s also clear why fruit crops are judged on Shavuot, for that is the time they start ripening. Sukkot, too, is the time of judgment for rainfall, for it is the beginning of the rainy season. However, what happened to mankind on Rosh Hashanah that makes it suitable as a Day of Judgment for all the world’s inhabitants?

The simple answer to this question is that man was created on Rosh Hashanah, for the world was created on the twenty-fifth of Elul, and on the sixth day of creation, i.e., on the first of Tishrei, man was created. Rosh Hashanah thus marks the “birthday” of the creation of mankind, and as each year draws to a close, Hashem considers whether each individual should live another year.

Moreover, we find in the Midrash (*Pesikta* 23) that Rabbi Eliezer states that in addition being created on the first of Tishrei, Adam Harishon was also placed in Gan Eden, sinned by eating from the *etz hada’as*, repented, and was forgiven for sinning. This was therefore the day of man’s creation, judgment, repentance, and forgiveness.

“*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told him, ‘You will be an indication for your descendants; just as you stood in judgment before Me on this day and were pardoned, your descendants will stand in judgment before Me on this day and will be acquitted.’”

Rosh Hashanah is designated as the Day of Judgment because it is the day that man was created and the day he stood in judgment and was pardoned.

☛ Was Adam Harishon Created on Rosh Hashanah?

IN *MASECHES ROSH HASHANAH* (10b), we find a dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua over whether or not man was created on Rosh Hashanah: “Rabbi Eliezer said, ‘The world was created in Tishrei.’ Rabbi Yehoshua said, ‘The world was created in Nisan.’” The Gemara (ibid. 27a) explains that our prayer (in the *Amidah* for *Musaf* on Rosh Hashanah), “This day marks the beginning of Your deeds, commemorating the first day,” follows Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion that the world’s creation took place in Tishrei.

In light of the above, we would expect to find that in Rabbi Yehoshua’s view, the Day of Judgment for mankind is in Nisan, for that is when man was created. Yet no such disagreement is recorded; even Rabbi Yehoshua agrees that the Day of Judgment is in Tishrei, begging the question as to why this should be, since in his view, man was created in Nisan, and no significant event marks the first of Tishrei that makes it particularly suited for being the Day of Judgment.

☛ The Ran’s Approach: Judgment Is Fixed for a Season of Forgiveness and Atonement

THE RAN (RABBEINU NISSIM on the Rif, *Rosh Hashanah* 3a in the Rif’s pages) raises this question. He explains that indeed, according to Rabbi Yehoshua, nothing warranting judgment took place on Rosh Hashanah. In fact, says the Ran, these are days when Heaven’s kindness is particularly aroused. He explains how this came about. On Rosh Chodesh Elul, following the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven and was there for forty days, which concluded on Yom Kippur when Hashem told him, “I have forgiven [Bnei Yisrael] as you said.” The process of finding forgiveness and favor

in Heaven's eyes began on the first of Elul, gradually intensifying until reaching its zenith with the arrival of the month of Tishrei. With these final ten days, the period of the Jewish nation's forgiveness — the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* — begins, climaxing on Yom Kippur.

“Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur,” writes the Ran, “Hashem began to intimate His reconciliation to Moshe, and on Yom Kippur the reconciliation was complete. Therefore, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wants to judge His creations at a time that was designated for forgiveness and atonement.”

In other words, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* chose Rosh Hashanah for judging His people in order to start the judgment process at a time when Divine kindness is predominant, thus facilitating their acquittal.

According to the Ran's explanation, the disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua is very stark. In Rabbi Eliezer's opinion, man's creation on the first of Tishrei is the reason for his judgment on that day, whereas according to Rabbi Yehoshua, nothing ever took place to render this a season of accounting, and its designation for judgment is due to the outpouring of Divine kindness and mercy that took place then.

☞ Tosafos's Opinion That on Rosh Hashanah, Judgment Alone Is Dominant

TOSAFOS IN *ROSH HASHANAH* (27a, s.v. *keman matzlinan*) pose a contradiction between two of our prayers, both composed by Rabbi Eliezer Hakalir. On one hand, the wording of our prayer for rain on Shemini Atzeres accords with Rabbi Eliezer's opinion that the world was created in Tishrei, while that of our prayer for dew on Pesach follows Rabbi Yehoshua's opinion that creation took place in Nisan.

Rabbeinu Tam's response to this contradiction is, “Both are the words of the living G-d.” Tosafos resolve the apparent paradox of how Creation could have taken place at two different times by explaining that in Tishrei, “the idea of the world's creation first arose, whereas it was only actually created in Nisan.” On Rosh Hashanah, the first

of Tishrei, we therefore say, “Today the world was conceived,” for the process was akin to pregnancy, with conception taking place on Rosh Hashanah, culminating in Creation’s emergence — its “birth” — in Nisan. If so, however, why was Rosh Hashanah — the day *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* first wanted to create the world — chosen as the Day of Judgment, rather than the day He actually created the world?

In *Tziyun L'nefesh Chayah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a), the author of *Noda B'yehudah* notes Rashi’s comments on *Bereishis* 1:1, explaining why, when telling us that G-d created the world, the Torah refers to G-d by His Name that denotes strict justice rather than His Name that denotes mercy. Rashi writes, “At first, it occurred to Him to create [the world] according to the dictates of the attribute of [strict] justice. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* saw that the world could not endure in this manner, [so] He put the attribute of mercy first, partnering it with the attribute of justice.”

In Tishrei, therefore, when “the idea of Creation arose,” the attribute of justice prevailed, and only later, when Creation actually took place, did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* make the attribute of mercy part of Creation.

Rosh Hashanah was thus designated for judgment because the attribute of justice was then solely dominant.

We thus find two distinct approaches to the question of why according to Rabbi Yehoshua’s view, Rosh Hashanah should be in Tishrei, rather than in Nisan when creation actually took place:

1. According to the Ran, the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is a time of Divine kindness and forgiveness.
2. According to Tosafos, Divine judgment was dominant during this period.

☞ Questions on Both Approaches

BOTH OF THESE approaches leave us with major questions.

According to the Ran, the relevance of the entire *Zichronos* (Remembrances) blessing, one of the three main sections of the *Amidah*

for Musaf on Rosh Hashanah, must be explained. What are we commemorating on the first of Tishrei according to Rabbi Yehoshua if nothing happened then?

According to Tosafos's approach that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua agree that the idea of Creation first arose in Tishrei, though the world was not actually created until Nisan, how are we to understand the Gemara's statement that the prayer (part of the *Zichronos* blessing), "This is the day of Your first creations, in commemoration of the first day" corresponds to Rabbi Eliezer's approach that Creation took place in Tishrei? After all, according to Tosafos, there is no argument, for they agree on the "timetable" of Creation?

☛ Man's Two-Tiered Existence:

The Heart Is the Source of His Physical Vitality,
While the Mind Is the Seat of His Soul

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 37), the Maharal provides a key to unraveling these problems. He writes, "Two of man's organs rule over all the others: the heart and the mind."

The heart is positioned "at man's center," and all his physical vitality flows and is drawn from it. On the other hand, "The spiritual soul is in the brain; the soul is more Divine (i.e., closer to G-d) than the heart."

In other words, man is comprised of two components, body and soul, the sources of whose vitality are the heart and the mind.

☛ Tishrei Corresponds to the Head and Nisan to the Heart

EXTENDING THIS IDEA to the months of the year, the Maharal (*Chiddushei Aggados* to *Rosh Hashanah* 10b) notes the great profundity of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua's argument over whether Creation took place in Nisan or Tishrei, for these are the two main months of the year. Tishrei is akin to the head, the seat of the

intellect which, operating independently of the body's urges, is totally holy. Its holiness is further indicated by its position as seventh month of the year, for as we find in the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yisro 276*), "All seventh [unit]s are holy," e.g., Shabbos, the seventh day of the week, and the *Shemittah* year, the seventh year in the *shemittah* cycle. Tishrei, the seventh month, was therefore designated for holiness. Nisan, on the other hand, corresponds to the heart, the source of physical vitality; it coincides with the season of the world's reawakening to life and growth following the winter slumber.

☛ The Physical World Was Created in Nisan, and the Spiritual World in Tishrei

IN LINE WITH Tosafos's approach that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua agree, the Maharal explains that there is no practical difference between them. Rather, they are speaking of two different aspects of the same reality. The physical world was created in Nisan, the season of its repeated renewal, from which it draws its vitality. In Rabbi Yehoshua's opinion, Nisan deserves recognition as the world's beginning, for that is when it received its physical vitality. However, the spiritual world was created in Tishrei, and therefore, Rabbi Eliezer considers it the world's beginning, for that is when it is "close to Hashem relative to its holiness and [sublime] standing." According to Rabbi Eliezer, explains the Maharal, "Rosh Hashanah is akin to the head, the seat of the soul, in every respect; Tishrei, too, is the year's head and is referred to as the head, whereas the heart resembles the month of Nisan, which marks the beginning of physical life."

☛ Which Wisdom Is More Significant — the Mind's or the Heart's?

THE MAHARAL NOTES further, "I later found that these selfsame Sages, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, are cited by the Midrash as disagreeing over the location of the seat of wisdom." The Maharal is

referring to *Midrash Mishlei* (1), where we find Rabbi Eliezer maintaining that wisdom is located in the head, while according to Rabbi Yehoshua, it is located in the heart: “Why was wisdom located in the heart? Because all the [body’s] organs are dependent upon the heart.” The Midrash further notes that this question was subject to a difference of opinion between David Hamelech and his son Shlomo. In David’s opinion, the head, the uppermost and foremost part of the body, is the seat of wisdom, and therefore, he opened the book of *Tehillim* with the letter *alef* (*Ashrei ha’ish...* [*Tehillim* 1:1]), whereas in Shlomo’s opinion, wisdom is in the heart, at man’s center, and he therefore opened the book of *Mishlei* with the letter *mem* (*Mishlei Shlomo* [*Mishlei* 1:1]), the middle letter of the *alef-beis*. The Maharal points out that this is consistent with Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua’s difference of opinion in regard to Rosh Hashanah; the former attaches greater significance to the mind and to the soul that resides there, while the latter assigns greater significance to the heart.

☛ On Rosh Hashanah, the Head Is Judged

WE ARE NOW in a position to answer our earlier questions on the Ran and on Tosafos’s approaches. According to the Maharal’s explanation, the relevance of the blessing of *Zichronos* and commemorating “the first day” is clear, for Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of man’s spiritual component. In order to resolve the question of when and on what man is being judged, we must decide which of the two opinions, Rabbi Eliezer or Rabbi Yehoshua’s, to follow: is it man’s mind, with its spirituality and holiness that are renewed in Tishrei, upon which man is judged, or is it upon his physical vitality, which is renewed in Nisan? The crux of the question is, what is man’s essence, upon which his judgment focuses?

Thus, according to the Maharal, we can say that the first of Tishrei was chosen for man’s judgment because the judgment focuses on the soul that resides in man’s head, which all agree was created in Tishrei. While man’s physical aspect is certainly affected by this

judgment, this is a consequence of the primary judgment, which focuses on his spiritual aspect. Man's judgment focuses upon his mind rather than his heart. The Mishnah that says, "On Rosh Hashanah, all the world's inhabitants pass before Him like *bnei maron*" refers to man's soul, in which respect he is superior to other living things.

Rosh Hashanah is indeed a cryptic festival, for man's physical vitality and outward signs of life that are most apparent to us do not reflect his true self, nor do they undergo a separate judgment. Man's essence, which is judged on Rosh Hashanah — the head of the new year — is his spirituality and his soul, which reside within his head!

The Maharal thus elucidates Rosh Hashanah's essence as the Day of Judgment.

The physical world was created in Nisan, the season of the renewal of its vitality. Rabbi Yehoshua therefore holds that Nisan deserves to be the year's head. However, the spiritual world was created in Tishrei, and therefore, Rabbi Eliezer holds that this is when the world "is close[est] to Hashem in regard to its holiness and virtue." Their disagreement centers upon man's essence upon which he is judged. The conclusion that man is judged on the first of Tishrei shows that it is his soul that is judged, for this is his essence. Man's physical vitality is merely a consequence of his spirituality and his soul, which is the focus of his judgment, for "That which is concealed (i.e., man's soul) [is judged] on the day of our festival, for it is a statute for Yisrael, a law for the G-d of Yaakov" (*Tehillim* 81:4).

Yom Kippur

The Essence of *Teshuvah* and the Imperative to Repent Immediately

☛ How Can Repentance Change the Past?

LET US SAY a person decides to sin. The terrible deed is then done. What has happened has happened, and bitter consequences will entail. Then, our sinner regrets his actions. How can he repent? The past cannot be undone — there is no way to alter history. Perhaps his regret justifies a lighter penalty, for he is plagued by guilt, and his present suffering can be considered part of his punishment. But how can repentance uproot his misdeed and render it as good as undone, for this is indeed what repentance achieves, as stated by the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:4): “A person who repents should not imagine that he remains far from the levels of the righteous because of his past sins — this is incorrect. He is loved and cherished by the Creator *as though he had never sinned.*”

The Rambam even adds (*ibid. halachah* 7), “Repentance brings the distant closer. Yesterday, he was hated by G-d, despised, distanced, and abominated; today, he is beloved and precious, close and a loved one.” How are we to understand the cancellation of his deed, as though it had never taken place? What are the mechanics of repentance?

Rav Yosef Albo (*Sefer Ha'ikkarim*, 4:27) expresses this conundrum succinctly: “Once the sin has actually been done, how do

repentance, regret, and confession help? If a murderer repents both verbally and in his heart, will this bring the victim back to life? This would be like a person who demolished a house, rebuilding it by [mere] speech. How can such repentance be effective in cleansing and clearing away a sin that was already committed?”

☛ Delaying Repentance Is Worse than the Original Sin

REPENTANCE SHOULD NOT be viewed as an extraordinary, but ultimately optional, privilege. It *is* an extraordinary privilege, but it is more than that — it is an obligation.

It is obligatory to repent immediately, and even more so when the gates of repentance are open, during the period when we are told to, “call Him when He is close” (*Yeshayah* 58:6). Rabbeinu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah, shaar I, 2*) writes, “The punishment of a sinner who delays repenting his sin grows heavier with each passing day, because he knows that he is subject to Divine wrath and that he has a refuge to which to flee — the refuge being repentance — yet he maintains his defiance and remains at fault. He could escape from the upheaval, yet he is unafraid of the anger and wrath, so his villainy is great. Chazal said, “This is comparable to a band of robbers who were thrown into jail by the king and who dug a tunnel and escaped. One remained behind. [When] the jailer came and saw the tunnel and that this fellow was still there, he beat him with his stick and told him, “You wretch! The tunnel is right in front of you; how could you not hurry to escape?!” (*Koheles Rabbah* 7:32). In the future, too, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will tell the evildoers, “[How is it possible that] you had the opportunity to repent, yet you failed to do so?!””

But this must be clarified. Why did the jailer beat the prisoner who stayed behind? What did he do wrong by not escaping and accepting his due? When a criminal is caught, he is expected to undergo his punishment. Any attempt to interfere with the judicial process or to escape from jail counts as a further crime. How is a

sinner who is expected to repent and make amends for his misdeed comparable to a criminal's failure to escape punishment?

☛ Some Sins are Forgivable but Not All

THE GEMARA (*YOMA* 22B) tells us, "Shaul [sinned] once and it cost him [the throne], whereas David [sinned] twice, yet it did not cost him [the throne]."

Shaul sinned only once, when he failed to kill Agag, king of Amalek, but for this one and only sin, he lost the throne. David, on the other hand, sinned twice, once by sending Uriyah (husband of Bas-sheva) to his death on the front line and again when he counted the Jewish People. Yet, "David, king of Yisrael, lives and endures." The throne remained with him and his descendents for eternity. What was the difference between David and Shaul? Was there some kind of favoritism?

☛ Immediate Acknowledgment of the Sin Ensures Forgiveness

THIS QUESTION IS DISCUSSED BY THE SEFARNO IN HIS COMMENTARY TO *Bamidbar* 12:9, where the Torah tells us that Miriam and Aharon spoke about Moshe's separation from Tzipporah, for which Hashem rebuked them, "Listen now to My words. If there is a prophet among you, I, Hashem, reveal Myself to him [only] in a vision; in a dream I speak to him. My servant Moshe, [however,] is not like this. Among all My [people, the] House [of Israel], he is the most dedicated. I speak to him face to face, lucidly and not in riddles, and he perceives Hashem's image. So why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, Moshe?" Following this rebuke, "Hashem became angry with them and left." Hashem's anger did not flare against them before His rebuke, but rather while rebuking them. What happened then to engender this anger?

The Seforno explains that as they listened to Hashem's rebuke, Aharon and Miriam were not immediately moved to repent: "They

were not immediately submissive, as David was when he told Nassan, 'I have sinned' (*Shmuel II*, 12:13)."

Evidently, then, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* pardoned David for his sins because he acknowledged his wrongdoing without delay and fully repented.

Herein lies the difference between David and Shaul. Even after Shmuel pointed out to him where he was at fault, Shaul tried to explain himself and justify his actions, failing to acknowledge his sin immediately. The Seforno points this out in his comments to *Bereishis* 4:13 as well, where he notes that Kayin repented only after having been pressed to do so: "Like Shaul in the matter of Amalek, who only told Shmuel, 'I have sinned' after Shmuel pressed him and after he pointed out to him that he should repent for his sin. Shaul was therefore punished, being told 'He has despised you as king.'"

But what is the urgency for regret and repentance? What difference does it make how long it takes a person to repent — ultimately, even Kayin, Shaul, Aharon, and Miriam acknowledged their sin?

In order to understand this, we must examine the mechanism of repentance.

☛ Sin Arises on Man's Physical Plane

MAN IS COMPRISED of two components: a physical and an intellectual component, which are in constant conflict for control over him.

In *Derech Hashem* (1:3), Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto explains that these opponents are the intellectual, pure soul and the coarse, earthly body, each of which pulls [him] in its direction: the body towards physicality and the soul towards intellectuality. These two opposing forces are at war, such that "If the soul is victorious, it is elevated, *and it elevates the body with it*, while if a person allows his physicality to get the better of him, he degrades his body, *and his soul is degraded with it*."

When a person sins, it means that his physical component has wrested control over him and dragged down his soul. The Gemara (*Sotah* 3a) tells us, "Nobody sins unless a spirit of folly has entered

him.” The Maharal (*Chiddushei Aggados* *ibid.*) explains: “This means that sin is unconnected to the intellect. Chazal therefore say, ‘Nobody sins unless a spirit of folly has entered him’ and he then sins. Shlomo, too, refers to the evildoer as ‘a fool’ throughout the book of *Koheles*.”

☛ Regret Represents Arousal from Slumber

THE FIRST STAGE of repentance is regretting the past. When desire abates, the intellect reawakens and resumes its dominance over man; he reconsiders his actions and regrets them, telling himself, “It was foolish and mindless.”

A person who repents is like a waking slumberer dissociating himself from his actions while he slept. As the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (3:4) regarding the shofar arousing people to repentance: “Awaken sleepers from your sleep and slumberers from your slumber; examine your deeds and repent; remember your Creator, those who forget the truth amid temporal vanities.”

☛ Repentance Is Possible Because It Is Not Man Who Sinned

THIS INSIGHT ENABLES us to understand the process of repentance. The sin has indeed been done, and that cannot be changed, but it was not the person in his right mind who committed it. Rather, it is as though the act was done by an “imbecile.” In *Sefer Ha’ikkarim* (*ibid.*), Rav Yosef Albo explains, “For a person who utterly and completely regrets his actions and resolves that his earlier deed was a mistake, done without thought or comprehension — since [such a person] regrets [his misdeed], he doesn’t deserve punishment for such a transgression, in the same way that he doesn’t deserve disgrace for something he did by mistake and unknowingly. It is the same with a good deed, for which a person doesn’t deserve praise unless he did it willingly to begin with and wanted it done afterwards. In other words, in retrospect, he is happy it was done and he doesn’t regret

it, for if he regrets having done it, he loses his reward, and it is not considered righteousness on his part.”

In *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Hateshuva* 1), the Maharal writes in this vein that upon repenting, a person's intellect reasserts dominance over his physicality. His essence after repenting has changed from what it was when he sinned. With his return to lucidity, man's body can be likened to a horse and his mind and intellect to a rider. Once he regrets his misdeed, it can be said that it was the horse that sinned, not the rider.

In the Maharal's words, “If a person was wholly [comprised of] intellect, repentance would be of no avail, for the purpose [of repentance] is that he should say, ‘I have sinned’ and regret his deeds, and regret is [only] possible because not all his deeds originate with the intellect. Repentance would therefore not be possible at all if man was solely intellect. However, since man is not altogether intellect, regret and repentance are possible, and therefore, the Torah, which is [wholly] intellect, calls upon sinners to repent.”

While the misdeed cannot be undone, the person who committed it is no longer here. It was carried out by a fool who has now come to his senses. The erstwhile sinner has undergone the most dramatic type of change that a human being can undergo — from slumber to lucidity, from lack of awareness and unbridled sensuality to awareness and self-control.

☛ Justifying a Sin in Retrospect Flies in the Face of the Process of Repentance

IN KEEPING WITH the above, the Maharal explains that if a person justifies a past misdeed after his passion and haste have abated, the sin can no longer be attributed to a spirit of folly, for he refuses to disown it even once he is sober. As the Maharal puts it, “If he doesn't repent after knowing he sinned and that he ought to have repented, it shows that his sin stems from his intellect.”

In other words, a person who refuses to repent as soon as his sin

is pointed out to him and instead uses cold logic to try and justify it negates the entire process of repentance, which is contingent upon clarifying that the sin arose from his bodily component, which desires without any reckoning. He removes any possibility of arguing that the sinner and the person presently before us are two different individuals.

✎ Failure to Extricate Oneself Means Continuing as before with No Misgivings

A PERSON WHO continues to identify with his sin even after he has resumed thinking can't argue that he has changed, because he is now using his mind to sin. Now we understand the great severity with which an unrepentant person is regarded. His sin now taints his intellect and can no longer be said to be the work of a base, physical plane of his personality that is unrelated to him as a thinking individual. This is why it is critical to repent sincerely as soon as reason begins to reassert itself.

A prisoner who fails to escape when provided with the opportunity to do so shows to a great extent that he is comfortable with his situation. He has reconciled himself to the fact that he has sinned and is at peace with this. He has no misgivings, no desire to unfetter himself and escape. In his *Discourse for Rosh Hashanah*, the Ramban notes: "While repentance is a great favor to mankind, it can involve them in severe penalty, for when a person sins, he has transgressed his Creator's will momentarily, when he sinned. When he persists in his defiance and does not repent, he is angering Hashem constantly and [shows that he] is totally unconcerned with fulfilling his Creator's wishes."

It is thus readily understandable why David, who retracted immediately, was forgiven and did not lose the throne even though he sinned on two occasions, while Shaul suffered the consequences of his single sin, because when Shmuel pointed out to Shaul the severity of what he had done, he continued justifying it.

A constant battle between body and soul is underway within man. It is usually the body, which gains dominance in order to satisfy its physical urges, which is responsible for man sinning. Although a misdeed cannot be undone, once a person comes to his senses and his mind reasserts control, he is like someone seeking forgiveness for what he did while he was drunk. However, if he still identifies with his sin after returning to sobriety, he can no longer argue that it was a base level of his personality, unconnected with his thinking self, that committed the sin. This is why it is crucial that a person repent as soon as he returns to his senses.

Sukkos

The Essence of a Makeshift Dwelling

• What Is the Significance of Bnei Yisrael Having Dwelt in Sukkos?

IN *PARSHAS EMOR*, in the section dealing with the festivals, the Torah tells us, “You shall live in booths for a seven-day period; all natives among Yisrael shall live in booths. This is so that your succeeding generations will be aware that I settled the Children of Israel in booths when I took them out of the Land of Egypt; I am Hashem, your G-d” (*Vayikra* 23:42–3).

The miracle of Bnei Yisrael’s departure from Egypt involved many separate miraculous events, such as the death of all the Egyptian firstborn and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, etc. However, none of these individual events is marked by a special festival. The festival of Pesach commemorates all the separate events that took place within the framework of the tremendous miracle of Bnei Yisrael’s redemption. Only in relation to one such event, dwelling in booths — which seems to be the least significant one — is a special, distinct festival designated. Why? What is the significance of this particular detail in the overall miracle that requires singling it out and devoting a special festival to its commemoration?

Moreover, if this is indeed such an important detail of the Exodus from Egypt, why isn’t it mentioned by the Torah when it happened? Why do we only find out *post facto*, while the Torah is telling us about

the festival of Sukkos, that Hashem had Bnei Yisrael dwell in booths when He brought them out of Egypt?

☛ What Was Miraculous about the Booths in Which Bnei Yisrael Dwelt?

THE GEMARA (*SUKKOS* 11B) records a disagreement about the nature of the booths in which Bnei Yisrael dwelt when they left Egypt. In Rabbi Eliezer's opinion, these were the Clouds of Glory that surrounded Bnei Yisrael when they encamped and while they traveled from place to place. According to Rabbi Eliezer, since the Torah quotes Hashem as saying that He had them dwell in these booths, they were the work of Heaven and must have been the Clouds of Glory. In Rabbi Akiva's opinion, however, "They built themselves actual booths." Rashi explains that Bnei Yisrael made themselves actual booths to protect themselves "from the sun when they encamped."

Rabbi Akiva's opinion gives rise to several major questions:

1. If Bnei Yisrael made these booths by themselves, what was miraculous about them?
2. The *pasuk* that says, "I had Bnei Yisrael dwell in booths," implying that they were Heaven's handiwork, not Bnei Yisrael's, seems to prove Rabbi Eliezer correct. Why does Rabbi Akiva take issue with this?
3. The *pasuk* tells us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had Bnei Yisrael dwell in booths "when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." According to Rabbi Akiva, though, the booths were set up at each encampment and had no particular connection with leaving Egypt. Why are they considered commemorative of the Exodus from Egypt?
4. The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 625) asks why the Torah places the festival of Sukkos in Tishrei when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt in Nisan. He explains, "Although we left Egypt in the month of Nisan, He did not instruct us to make booths in that season because it is summer, and it is usual for people to make

booths to provide shade, and our doing so in order to fulfill the Creator's command would not be noticeable. He therefore instructed us to make [booths] in the seventh month, which is the rainy season, when people usually leave their booths to dwell indoors, whereas we leave the house to dwell in the *sukkah*. It is thus visible to everyone that this is the King's command that we must fulfill." According to Rabbi Akiva, however, the booths do not commemorate an event that took place in Nisan, at the time of our departure from Egypt. Rather, they were a feature of every encampment of Bnei Yisrael's, year round, throughout the forty years they spent in the desert. Does Rabbi Akiva's opinion obviate the *Tur*'s question?

☛ The Gentile Nations' Disdainful Kick

IN *MASECHES AVODAH ZARAH* (2a), the Gemara tells us that in the future, *Hakaodsh Baruch Hu* will bring a *sefer Torah* and hold it to Himself and say, "Whoever occupied themselves with Torah should come and receive their reward." The gentile nations will complain that they are being unfairly deprived of reward, for they were not given equal opportunity to serve their Creator — they didn't fulfill the Torah because it wasn't given to them! In response, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will tell them, "Whoever toils on *erev Shabbos* has food to eat on Shabbos, but if a person doesn't toil on *erev Shabbos*, how will he have food to eat on Shabbos? Nevertheless, I have an easy mitzvah called *sukkah* — go and fulfill it." The Gemara explains that *sukkah* is called an easy mitzvah because it doesn't involve financial outlay, as the materials for constructing a makeshift dwelling are freely available in the post-harvest fields.

The Gemara notes that upon hearing this, "Each of them immediately goes and makes a *sukkah* on his roof." What does *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* do in response? "He shines the burning sun upon them like at the height of summer, and each of them kicks his *sukkah* and leaves it."

The Gemara then asks that Yisrael too are entitled leave the *sukkah*

if they become uncomfortable while sitting there, for it is a halachah that “Someone who is distressed by being in the *sukkah* is exempt from dwelling there.” What, then, is so noteworthy about the gentiles leaving their *sukkos* during a heatwave? The Gemara explains that while a Jew is indeed exempt under such extreme conditions and will also leave the *sukkah*, it would never occur to him to give the *sukkah* a parting kick.

This account raises several questions:

1. *Sukkah* is termed “an easy mitzvah” because it is not costly to fulfill and anyone who is uncomfortable dwelling in *sukkah* is exempt. But why this emphasis on ease? If we are commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, why are we not commanded to make some more serious investment of our resources, or at the very least to sacrifice our ease and fulfill the mitzvah of *sukkah* even at the cost of some discomfort?
2. How can such an “easy” mitzvah serve as the means of distinguishing between Yisrael and the gentile nations? This would seem to be the least accurate example of the difference between them. If we are looking for a way to contrast observing mitzvos out of love for the Creator and desire to fulfill His will with doing so out of coercion, we ought to choose some mitzvah that the former will never abandon, even at great personal sacrifice. Why was the mitzvah of *sukkah* in particular chosen as the litmus test when even a Jew who experiences difficulty leaves the *sukkah* and does not fulfill the mitzvah?
3. Since the mitzvah of dwelling in the *sukkah* doesn't apply when it involves discomfort, what is so significant about the gentiles' kick that shows that they have no connection to the yoke of fulfilling mitzvos and were therefore not given the Torah?

☛ *Sukkah* Is a Test Case That Gauges a Person's Faith

IN HIS *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Avodah Zarah* *ibid.*), the Maharal explains that *Hakaodsh Baruch Hu* chose the mitzvah of *sukkah* as a test

case because of the nations' argument that they too deserved to receive the Torah, "which is intellectual and non-natural" (i.e., above the world's natural order). Torah elevates man to a spiritual plane where he is no longer subservient to the material world and his physical convenience. In his Commentary to *Avos* (1:5), Rabbeinu Yonah explains that "The Torah's thought processes cannot be established in the sight of a person who seeks [to indulge] his heart's desires, for these are two patterns of thinking that the heart cannot contain together."

A person's main and most important comfort zone is his own home. Being homeless compromises a person's self-confidence and status. In *Chiddushei Aggados* to *Sanhedrin* 37b, the Maharal explains that exile atones for a person's sins because beyond the discomfort and lack of amenities it entails, "It is considered to some degree like removal from this world, for the existence of every thing is tied to a particular place, as Chazal said in *maseches Avos* (4:3), 'There is nothing that does not have a place,' and it is this place that enables the item to exist."

The nations were therefore tested with the mitzvah of *sukkah*, which requires that a person leave his house — his natural environment — and move into a makeshift dwelling. A *sukkah*-dweller doesn't place his trust in the boughs of *sebach* above his head to protect him; he is exposed to all the vagaries of the changing weather and must place his reliance in the One Who resides in the heavens arching high above his *sukkah*.

In the *sifrei hakabbalah*, the *sukkah* is referred to as *tzila d'meheim-nusa*, the shade (i.e., protection) of the Dependable One (*Zohar* Vol. III, 103a), for leaving one's permanent abode in favor of a makeshift dwelling expresses one's belief that beyond the narrow, causal relationship between a natural occurrence and its consequence, there exists a Higher Being orchestrating everything that happens in the world.

Leaving one's home for the *sukkah* is thus a classic act of faith, of abandoning the dictates of logic and human intellect and turning to faith, of leaving one's physical comfort zone for the world of spirituality.

☛ The Nations' Kick

THE NATIONS WERE tested vis-à-vis their ability to discern between the world of Torah and the material world they inhabit. They left their homes for the *sukkah*, but at the first sign of difficulty, they returned home. They turned their backs not just on the *sukkah*, but on the spiritual world it represents. They didn't simply leave the *sukkah* on a swelteringly hot day; they kicked it as well. That kick showed that they weren't just physically leaving the *sukkah* but were rejecting the entire value system it represents. Their kick expressed the stark distance between them and their world of craving physical comfort and our world of mitzvos and spirituality.

☛ The *Sukkah* as a Symbol of the Exodus from Egypt

IN THIS VEIN, the Maharal explains the connection between our Exodus from Egypt and the mitzvah of *sukkah*. The *sukkah* is not a mere detail in a larger picture; it encapsulates the essence of the redemption: "When He took them out of Egypt, their removal defied nature and the way of the world. The *pasuk* therefore says, 'for I had Bnei Yisrael dwell in booths when I took them out of Egypt' — for it was inappropriate for them to dwell in houses, which are residences belonging to the natural order; instead, they dwelt in booths, which represent departure from dwellings bound by nature."

Bnei Yisrael's departure from Egypt represented their detachment from the materialism in which they had wallowed while in Egypt and their ascent to heights of spirituality and faith in G-d. Symbolizing the conclusion of their subservience to the confines of nature and the natural order were the booths in which they now dwelt. Upon leaving Egypt, they preferred the makeshift and the miraculous over the "security" of nature and the physical world. Therefore, continues the Maharal, "Just as it was then, when they

left Egypt and were under the authority of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and under His protection, so are future generations of Bnei Yisrael commanded to do, to make *sukkos*.”

There is thus no fundamental difference of opinion between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva regarding the essence of the mitzvah. Whether their *sukkos* were the Clouds of Glory or actual booths, all agree that they were living in the shelter of their faith, detached from materialism and nature and shielded by G-d’s miraculous protection.

☛ The Collapsing *Sukkah* of David

BEYOND SYMBOLIZING THE Jewish nation’s spiritual world of faith, the *sukkah* symbolizes the nation’s ultimate, future role in history. The *navi* Amos prophesies, “On that day, I shall erect the collapsing *sukkah* of David” (*Amos* 9:11). This refers to the dynasty of David Hamelech, which is compared here to a *sukkah* that will arise and stand erect in the future. In *Netzach Yisrael* (Chap. 35), the Maharal explains this analogy. Royalty signifies stability and power, and for this reason, a royal dynasty is referred to as “the Royal House.” By contrast, the dynasty of David Hamelech doesn’t represent man’s rule over man, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s rule over man — the dominion of the spiritual world over the material. “The *navi* therefore calls the royal house of David a *sukkah*,” explains the Maharal, “because the royal house of David is a Divine dominion, unlike other royal houses, which are mundane.”

The *sukkah* symbolizes man’s departure from his comfort zone and the abandonment of his trust in the natural shelter afforded by his dwelling of wood and stone, and his entrance into the world of spirituality. It is an expression of the belief that rather than the rules of natural cause and effect, the world operates according to the dictates of Divine reward and punishment. This is the essence of the Davidic dynasty’s leadership of the Jewish nation as it will be revealed through the Mashiach, who will be a descendent of this dynasty. This explains why the Davidic dynasty is termed a *sukkah*.

☛ Spiritual Resilience and Eternity

THE MAHARAL ADDS a further dimension to our understanding with his elucidation of the term “collapsing.”

He explains: “When a house falls down, it no longer exists. If a person rebuilds it, it is a new house; one does not say that he has reconstructed the house that fell, for the house that fell down has disappeared. When he rebuilds, it is an entirely new house. A *sukkah*, however, which is not a proper, permanent structure reverts easily to its former state, so if it falls down, it can be put back up and is thereby restored.”

In other words, something whose existence depends upon its material solidity loses its identity altogether when its strength fades and its substance falls apart. By contrast, an item whose essence depends on its content rather than on external conditions is not lost altogether when it is dismantled. It can be reassembled at any time and resume its existence. The dynasty of David Hamelech is called “the Collapsing *Sukkah* of David” because “Even in its fallen state, it retains its identity as a *sukkah*.” Describing it as “collapsing” therefore is not a shortcoming; it is a sign of its spiritual resilience and eternal endurance.

The *sukkah* indeed symbolizes the essence of our Exodus from Egypt — our detachment from materialism and ascent to sublime levels of faith. Upon leaving Egypt, Bnei Yisrael preferred to place their trust in the makeshift rather than the physically solid. Future generations were therefore commanded to construct *sukkos*, leaving their natural comfort zone behind and moving into a makeshift dwelling exposed to nature’s vagaries and shielded solely by Hashem watching from above.

Chanukah

The Eighth Dimension

☛ “What Is Chanukah About?” — Kindling Lights

IN *MASECHES SHABBOS* (21b), Chazal tell us: “What is Chanukah about? The Sages taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [begin] the days of Chanukah, eight in number... for when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oils in the Sanctuary, and when the royal house of Chashmonai gained the upper hand and vanquished them, they searched and found only one container of oil that was left with the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*, and it contained just enough to light [the Menorah] for one day. A miracle happened, and they lit from it for eight days. The next year, they established these days and made them festive days of praise and thanksgiving.”

It seems from this passage that Chanukah’s essence is the kindling of lights to commemorate the miracle of the container of oil.

☛ The Main Miracle Was the Military Victory, While the Miracle of the Oil Was Secondary

WE EXTOL HASHEM in the *Al Hanisim* prayer added to the *Amidah* and to *Birkas Hamazon* on Chanukah, “You handed the mighty over to the weak, the many to the few, the impure to the pure, the wicked to the righteous, and scoundrels to those who study Your Torah. You made a great and holy Name for Yourself in Your world, and You wrought great salvation and deliverance for Your people, Yisrael, to this day.” There is no mention of the miracle of the container of oil;

rather, the Chanukah miracle is portrayed as being in the military victory over the Greeks. Towards the end of the prayer, we say, “And afterwards, Your sons entered the chamber of Your House, cleared Your Sanctuary, purified Your Mikdash, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and established these eight days of Chanukah to thank and praise Your great Name.”

This implies that the kindling of the lights in the Beis Hamikdash was a minor event that took place after the victory, which was the principal miracle. Why then does the Gemara respond to the question “What is Chanukah about?” by relating the miracle of the container of oil, when it seems to have been an almost incidental consequence of the victory in battle over the Greeks? Why portray this as the main feature of the festival?

☛ The War against the Greeks Focused on the Service of Kindling the Menorah

IN *DERECH HASHEM* (part IV, Chap. 8), Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto notes, “The message of Chanukah is to provide illumination with the [same] light that shone in those days, when the *kohanim* gained the upper hand over the wicked sons of Greece, who wanted remove Yisrael from serving Hashem. The *kohanim* strengthened themselves, and through them, they (i.e., the nation) returned to Torah and to the service of the Beis Hamikdash — and [this salvation involved] the Menorah in particular according to its [spiritual] rectifications, for there were hindrances to its function, and the *kohanim* restored them to their proper state.”

Here we see that the Greeks’ campaign against Yisrael centered upon the Menorah. The Greeks defiled all the oils because that was the aim of their struggle against the Jews. The miracle of the container of oil that enabled the Menorah to be rekindled was thus no mere minor consequence of the victory — it represented the war’s finest moment and the height of victory. Since the Greeks waged war against Yisrael in order to “defile all the oils,” the response to the

question “What is Chanukah about?” is not the military victory, but the miracle of the container of oil.

But how are we to understand this? What lay behind the Greeks’ goal of defiling all the oils? How does oil burning in a lamp become a *causus belli* between Greece and Yisrael?

☛ Oil Denotes Wisdom

THE GEMARA (*MENACHOS* 85b) mentions the *pasuk*, “Yoav sent to Tekoa and from there brought a wise woman” (*Shmuel II*, 14:2) and asks why when Yoav sought a wise woman, he searched particularly in Tekoa. “Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘Since they are used to eating olive oil, wisdom is found among them.’” (The Mishnah tells us that Tekoa was renowned for its excellent olive oil.) In *maseches Horayos*, too, we find “a person who is in the habit of eating olive oil” listed among the ways of retrieving forgotten Torah knowledge.

☛ The Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash Symbolized the Torah’s Wisdom

THE GEMARA TELLS us (*Berachos* 57a), “A person who dreams that he sees olive oil should anticipate illumination with Torah[’s wisdom], as it says, ‘They should bring you pure olive oil’ [with which the Menorah’s lamps were filled] (*Shemos* 27:20).”

The *aron* in the Beis Hamikdash contained the two *luchos*, representing the Written Torah, which came from Heaven. The Menorah contained oil, which symbolizes the wisdom acquired by a person who studies Torah and develops his own novel insights into the Oral Torah. The Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash thus symbolized Torah’s wisdom.

☛ Greece Is Likened to Darkness

IN THE MIDRASH (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4), Chazal interpret the following *pasuk* in reference to the four empires that subjugated

Yisrael during the latter's four exiles: "when the earth was astonishingly desolate and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep" (*Bereishis* 1:2). The words "with darkness," they say, "refer to Greece, who obscured Yisrael's vision with their decrees, telling them, 'Write for yourselves on the ox's horn that you have no portion in the G-d of Yisrael.'" Whereas the Menorah symbolizes the wisdom of Yisrael, the wisdom of the Greeks is likened to darkness.

☛ The Four Empires Correspond to the Four Human Faculties

IN *NER MITZVAH* (p. 10), the Maharal explains that the four empires that subjugated Yisrael correspond to the four faculties each person possesses: the first is physical strength, the second is emotional resources, the third is intellectual faculties, while the fourth is the combined action of all three, which together make up the sum total of the personality.

☛ Greece Represents the Third Faculty — Intellect

"THE GREEK EMPIRE corresponds to the third human faculty, i.e., intellect," explains the Maharal, "because the Greeks' sole ambition was to attain wisdom." Greek culture indeed abounds in intellectual attainment: mathematics, art, poetry, and philosophy. The Greeks recognized seven branches of wisdom. In his commentary on *Avos* (at the end of Chap. 3), Rabbeinu Bachye lists these disciplines as, "the science of logic, the science of mathematics, the science of geometry, natural science, the science of astronomy, the science of music, and theology."

☛ Greek Wisdom Battles Torah's Wisdom

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that Torah wisdom, which is the most sublime of all disciplines, "is not relevant to the nations. So say Chazal in the Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah* 2:13): 'Her king and princes are

among the nations, there is no Torah' (*Eichah* 2:9) — if someone tells you, 'Wisdom exists among the nations,' believe him. If they say, 'There is Torah among the nations,' do not believe it. The Greek empire therefore opposed not Yisrael, but their Torah."

Why were the Greeks incapable of appreciating the Torah's wisdom? What prevented such intelligent people from studying Torah? Once we clarify the difference between Torah and other branches of wisdom, we will be in a position to answer these questions.

☛ The Difference between Torah and Other Disciplines

IN HIS COMMENTARY on Chumash (to *Vayikra* 16:8), the Ramban scathingly berates "those scholars of nature who are attracted to [the teachings of] the Greek (i.e., Aristotle), who denied the existence of anything he was unable to experience with his physical senses. He and his wicked disciples arrogantly asserted that anything he could not comprehend with his intellect was not true."

The Greeks took the position that nothing exists beyond that which man can apprehend with his physical senses or through the power of his intellect drawing upon his immediate experiences. They denied outright the existence of an abstract, spiritual dimension that necessitates man believing in that which lies beyond his physical capability of apprehending. Refusing to acknowledge any wisdom lying beyond the grasp of the human intellect, they scoffed at the idea of man being able to attach himself to a system of sublime, Divine wisdom.

Torah possesses a quality that raises it above human logic, keeping it ultimately beyond the reach of what is attainable to human senses. (Nevertheless, the Creator has made His Torah accessible to His nation, conveying it through Moshe Rabbeinu in a form that enables every Jew to study it and absorb its Divine wisdom.) In *Bava Basra* (12b) the Gemara tells us, "A wise man is superior to a prophet." The Ramban (*ibid.*) explains: "Even though prophecy in

the form of sights and visions has been removed from the prophets, the prophecy accessible to a wise man has not been taken away, *for they know the truth through the Divine inspiration that is within them.*" Torah's wisdom is a type of prophecy, though whereas regular prophecy is bestowed from Above, Torah wisdom is a form of Divine inspiration upon which a scholar draws from deep within himself. Torah wisdom is Divine wisdom to which man succeeds in attaching himself. Due to its Divine origin, man cannot attain this wisdom if he remains shackled to materialism and physicality. The *Midrash Tanchuma* tells us, "You will not find [proficiency in] the Oral Torah with a person who seeks worldly pleasures, desires, honor, and greatness in this world; rather [you will find it] in a person who deprives himself in order to study it ... Such is the way of Torah: eat bread with salt, drink water in measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of privation, and toil over Torah study." The correlation between worldly indulgence and paucity of Torah knowledge is so direct that the Gemara (*Shabbos* 147b) tells us about Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, who indulged in the pleasures of natural springs and forgot all his Torah knowledge. In the realm of worldly wisdom such as the nations possess, there is no contradiction between intellectual prowess and physicality. It is only Torah wisdom, which involves a person attaching himself to a system of holy, Divine wisdom, that sees contradiction between indulgence in physical pleasures and the possibility of attaining sublime, spiritual insights.

☛ The Difference between the Olive and Its Oil

THE GEMARA (*BERACHOS* 63B) tells us, "Listen carefully Yisrael and hear' (*Devarim* 27:9) ... Break yourselves over [studying] Torah teachings, as Reish Lakish said: 'Torah teachings endure only in a person who puts himself to death (i.e., who undergoes privation) over them, as it says, "This is the Torah — a man who dies in a tent" (*Bamidbar* 19:14).'" In other words, a person can only study Torah and absorb its Divine wisdom when he breaks and grinds his physical

existence, keeping it at low ebb while directing all his energies into the pursuit of Torah knowledge.

Oil is yielded when an olive undergoes a similar process of crushing.

The word *kassis* (crushed) is mentioned by the Torah in connection with the oil that burned in the Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash: “crushed for [providing] illumination” (*Shemos* 27:20). We have already seen that oil symbolizes Torah wisdom, and the olive yields oil only after its flesh, which contains the oil, has been crushed. In *Horayos* (13a), we find the consumption of whole olives listed as predisposing to forgetting Torah, whereas eating olive oil contributes to recouping Torah knowledge: “Just as an olive can cause a person to forget that which he learned throughout seventy years, olive oil can restore the learning of seventy years.”

In *Chiddushei Aggados* (ibid.), the Maharal explains, “Olive oil is particularly linked to wisdom and intellect, for [when lit,] it yields the illumination to which the intellect is likened, whereas the olive, which contains the oil, predisposes to forgetfulness, for the carrier (i.e., the body) that holds the intellect is physical, and it drives away the intellect when the latter is under its pressure. When a person consumes the oil when it is on its own and separated from the olive, it is auspicious for knowledge, for it is wholly illumination.”

☛ The Greek War against Yisrael Consisted of Defiling the Oils

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN Greece and Yisrael was thus a struggle between two types of wisdom: Greek wisdom, which draws upon the combined resources of both mind and body (this is known as holistic knowledge), and Torah wisdom, which involves attachment to the Divine, which in turn necessitates detachment from physicality and crushing man’s material aspect. This struggle is symbolized by the contrast between the olive flesh — the surrounding physical shell — and “pure olive oil, crushed for [providing] illumination.”

The Greeks tried to defile all the oils and uproot Torah from Yisrael altogether, but Hashem performed a miracle, and one small container remained bearing the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*, marking it as holy of holies, detached from all physicality. This container's oil allowed the light of the golden Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash to be rekindled. This represented the climax of Yisrael's victory in the struggle against the Greeks, thereby providing the genuine answer to the question, "What is Chanukah about?"

☞ Oil and Eight Days

IN *NER MITZVAH* (p. 23), the Maharal explains that just as oil symbolizes the essence of Yisrael's struggle against Greece, the eight Chanukah days symbolize the very same idea.

The number seven denotes physical existence, which was created during the seven days of creation.

The number eight denotes the Divine dimension, which goes beyond nature.

The Jewish nation experiences a dimension of Divine attachment that takes them beyond nature (holiness).

This is the essence of *bris milah*, which is therefore performed on the eighth day after birth.

The Chanukah miracle, which resulted in Yisrael's restoration to the Torah's wisdom and its dimension of attachment to Divine wisdom, lasted for eight days.

The number eight denotes the dimension that extends beyond nature. Similarly, oil (which in Hebrew is *shemen*, related to the number eight, *shemonah*) floats and rises above other substances, reflecting this dimension that extends beyond nature. The Maharal notes that "They therefore lit [the Menorah] from this oil for eight days, for it is holy of holies, coming after [the number] seven; this is the eighth [number]. Why does the holy of holies follow seven? Because the world's natural order is subject to the number seven, and therefore, that which goes beyond nature is subject to the number

eight. *Bris milah*, which contravenes nature — for nature dictates that man is born uncircumcised, and *milah* goes beyond nature — is therefore performed on the eighth day. The Holy of Holies thus contained the *aron* [*hakodesh*] and the Torah, which is [pure] intellect, with no physical aspect. The Torah, too, was given after [the passage of] seven [weeks], for it says, ‘Count for yourself seven weeks’ (*Devarim* 16:9), and after seven weeks, on the fiftieth day [after leaving Egypt], the Torah was given. One container remained, left with the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*, who served in (i.e., while wearing) eight vestments (*Yoma* 71b), and all this was for the sake of his sublime level, for he attained the eighth level [of elevation above nature], and when the Greeks defiled the Sanctuary, and they [subsequently] purified it from the impurity, and the holiness returned from that level which is the eighth; therefore, the miracle was performed — for eight days.”

The miracle of the container of oil thus represented the climax of victory in the war against the Greeks, signifying the essence of that victory in the conflict between Greek wisdom, which recognized only wisdom accessible to both body and soul, and Torah, which represents attachment to G-d’s sublimely spiritual word, whose attainment is conditional upon crushing physical desire. As the product of the crushed olive, oil thus symbolizes G-d’s Torah. Guarding the oil’s purity is the mission of every Jew who studies Torah in holiness and purity. The Greeks tried to defile all the oils, but a single container remained with its purity intact, bearing the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*, representing that dimension of Torah’s wisdom where attachment takes place to that which lies beyond human senses and intellect, to Divine holiness. This extends beyond the natural dimension, which is confined to the limits set by seven days of creation, reaching the eighth dimension.

Purim

Concealed Miracles Are More Sublime than Revealed Miracles

☛ The Purim Miracle Will Never Fade Despite Having Been Concealed

THE MIDRASH IN *Mishlei* (9:2) tells us that in the future (i.e., after the Ultimate Redemption), all the festivals will fade into insignificance, as the miraculous events they commemorate will be outshone by the miracles accompanying the Redemption. The exception will be Purim, which will never fade, as it says “And these days of Purim will not pass from among the Jews” (*Esther* 9:28).

What makes Purim unique among the festivals? Was the Purim miracle more important than Bnei Yisrael’s departure from Mitzrayim or the splitting of the *Yam Suf*?

In *Ohr Chadash*, the Maharal adds depth to this question, noting that the Purim miracle was performed in a concealed manner, i.e., cloaked in a natural sequence of events that was regular and rational. “If the miracle was so great,” asks the Maharal, “why throughout the Megillah was no open miracle performed?” This difficulty prompted some to say that the concealment shrouding the Purim miracle shows that it wasn’t so great compared to, for example, the Chanukah miracle, which involved an open miracle that went against nature, when a cruse of oil sufficient for only one day burned for eight. The Maharal, however, states, “You should know that the opposite is true:

it is due to the miracle's greatness that no open miracle was performed throughout the Megillah; it was exceedingly great, to the extent that it emanates from a sublime, concealed place." A concealed miracle is evidently more sublime than a revealed miracle. Because it was concealed, the roots of the Purim miracle are even more elevated than those of other miracles, hidden among the secrets of the Upper Worlds.

How are we to understand this? Logically, it seems that an open miracle, which defies the natural order, is more significant than a concealed miracle, which fits smoothly into the world's regular, ordinary functioning.

☛ Open Miracles Demonstrate That Nature Is Nonexistent and That Everything Is Miraculous

THE MAHARAL'S COMMENTS seem to us somewhat counterintuitive because we usually understand that open miracles demonstrate that there is truly no such thing as nature and that everything that happens in the world is miraculous, albeit concealed. In other words, from the occasion when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* split the sea we learn that even when the sea behaves in the manner we are used to, this doesn't happen automatically. This idea is explained by the Ramban at the end of *parshas Bo* (*Shemos* 13:16): "From the great, publicly performed miracles, a person acknowledges the hidden miracles, which constitute the foundation of the entire Torah, for a person has no share in the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu without believing that every aspect of our lives and all that happens to us are miracles, without any element whatsoever of [independently functioning] nature or the way of the world, both on the communal and individual level. Rather, if a person performs the *mitzvos*, his reward will bring him [ultimate] success, whereas if he transgresses them, his punishment will cut him off — all [of this working] according to Divine decree."

We thus draw our belief in a Creator who runs every aspect of His world from the open miracles He has performed, which teach us that His Providence affects even that which seems to operate on

its own. People thus learn from open miracles to believe that G-d is present in everything around them. Why then does the Maharal assert that the most sublime kind of miracle is not performed openly but is hidden within the world's regular, ordinary functioning?

☛ How Can a Drunkard Who Is Unaware of Any Miracle Publicize It?

THE FACT THAT it seemingly requires probing reflection and keen attention for a person to recognize that he has experienced a miracle only heightens our difficulty. On Purim, not only was the miracle concealed within a chain of events that seemed wholly natural, but we are also supposed to publicize it when our senses are dulled and our perception clouded.

The Gemara (*Megillah* 7b) tells us, "On Purim, a person is obligated to become intoxicated to the point where he doesn't know the difference between 'Cursed is Haman' and 'Blessed is Mordechai.'" Is a person who is intoxicated to this degree capable of attaining the insight that is required in order to perceive the miracle behind the events described in the Megillah?

How can a person who is drunk and thus unaware of the miracle publicize it? How can a person commemorate such an important event by attaining the unseemly state of drunkenness, which prevents him from serving Hashem joyfully because his mind is unclear, and when he is altogether unaware of the miracle that was performed for him?

By dwelling upon the nature of the Purim miracle, we will be in a position to answer these questions.

☛ Preparing the Cure before the Illness and the Reason for Doing So

ESTHER'S CORONATION AS Vashti's successor took place before Haman's elevation and the subsequent harsh decree. In the Megillah it is

written, “After these matters, King Achashveirosh elevated Haman to greatness” (*Esther* 3:1). The Gemara (*Megillah* 13b) tells us that the word “after” is not merely informing us of the order of events, but also comes to teach us that it was “‘after’ *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had prepared the cure for the blow — for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not smite Yisrael unless He has already prepared the cure in advance. With the gentile nations, however, it is otherwise; He smites them and only then prepares their succor.” Why does the order matter? What difference does it make if the blow comes before the relief or after it?

The Maharal explains that when the cure precedes the blow, it means that the blow was not dangerous to begin with, for it was always intended as a part of a two-stage process whereby it would first make its appearance and then be neutralized. Then, when the overall picture emerges and it transpires that the cure was ready even before the blow, it is clear that there was no evil decree to begin with, just a mirage whose purpose was to lead to salvation, with the ultimate positive outcome preordained from the beginning.

The following halachah mentioned by the Gemara in *Chullin* (43a) illustrates this point. If one of an animal’s inner organs develops a hole (such that the animal is rendered a *tereifah*) over which a membrane subsequently grows, this doesn’t change the animal’s status, because the hole remains. Even though it is covered by a thick plug, this remains an unstable closure. However, if a hole develops in the animal’s lung at a spot where the thoracic wall covers it, the animal is kosher, for this is a permanent closure that was in place to begin with. In other words, we do not see this as a hole; there was never a true hole to begin with, and the animal was never endangered.

☛ The Greatness of a Concealed Miracle

A CONCEALED MIRACLE indicates the operation of a preordained plan that appears wholly natural because the Stage Director put the rescue plan into place before the danger threatened, such that the danger was never truly dangerous to begin with. This process,

whereby it turns out that the blow itself becomes the source of the cure and that which appeared evil emerges as not actually evil but good, is referred to in the Megillah as a reversal — “[the situation] was reversed” (*Esther* 9:1). Since it reveals the existence of a prearranged plan, this constitutes a more sublime revelation than a series of natural events that includes a stage of danger, wherein the Creator is “compelled” to usurp nature in order to rescue His children.

☛ The Ending Is Evident All Along

THIS IDEA SHEDS light on a difference in the *halachos* governing reading the Megillah and the daily reading of *keriyas Shema*. In *Hilchos Keriyas Shema* (2:11), the Rambam rules that if a person read a later section before an earlier one, he has nevertheless fulfilled the mitzvah, whereas the Mishnah (*Megillah* 17a) tells us, “A person who reads the Megillah in reverse order has not fulfilled the mitzvah.” Following the order of events in the unfolding of the Purim miracle is crucial. Realizing the extent of the miracle depends on seeing how the source of the salvation preceded the threat, such that no true threat ever existed, and the entire series of events was predestined for the good.

☛ Our Task on Purim Is to Reveal Hidden Secrets

THE CENTRAL THEME of Purim and its mitzvos is thus the revelation of the secret concealed within the Megillah — how in retrospect the source of the salvation preceded the danger and how the rescue sprouted from the threat itself, such that that which appeared bad at the time was truly preordained good. This realization dawns on a person when he grasps the existence of a deeper significance to the events he witnesses than is readily apparent to the casual observer, mirroring the existence of deeper levels in his own personality than are readily discernible. This is why there is an obligation to drink to the point of blurring the difference between Haman and Mordechai — in order to ensure that his conscious mind not obscure his inner essence,

which on this day will be reflected in his conduct and be apparent to all. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (38b) points out that the *gematriya* (numerical value) of the word *yayin*, wine ($10 + 10 + 50 = 70$), is equal to that of *sod*, secret ($60 + 6 + 4 = 70$), for “When wine enters [a person], secrets emerge.” In his *Chiddushei Aggados* (ibid.) and in *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 60), the Maharal writes that “Wine is a liquid that is hidden, concealed in the innermost part of the grape, and when wine enters a person, it brings out the secrets hidden within him.”

The Arizal writes (by way of introduction to *Pri Eitz Chaim*, *Sha’ar Rosh Chodesh*, *Chanukah*, *u’Purim*, Chap. 5): “The word *megillah* [referring specifically to *Megillas Esther* but also generally to any scroll that is unrolled to reveal what is written inside] means ‘revealed.’” In other words, a *megillah* doesn’t just denote a roll (*gelilah* in Hebrew) of parchment but is derived from *gilui*, the revelation of something hidden and concealed. Of course, the Arizal’s comments contain further hidden layers of meaning, but we can certainly learn from them that the word *megillah* denotes the revelation of something concealed.

☞ It Will Be Revealed in the World to Come That Everything Was Always for the Good

THE GEMARA (*Pesachim* 50a) asks a question on the *pasuk*, “Hashem will become [acknowledged as] King of the entire world; *on that day* Hashem will be One and His Name will be One” (*Zechariah* 14:9). And until that day’s arrival at some time in the future, asks the Gemara, isn’t Hashem already One? The Gemara explains: “This world is unlike the World to Come. In this world, upon hearing good tidings, one makes the blessing, ‘...Who is good and bestows good,’ and on bad tidings the blessing, ‘...the Judge of truth.’ In the World to Come, however, it will all be ‘...Who is good and bestows good.’”

The Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* Chap. 42) explains that the *pasuk* “*On that day* Hashem will be One...” doesn’t refer to *Hakadosh Baruch*

Hu Himself, for He is always One — “Hashem rules; Hashem [has always] ruled; Hashem will [always] rule,” etc. It is our perception that will change, for only in the future will we grasp that Hashem does not have two separate ways of relating to us, kindness and judgment. Rather, even that which appears to us as punitive judgment is rooted in the kindness that Hashem bestows upon His creations.

The *Noda B'yehudah* (in his commentary *Tziyun L'nefesh Chayah* to *Pesachim* *ibid.*) explains, “It is written, ‘I thank You Hashem for having been angry with me’ (*Yeshayah* 12:1). But how can a person give thanks for a punishment? The answer is that ‘From on High, no evil comes’ (*Eichah* 3:38); nothing evil comes from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Everything is for the good, even the punishments a person suffers are not bad, but rather good, their purpose being to refine him. But in this world, a person doesn’t understand this properly and things appear to him as evil, like a patient to whom a dressing is applied and it is painful. The foolish patient will scream that they should remove the dressing, while the wise person will suffer happily. The suffering of the wicked similarly represents a dressing [on their spiritual malaise]. In the future — ‘on that day’ — we will say ‘I thank You Hashem for having been angry with me,’ and we will offer thanks in retrospect for the temporary flaring of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s anger against us, which was for our ultimate benefit. Chazal therefore say that in this world, we make the blessing ‘Blessed is... the Judge of truth,’ for a person believes that whatever befell him was Heaven’s judgment, but in the World to Come, he will say upon good and evil tidings alike the blessing, ‘Who is good and bestows good,’ for he will appreciate in retrospect that everything was for the good.”

☛ The Purim Miracle Is a Preview of the Pattern of Heaven’s Future Rule

ACCORDINGLY, WE FULLY understand why all the festivals will fade into insignificance in the future, for they commemorate the Exodus

from Egypt, which included numerous open miracles that usurped the natural order in order to save and protect Bnei Yisrael from danger. In the future, we will see that the attribute of judgment never held sway and that nothing was evil. Rather, everything was a manifestation of Heaven's kindness and good to begin with. The miracle of *Megillas Esther*, on the other hand, was arranged in such a way as would be apparent upon close scrutiny even in this world, not just in the future, that everything emanated from He "Who is good and bestows good," without a single moment's manifestation of "the Judge of truth." This was therefore a truly sublime miracle, even in terms of the pattern of Divine rule that will be in place in the future, and it is understandable why the significance of this miracle will never fade, even in the future.

A hidden miracle is indeed more sublime than a revealed miracle, for when Heaven effects a situation's reversal, we perceive that what appeared bad was actually good all along; that the cure preceded the blow and thus the blow never represented a real danger. This process is more elevated than one that presents danger from which the Creator must extricate us by usurping the natural order. A concealed miracle is thus greater than a revealed one. In the future, all the festivals will fade into insignificance when we see that judgment was never dominant and that everything was Divine kindness. Purim, however, will never fade, for it was a miracle that took place within the workings of this world, showing that there never was any evil and that everything is good.

Pesach

The Uniqueness of Yisrael's Departure from Egypt Does Not Lie in the Supernatural Miracles That Accompanied It

☞ Yisrael's Departure from Egypt Serves as the Basis of Our Faith

THE FESTIVAL OF Pesach revolves around the Jewish People's miraculous departure from Egypt, of which the Haggadah says, "The more a person relates of it, the better."

Many of the Torah's mitzvos are given "in commemoration of the Departure from Egypt." One example is the mitzvah of *tefillin*, which the Torah refers to as *totafos* (*Shemos* 13:1; *Devarim* 6:8 and 11:18). In *Shemos* (ibid.), Rashi explains that this word is derived from the same root as *hatafah*, meaning preaching or speaking, "because whoever sees them tied [on the head, positioned] between the eyes remembers the miracle [of the Exodus from Egypt] and will speak about it."

In *Gevuros Hashem* (Chap. 3), the Maharal notes, "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* chose the night of Pesach to make the world's inhabitants aware of His deeds and make His Name known in the world by taking His People out of Egypt. We see this from how the Torah relates to the Exodus from Egypt: as the most fundamental event and the root of everything. Many mitzvos come [to us] in the wake of the

Exodus through which this fundamental event will remain before us, never wavering. For example: the mitzvah of *sukkah*, of which the Torah says, ‘so that your succeeding generations will be aware that I settled the Children of Israel in booths when I took them out of the Land of Egypt’ (*Vayikra* 23:43). About Shabbos, too, the Torah says, ‘Remember that you were once a slave in Egypt’ (*Devarim* 5:15), and the festival of Pesach certainly commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. Similarly, when making Kiddush on all the festivals, we declare them to be ‘in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt.’ In addition to this, we are obligated to remember the Exodus from Egypt twice daily in *keriyas Shema*. All of these demonstrate that the actual Exodus from Egypt, apart from all the attendant miracles, is the foundation of [our] faith upon which everything else is built.”

☛ What Was Unique about the Miracle of Leaving Egypt?

THE MAHARAL THEN poses a question that challenges this basic assumption and forces us to think:

What was so special about the Exodus from Egypt? Was the sun standing still in Givon (as described in *Yehoshua* 10:12–14) any less miraculous? As the Maharal writes, “*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has performed innumerable wonders and miracles for Yisrael. Why is the Exodus the only one the Torah mandates that we remember and commemorate? Moreover, to some shortsighted people, it seems that there were other supernatural miracles, which seem to some to have been greater miracles and wonders than the Exodus from Egypt.”

Similarly, the Torah tells us that Yisro heard “about everything that G-d had done for Moshe and for His people, Yisrael — that Hashem had taken Yisrael out of Egypt” (*Shemos* 18:1). In other words, he compared their departure from Egypt to all the other miracles that Bnei Yisrael had experienced and placed it on equal footing with them. Chazal comment on this (*Mechilta, parshas Yisro* 1), “This teaches us that the Exodus from Egypt [alone] is equal

in significance to all the miracles and mighty deeds that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* performed for Yisrael,” meaning that if all the other miracles were placed on one pan of a scale and the Exodus from Egypt on the other, it would balance. How can this be?

Furthermore, in many places, the Torah mentions *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* taking us out of Egypt “with a strong hand and outstretched arm.” For example, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and Hashem, our G-d took us out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” (*Devarim* 6:21) What is the significance of this singular strength that Hashem apparently needed to draw upon, as it were, in order to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt? Is there any such thing as a miracle requiring effort from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? Does He need to employ His “strong hand” in order to defy nature? It is as much Hashem’s will that operates every aspect of the natural world as causes miracles!

☛ Slavery and Bondage

IN THE *MIDRASH SHOCHER TOV* (*Tehillim* 116), Chazal provide two comparisons to the miracle of Bnei Yisrael’s departure from Egypt. One comparison is to a metalworker withdrawing a chunk of gold from the flaming center of a refining crucible, and the other is to a person extracting an animal’s newborn from within its body.

These comparisons convey the type of “difficulty” that taking Yisrael out of Egypt entailed. The Maharal notes that in this Midrash, Chazal explain “two highly significant features of the Egyptian bondage. The first difficulty lay in the fact that the Egyptians were holding onto Yisrael and overwhelming them with their strength, preventing Yisrael from escaping from their authority.” In other words, the Egyptians were akin to the searing heat of a refining crucible — a hostile environment — preventing access to the precious metal at its core.

“The second difficulty arose from Yisrael’s identity [or lack thereof] in Egypt, attached as they were to the Egyptians and secondary to

them, as though they had no possibility of existing independently.” In other words, Yisrael were akin to a fetus in its mother’s womb that is like another of the mother’s limbs, lacking independent existence.

These are the lines along which the Maharal explains Chazal’s comparisons of Yisrael in Egypt to gold in a crucible and to a fetus inside the womb.

Gold undergoing refinement in a heated crucible is inaccessible. The Torah thus writes, “Hashem took you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be His designated people” (*Devarim* 4:20). This “difficulty” arose from the Egyptians, whose effect upon Yisrael the Torah compares to that of an “iron furnace.”

A fetus inside the womb has no independent existence whatsoever; its life is wholly sustained by and dependent upon its mother. The Torah thus writes, “Or has any god performed such miracles, coming and taking for himself one nation from within another nation?” (*ibid. pasuk* 34). Yisrael were subsumed inside Egypt, just as a fetus is wholly swallowed up within its mother’s womb.

☛ Yisrael Was an Appendage of the Egyptian Nation

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that the principal impediment to their redemption was Yisrael’s lowly spiritual state while living in Egypt. This is the difficulty that Chazal compare to a “fetus” enveloped by the “womb” of the Egyptian nation. Indeed, Chazal tell us (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:8) that “When Yosef died, Yisrael abrogated the covenant of *milah* and said, ‘Let us be like the Egyptians.’ When they did that, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* transformed the love that the Egyptians had for them into hatred.” By trying to become identical to the Egyptians, Yisrael became an inseparable part of the Egyptian nation.

Chazal tell us similarly (*Vayikra Rabbah* 23:2) that Yisrael were like “a rose among the thistles” (*Shir Hashirim* 2:2) — “Just as its owner has difficulty plucking a rose from among the thistles, Yisrael’s redemption was difficult for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and of this [the

Torah] says, ‘Or has any god performed such miracles, coming and taking for himself one nation from within another nation?’” The continuation of this Midrash underscores Yisrael’s comparison to a fetus inside the womb: “Both these and those are uncircumcised; these grow their fringes and those grow their fringes; these wear clothes of mixed fabrics and those wear clothes of mixed fabrics — the attribute of Divine justice would thus never allow Yisrael to be redeemed from Egypt.”

☛ Becoming Secondary Means Becoming Subservient

IN *GEVUROS HASHEM* (Chap. 52), the Maharal explains that Bnei Yisrael’s enslavement by the Egyptians was not coincidental but arose due to their natural state once they had become part of the Egyptian nation. “For Yisrael deserved to be slaves in Egypt,” writes the Maharal, “and Pharaoh deserved to be a king who enslaved Yisrael.” This was the dynamic at work here: abandoning one’s own identity and becoming secondary to another entity accords it dominion over oneself.

The Maharal provides a striking parable to this idea in *Chid-dushei Aggados to Bava Metziah 33a* (in explaining the principle mentioned by the Gemara, “Whoever makes himself out to be thus will ultimately become thus”): “If a person takes a wooden plank and rests it across the two banks of a river in order to cross over from one side to the other, he is almost guaranteed to fall off. But if the same plank is lying on the ground [and he walks from one end to the other], his feet will not slip off it. Why? Because when the plank is resting high above the river, the person crossing is scared, and a person’s thoughts affect his actions.”

When a person fears something, he gives it power over him. He becomes subservient and cowers before it and thus is powerless to resist it. As Iyov expressed this: “That which I feared will befall me” (*Iyov* 3:25). “When a person fears something,” says the Maharal, “he diminishes himself in respect to that which he fears, thus enabling it to have an effect upon him.”

☛ “With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm”

IN LINE WITH these ideas, the Maharal explains the uniqueness of the Exodus from Egypt. The difficulty obviously didn't lie in the need to overcome Pharaoh's might, for the need to perform miracles in the physical realm poses no difficulty for Heaven. Yisrael, though, were firmly stuck in Egypt like a headless nail embedded in a block of wood. Having altogether lost their connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, they had lost the means of being pulled out. This is what necessitated *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* intervention “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.”

☛ The Miracle Was Performed by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Bonding with Yisrael in Their Lowly State

THE MIRACLE OF their departure came about through *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* forging a connection with Yisrael despite their spiritual decrepitude and their subservience to Egypt.

As the Maharal puts it: “There was no partnering or bonding on Yisrael's part to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, for they were under Egypt's authority. So when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to take Yisrael out of Egypt, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bonded to Yisrael [even] while they were under Egypt's yoke.”

☛ The Magnitude of the Miracle Lay Not in Defying the Natural Order, but in Defying the Spiritual Order

IT IS THUS not the nature-defying aspect of the miracle of our departure from Egypt that sets it apart from all others, but rather the fact that it defied the spiritual principles according to which the world operates, since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bonded to the Jewish People despite their lowly spiritual level.

Parallel to the array of natural factors according to which the world operates is a corresponding array of spiritual factors in which

physical miracles are rooted. Yet the miracle that took place on the Seder night defied any and every order, both physical and spiritual.

The special character of the miracle of Yisrael's departure from Egypt thus lay in the harsh self-enslavement that Bnei Yisrael brought upon themselves by identifying with the Egyptian nation and assimilating with them to the point where they lost their own identity and their connection to Divinity. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bonded with Yisrael even in this lowly state, withdrawing them from the forty-ninth level of impurity. Our obligation to remember that "I am Hashem, your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (*Bamidbar* 15:41) has nothing to do with the "difficulty" in performing a miracle, but with our ability to be redeemed even from the depths of Egyptian depravity.

Shavuos

Human Beings Receive the Torah — Physicality and Holiness Dwelling in Harmony

☞ “Extend Your Glory across the Heavens”

THE TORAH IS an abstract entity — pure, unadulterated spirituality. Yet the Torah was not given to *malachim*, who are wholly spiritual beings, but to human beings, who inhabit earthly bodies and have physical needs. How are we to understand this paradox whereby the seemingly most suited candidates for receiving the Torah were bypassed and instead, materialistic man was chosen as the recipient for this abstract, spiritual entity? As the Maharal puts it (*Tiferes Yisrael* Chap. 24), “The question arises: how can the Torah, which is unadulterated Divine Intellect, be with man, a physical being, when it is unavailable to heavenly *malachim*?”

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88b) actually deals with this question, relating that the *malachim* themselves asked *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “You have a hidden precious object that was hidden for nine hundred and seventy-four generations prior to the Six Days of Creation, and You intend to give it to [beings of] flesh and blood? ‘How is man deserving of G-d’s mention or a person of G-d’s counting?’ (*Tehillim* 8:5) [Rather,] ‘Extend Your glory across the heavens!’ (ibid. *pasuk* 2).”

Moshe Rabbeinu’s response to the *malachim* was, “What is written in the Torah that You are giving me? ‘I am Hashem, your G-d,

who took you out of the land of Egypt' (*Shemos* 20:2) — did you [*malachim*] go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why do you require the Torah [that addresses situations that are irrelevant to you]? It is written further there, 'Constantly remember the Shabbos day so as to sanctify it' (*ibid. pasuk* 8) — do you engage in work so as to require Shabbos for rest? It is written further there, 'You must not swear by the Name of Hashem, your G-d, in vain' (*ibid. pasuk* 7) — do you engage in business transactions [that can lead to disputes requiring oath-taking]? It is written further there, 'Honor your father and your mother' (*ibid. pasuk* 12) — do you have parents? It is written further there, 'You must not murder; you must not steal' (*ibid. pasuk* 13) — is there jealousy between you? Is the evil inclination present among you?" They immediately admitted [that Moshe was correct], as it says, "Hashem, our Master, how great is Your Name throughout the [lower] world" (*Tehillim* *ibid. pasuk* 10), and it no longer says, "Extend Your glory across the heavens."

☞ Torah Assumes a Physical Cloak When Given to Humans

MOSHE'S RESPONSE TO the *malachim* is not altogether clear. Although the Torah speaks in terms that are relevant to the practical world, it assumes this form only upon its being given to people, as the Malbim (*Shemos* 34:28) explains: "The Torah dons a physical cloak, corresponding to its recipients, who are human." So long as Torah remains in Heaven, it is divorced from any physical element and is sublimely and wholly spiritual. This phenomenon can be likened to a beam of light. The further away one moves from the beam's source, the wider the area it illuminates yet the weaker its light. The closer one gets to its source, the narrower the beam's diameter but the greater its intensity.

The Zohar (Vol. III, 152a) even tells us that when the Torah was given to man, it donned an external garb, and the Zohar warns that anyone who imagines that this garb represents the Torah's real, wholly spiritual essence is cursed and has no portion in the World to Come.

David Hamelech therefore prayed, “Uncover my eyes so that I witness wonders from your Torah” (*Tehillim* 119:18), seeking access to the Torah’s innermost levels that are concealed beneath its outer garb. In the future, the Torah’s inner “soul” and deepest layers of meaning will be perceived by all.

Therefore, although the Torah indeed speaks to humans in the “language” of this world, as Moshe Rabbeinu pointed out, this is not Torah’s true essence. This prompts us to wonder what Moshe intended in his response to the *malachim*, who wanted Torah to remain in its pristine, abstract, and wholly spiritual form.

☛ How Do Mitzvos Fulfilled through Practical Action Translate into Spirituality?

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (Chap. 6), the Maharal poses an additional question, one which the ancient philosophers had raised: What is the significance of the practical mitzvos that we perform? As he puts it, “How does a physical act help the soul attain eternal life in the spiritual world, where nothing physical exists?” They asked further that were all the mitzvos to deal with rectifying human traits — such as giving *tzedakah*, “You must not hate your brother in your heart” (*Vayikra* 19:17), and “You must not stand by when your colleague’s blood is in danger of being shed” (*ibid. pasuk* 16) — it could be argued that their purpose is to implant positive traits in man and distance him from evil. But what is the significance of mitzvos such as not wearing *sha’atnez* and not sowing mixed crops, which are solely between man and Heaven and seemingly play no role in improving a person’s character?

☛ The Spiritual Torah Is Meant to Introduce Holiness into the Physical World

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that in order to flourish, the spiritual realm is actually dependent upon the physical realm. Man was created in

the Divine image, but this manifests itself only when man consists of a physical body that houses his soul. “The Torah, too,” writes the Maharal, “despite its sublime level is dependent upon physical matters, namely, the practical mitzvos. In the same way that the *malachim* lack the Divine image possessed by man — because despite that image’s sublime level, it requires a substrate to support it, a role that is filled by the human body — so too the Torah requires a physical bearer to carry it, a role that is filled by human beings.”

Thus, even though the mitzvos have eminently sublime spiritual roots and encompass profound, abstract, and hidden content and meaning, they are enhanced still further by being given practical expression in the physical world. Should we wonder what this can possibly add to their already sublime status, the answer is that the practical fulfillment of the mitzvos brings holiness into the mundane and establishes Heaven’s dominion over the physical world, elevating it above all else.

☛ The Purpose of the Mitzvos Is Not to Refine the Soul

IN FURTHER DELINEATING the essence of the *mitzvos*’s practical observance, the Maharal cites the Midrash (*Koheles Rabbah* 6) on the *pasuk* “neither is the soul satisfied” (*Koheles* 6:7). Chazal say that the *pasuk* can be explained through the parable of a town-dweller who marries a princess. Even if he brings her all the finery the world has to offer, she will consider it insignificant, because she is a daughter of royalty and has seen far more in her father’s house than anything her husband brings her. This is also true of the human soul. Even if a person provides it with every worldly pleasure, “They are insignificant to the soul,” says the Midrash, “because it comes from the Upper Worlds.” By trying to satisfy material desires, a person only manages to raise the threshold at which he experiences pleasure but will never attain satisfaction and calm — in fact, he will end up disappointed and depressed. Only by fulfilling mitzvos, which are similar to the

experiences to which the soul was accustomed at its source, can a person reach a state of satiation and contentment.

Therefore, explains the Maharal, the soul derives no intrinsic elevation from the mitzvos a person fulfills. Since it comes from the Source of holiness to begin with, it needs no further perfecting. However, the Divine soul is in exile in this world, bound by the shackles of the physical body it inhabits. The mitzvos a person fulfills enable the soul to reconnect to its Heavenly Source while still dwelling in this world, thereby facilitating the *Shechinah's* presence here. While it is thus not man's spiritual aspect that requires his mitzvah fulfillment, through fulfilling the mitzvos, a person's soul becomes freed from its chains and can accord his spiritual aspect dominance over his physical aspect such that even the latter is sanctified.

☞ The Torah Sanctifies and Elevates the Physical Realm

THE TORAH IS not on a collision course with the material world and its attendant drives and urges. To the contrary, the Torah uses the physical realm as a means of cultivating spirituality. The Maharal points out that the only sacrifice we find that the Torah allows to be brought from *chametz* is the *shte'i halechem* (the two loaves) brought on Shavuos. The Maharal bases his explanation of this phenomenon on the Gemara in *Kiddushin* 30b, which expounds the word *v'samtem* in the *pasuk*, "*v'samtem* (you shall place) these words of Mine (i.e., Torah) upon your hearts" (*Devarim* 11:18). The Gemara interprets this word as a compound of two words: *sam* (drug or medication) and *tam* (perfect or effective), meaning a healing potion. The *pasuk* can thus be understood as conveying that "These words of Mine are a healing potion." As the Gemara says, "Torah is compared to a life-giving elixir. This can be compared to a father who delivered his son a heavy blow and then placed a dressing on the wound. 'My son,' said the father, 'as long as this dressing remains on your wound, you can eat whatever you like and drink whatever you like... you

can wash in either hot or cold water. But if you remove the dressing, the wound will fester... [and endanger your life].’ So said *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, ‘My sons, I have created the *yetzer hara*, and I have created Torah as its remedy. As long as you are occupied with Torah, the *yetzer hara* has no power over you, but if not, you will be under its control.’”

The dressing in the parable represents the Torah. Without it, the patient is limited in what he may and may not do, but while it is in place, he is free to do anything. Torah allows a person to attend to his physical existence even while scaling lofty spiritual heights.

The *shte'i halechem*, which were two leavened loaves, were therefore offered on the day on which the Torah was given. The evil inclination is likened by Chazal to leaven that makes dough rise, yet it cannot overcome a person who occupies himself with Torah. On the day the Torah was given, and only on that day, we are actually commanded to offer leaven, because under Torah’s influence, the leaven within a person also plays a role in his spiritual growth.

☞ Progressing from the Material to the Spiritual

IN *TIFERES YISRAEL* (Chap. 25), the Maharal explains that the elevation of the material realm through Torah represents the climax of the process of receiving the Torah.

When Yisrael left Egypt, they were comparable to a newborn, who exits its mother’s womb capable of independent physical life but with an undeveloped intellect. Throughout the ensuing seven-week period of the *omer*, their comprehension of the spiritual realm developed. As his spiritual faculties develop, a person becomes able to grasp and contain Torah, which is essentially pure intellect. The *omer* offering that is brought on the sixteenth of Nisan — immediately following our departure from Egypt — therefore consists of ground barley, which is primarily animal food, because the Torah requires a physical vessel within which to develop. After the *omer*-period, however, with the arrival of the festival of the giving of the Torah,

an offering of two wheat loaves is brought (*Vayikra* 23:17), for, as the Maharal writes, “Foods of wheat are fit for an intellectually developed person, as they say in *maseches Horayos*, ‘Five things aid study,’ one of which is eating bread made from wheat. Therefore, this is certainly true of consuming actual wheat.”

The Torah is thus akin to a ladder, enabling a person to stand firmly on the ground in this material world yet thrust his head heavenward into a wholly spiritual world, forging a connection between these two worlds and elevating his physical existence.

☛ Like the Earth, Man Is a Matrix for Growth

IN LINE WITH the above idea, the Maharal explains (*Tiferes Yisrael*, Chap. 3) Chazal’s statement that the term *adam* (man) is derived from *adamah* (earth), because man was created from the earth. But animals were also created from the earth. What makes man’s relationship to the earth particularly noteworthy?

Man is identified with the earth on account of his potential for growth and creativity. Although earth has no distinctive characteristics of its own, it fosters germination and growth, enabling seeds to sprout and reach their full potential as plants and trees. Man, too, has the capacity to foster the metamorphosis of his material aspect into sublime spirituality. The term *behemah* (animal), on the other hand, is comprised of the four letters *beis*, *hei*, *mem*, and *hei*, spelling “*bah mah*,” conveying the meaning that *mah* (what), i.e., whatever the animal is and all it can be expected to amount to, is *bah* (in it), already present within it, for it lacks the capacity to grow, develop, or yield anything further.

Man’s mission is thus to take the earth and turn it into Heaven. He achieves this through his fulfillment of practical mitzvos, which are rooted in sublime, spiritual spheres, thereby giving them expression in the coarse, physical world and enabling the *Shechinah* to be present in this world and elevate it. This was the purpose for which man was given the Torah.

The Torah that the *malachim* perceive differs conceptually from the Torah that man perceives.

The *malachim* apprehend an abstract, wholly spiritual Torah, seemingly bearing no relation to the physical world. The Torah that man has received, however, while rooted in Heaven, can only be fulfilled in practice in this world. Man's task is to harness his physicality and use it, by fulfilling the mitzvos, to create a vessel to contain the *Shechinah's* presence in this lower world.

Tishah B'Av

“He Has Declared a *Mo'ed* against Me to Break My Young Men”

☛ How Can Tishah B'Av Be Referred to by the Term Used for Festivals?

THE *SHULCHAN ARUCH* (*Orach Chaim* 559:4) rules that as is the case on festivals, neither *Tachanun* (the supplication said twice daily following the *Amidah* prayers of Shacharis and Minchah) nor *Selichos* (prayers said on fast days and other times of repentance, requesting forgiveness for our sins) are said on Tishah B'Av, because it is referred to (*Eichah* 1:15) as a *mo'ed* (a convocation, a time of meeting), a term otherwise applied only to festivals (see *Mishnah Berurah* *ibid.*).

The Rema (*Orach Chaim* *ibid.*) adds that neither is *Lamnatzei'ach* (*Tehillim*, Chap. 20, part of the weekday morning prayers) said on Tishah B'Av. The reason is that this chapter contains the *pasuk*, “Hashem will answer you on a day of distress,” rendering it incongruous for a festive day. But if Tishah B'Av doesn't qualify as a “day of distress,” which other day should?! And how can Tishah B'Av be termed a *mo'ed* when its atmosphere is as far from festive as can be?

This difficulty intensifies in light of the Maharal's explanation (*Ohr Chadash*, p. 69) that the term *mo'ed* is derived from the same root as *hisva'adus*, a close, intimate gathering, which is also the source of the Scriptural term *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting) used to refer to the Mishkan, which was where Hashem convened with Moshe Rabbeinu and around which Bnei Yisrael assembled. As the Maharal says, “All the *mo'adim* (festivals) are occasions of [particular]

connection and attachment between Yisrael and Hashem. They are therefore referred to as *mo'ed*, as in the *pasuk*, '*Veno'adti lecha* (I will convene with you) from upon the *kapores*' (*Shemos* 25:22), denoting closeness and attachment [between Hashem and Moshe]."

Similarly, in *Chiddushei Aggados* (*Makkos* 23b), the Maharal explains: "A *mo'ed* is a designated occasion when Bnei Yisrael are to celebrate and be occupied with serving Hashem. It is derived from the term '*Veno'adti lecha*,' in the manner of two [parties] who connect and convene with each other. A festival, too, is a time when Hashem convenes with His people and connects with them."

How then can Tishah B'av — the day on which Hashem *destroyed* the place where He convened with Yisrael — be referred to as a *mo'ed*?

☛ Mashiach's Birth Is on Tishah B'Av

THE MIDRASH (*EICHAH RABBAH* 1) relates that a Jew who lived in a country far from Eretz Yisrael was plowing his field at the time of the *churban* when his ox suddenly moaned in sorrow. Hearing this, a passing Arab asked him, "Are you Jewish?" and when the farmer affirmed this, he told him, "Release your ox from the bridle and stop plowing, for you have to mourn. From your ox's moan, I learned that the Beis Hamikdash is now being destroyed." While they were speaking, the ox moaned again. The Arab told the farmer, "Harness your ox and resume work; from your ox's moan, I learn that that Yisrael's savior has just been born." This Midrash teaches us that the moment of the *churban* is also the very moment when the redemption begins to unfold. What is the significance of the confluence of these two diametrically opposite events?

☛ How Can the Destruction of the Beis Hamikdash Have Saved the Jewish People?

TEHILLIM CHAP. 79 SPEAKS about the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, opening with the words, "A song by Asaf: G-d, nations have

entered Your possession...” Chazal (*Eichah Rabbah* 4:14) ask how it is fitting to call this a “song.” Wouldn’t “a lament” have been a more appropriate term of introduction? Chazal answer in the form of a parable: “A king constructed a home for his son’s marriage, but his son fell into bad company. The king immediately went up to the marriage canopy, tore down the curtains, and broke the poles. One of those present broke into song. People said to him, ‘How can you sit there and sing when the king is destroying his son’s marriage canopy?’ He told them, ‘I am singing because the king is taking his anger out on his son’s marriage canopy and not on his son.’ Similarly, they told Asaf, ‘How can you sit and sing when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has destroyed His Sanctuary?’ He told them, ‘I am singing because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has poured out His wrath on wood and stones and hasn’t poured His wrath out on Yisrael.”

This is astounding. We can understand why in the parable, it is good that when furious, the king vented his anger on something inanimate instead of on his son. But when it comes to explaining *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* exacting punishment, we are not dealing with outbursts of emotion, but rather with meting out balanced, precise judgment. Whatever is deserved happens, while that which is undeserved will never happen. How can it be that the focus of the judgment was shifted elsewhere?

☛ Miracles during the *Churban*

IN *YOMA* (54B), the Gemara tells us, “When the gentiles entered the Sanctuary, they saw the *keruvim* (the two cherubic figures, one male and one female atop the *kapores*) intertwined. The gentiles displayed them in public saying, ‘Is it fitting that those Jews — whose blessing is effective and whose curse is effective — should occupy themselves with such matters?’ They immediately scorned them, as it says, ‘All who [formerly] respected her [now] denigrated her’ (*Eichah* 1:8).” The Ritva (*Yoma*, *ibid.*) quotes a question from the Ri Migash (the Rambam’s teacher): the Gemara in *Bava Basra* (99a) tells us that at

times when Yisrael were not fulfilling Hashem's will, these selfsame *keruvim* turned away from each other. How could it be that they were intertwined at the time of the *churban*, which is by definition the ultimate state of not fulfilling Hashem's will?

The Ritva cites the explanation offered by the Re'eim: this was a miracle performed for the purpose of denigrating Yisrael and lowering their esteem in the eyes of the nations. However, this seems puzzling: we are familiar with miracles being performed to redeem Yisrael or to sanctify Heaven's Name, but not with their performance for the sake of disgracing Yisrael. Why was this done? Why did the *keruvim* display closeness and intimacy at the time of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash?

☛ Exile to Preempt Reaching the Point of No Return

THE *PASUK* STATES, "Hashem was diligent with the evil (i.e., the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and the Babylonian Exile) and He brought it upon us, for Hashem is righteous" (*Daniel* 9:14). The Gemara (*Gittin* 88a) asks how Hashem's righteousness can be cited as the reason for His diligence and alacrity in bringing misfortune upon us.

The Gemara points to the following *pesukim* from the Torah as containing the answer: "When you beget children and grandchildren and will have become old in the land, if you then become corrupt and make an idol, an image of anything, and do what is evil in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, so as to anger Him, I hereby call the heavens and earth as witnesses today that you will surely perish quickly from upon the land that you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of. You will not live long there, for you will be completely destroyed" (*Devarim* 4:25–6). We see here that when Yisrael spend a long time in the land and grow "old" and irreparably set in sinful ways there, this itself leads to their exile. Becoming ingrained in sinful habit is the root of all evil in human conduct,

for this indicates a person's detachment from his Source and loss of sensitivity towards Him.

The Hebrew words *shnei* (two), *meshuneh* (different, strange), *yashein* (asleep), and *yashan* (old) all have their origin in the idea of detachment from one's source or original state and becoming a pale reflection of one's former self.

Rashi (*Devarim*, *ibid.*) explains that being in the land for a long time and growing "old" there occurs after a period of 852 years, the numerical value of the word *v'noshantem* (you will have become old). *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* therefore brought our exile forward by two years to preempt our reaching the state of being irreversibly ingrained in sin. Advancing our nation's tragedy by two years and bringing it after we had been in the land for just 850 years was indeed righteousness on Hashem's part, for this preempted the far harsher decree to which we would have been subjected had we arrived at a state of *v'noshantem*, of having become "old" and irredeemably mired in sin.

What does all this mean?

☛ A Person's Place Is Part of His Identity

IN *GUR ARYEH* (*Devarim* 4:25), the Maharal explains that everything in the world needs a place of its own, as Chazal say, "There is nothing that does not have a place" (*Avos* 4:3). Anything that is rootless, lacking a place, is doomed to extinction.

Moreover, place is an important component of a sense of identity, as the Maharal writes in *Tiferes Yisrael* (Chap. 7): "For [an item's] place is part and parcel of its definition, and this is why the name of the place must be written in a *get*." This refers to the requirement that when writing a *get* (a bill of halachic divorce), the scribe must include not only the names of the divorcing man and woman, but also the names of the places where the *get* is being written and where the couple lives. The importance of the place where they live lies in its crucial contribution to every person's sense of identity.

☛ Exile Can Effect Atonement Because of the Loss It Entails

IN *CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS* (*Sanhedrin* 37b), the Maharal explains that exile atones for a person's sins because beyond the discomfort and lack of amenities it entails, having a place and a sense of belonging is an integral part of a person's sense of identity. Losing one's place and being exiled thus constitutes a degree of loss.

"Exile is considered to some degree like removal from this world," says the Maharal (*ibid.*), "for the existence of every thing is tied to a particular place, as Chazal said in *maseches Avos* (4:3), 'There is nothing that does not have a place,' and it is this place that enables the item to exist."

The Hebrew word for place, *makom*, is rooted in the concept of *kiyum* — stability and permanence — which a place provides to that which occupies it. When a person has to leave his place, to some degree his existence is thereby compromised.

☛ The Jewish People Have Never Lost Their Connection to Eretz Yisrael

ERETZ YISRAEL IS the place that provides the Jewish People with their sense of identity.

Losing its connection to Eretz Yisrael would constitute a sentence of destruction for the Jewish nation, for losing one's place means losing the foundation of one's existence. Had the Jewish nation become "old" in its land and detached from its Source, losing its sensitivity to the land, it would have been in danger of losing its connection to Eretz Yisrael altogether. Had this happened, explains the Maharal (*Gur Aryeh, Devarim, ibid.*), the people would have become homeless and rootless. The loss of connection to a place that constitutes part of one's sense of identity sets a person adrift, and he becomes lost. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* thus showed the Jewish People kindness by exiling them from Eretz Yisrael before they reached the irreversible

stage of growing “old” there and severing their connection to the land. Although this involved being exiled, their emotional connection to their genuine place in Eretz Yisrael remained intact. It lived on within them, providing the key to their survival in exile.

☛ Eretz Yisrael Has Never Left the Jewish Nation

IN *NETZACH YISRAEL* (Chap. 24), the Maharal explains further that although the Jewish People have been exiled from their land, the land remains within the people. As we would say in current parlance, “You can take the Jews out of Eretz Yisrael, but you can’t take Eretz Yisrael out of the Jews.” The Maharal writes, “With the exile’s advance, two years before *v’noshantem*, even though they were exiled from the land and were living elsewhere, their place never left them, for their sojourn in their land, which is their place, never ended. They are thus like a person who leaves his place and goes to another country, who retains the label of his place of origin. Even when they were exiled from their land, it remained their place.”

☛ Our Dispersion Is a Function of Our Ongoing Bond to Eretz Yisrael

SINCE ERETZ YISRAEL is the Jewish Nation’s only true location, Jews find no alternative permanent settlement in any of the lands of their exile, but rather remain scattered and dispersed among nations the world over. Some have perceived this as a shortcoming on their part, seeing them as a detached, rootless nation, lacking any homeland. This was Haman’s argument to Achashveirosh when he sought Yisrael’s destruction: “There is a certain people scattered and spread out among the other peoples in all the states of your kingdom... it is not worth it for the king to leave them alive” (*Esther* 3:8). His point was that since the Jews were scattered throughout the other nations of the king’s empire, they were of no importance and had lost any identity they may have had as a permanent nation in their own right.

In fact, though, this argument was mistaken. Had the Jewish People found an alternative location in which to foster their identity, they would have lost their connection to Eretz Yisrael, the true and only source of their vitality, and would have been truly lost. Their very failure to find any place to call their own throughout the lands of their dispersion is what perpetuated the Jewish nation's connection to the only place where they can enjoy self-determination — Eretz Yisrael.

☛ As Unnatural Phenomena, Exile and Dispersion Are Only Temporary

THE MAHARAL EXPLAINS that Yisrael's dispersion among the nations is an unnatural phenomenon, and as such, follows the rule that no aberration endures on a long-term basis. As the Maharal expresses it, "Happenstance does not endure." When a stone is thrown upwards, it ultimately returns to its source. Therefore, the very intensity of the destruction and our dispersion among the nations, such that the Jewish People find no peace anywhere, constitute the foundation of our redemption. They show that our connection to Eretz Yisrael endures and that we will ultimately return to our natural setting that is part of our identity. "Now you can understand that exile — the single nation's tarry away from its prearranged place — is unnatural. And if some change does take place in the order of reality, it is only temporary, and the people will ultimately return to their place. This is the same as any person who leaves his set place, who will ultimately return to his arranged place, and his departure is not considered a true change [of place], because in the end, he will return to his arrangement."

The Maharal (in *Netzach Yisrael*, Chap. 1) points out further that it is usual for a nation to assemble in its own land that constitutes part of its identity. "Dispersion is an unnatural state of affairs, and just as every thing returns to its place, so too do all the scattered, separated parts [of a whole] go back to being a single unit. Thus, every dispersion will ultimately regroup."

☛ The Manner of the *Churban* Inexorably Sprouts Redemption

ACCORDING TO THIS, it is clear that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* could have taken His wrath out upon the Jewish People, which would have happened had they reached the stage of becoming “old” and stale in the land; they would then have lost their connection to Eretz Yisrael, the source from which they draw their vitality. Instead, though, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* advanced their exile by two years, pouring out His anger upon wood and stones so that the Jewish People’s connection to Eretz Yisrael would remain in place forever.

The focus of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s anger therefore never shifted away from where it “should” have been. The destruction of the Beis Hamikdash was not a lighter substitute for a worse punishment that the Jewish nation “ought” to have received. By visiting the calamity of the destruction two years early, the punishment of losing the Beis Hamikdash and the land was sufficient, and an outpouring of Divine wrath upon Yisrael, which would have been deserved had the people continued on in their sinful ways for another two years, was avoided.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu therefore also refrained from moving them as a group elsewhere, but rather scattered them among the nations so that their bond to their land would stay firm even during their exile. Within this dispersion lie the seeds of their eventual Redemption and the people’s natural return to their land and state of wholeness.

The ox that moaned at the time of the *churban* sensed that the beginnings of the Redemption were sprouting even in those very moments, in the shape of the natural phenomenon of every displaced thing’s return to its source when it lacks some alternative placement. And this is why the *keruvim* were intertwined as the *churban* took place — *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had not abandoned His nation, but rather was rather exiling them in a manner that would lead to their Redemption as a natural, inexorable consequence. This day, then, was actually the time when Hashem recreated and reconfigured His

convening with His people. Tishah B'Av is indeed worthy of being classified as a *mo'ed*, and *Tachanun* is therefore omitted.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu showed the Jewish People kindness by hastening the *churban* and dispersing them among the nations in a way that prevented them finding an alternative location with which to identify and ensured they maintained their connection with their natural setting, Eretz Yisrael. A nation will ultimately return to its land and natural surroundings, which constitute part of its sense of identity. The seeds of Redemption thus began to sprout at the height of the process of destruction, turning it into a temporary phenomenon that would not endure, but rather would come to an end with Yisrael's Redemption and return to Eretz Yisrael.